

Matthew 15:21-28

They Met Jesus:
Satisfied With Crumbs?

I would guess that most of us have a basic idea of what we think Jesus must have been like. Jesus was ever the caring and gentle healer who always had a kind word for everyone, all the time right?

Well today we're going to look at an event that at first doesn't seem to fit the pattern. Today we want to look at an encounter with Jesus that seems out of place for what we would expect.

If we only had one chance to try to help someone understand the character of Jesus Christ I'm sure most of us wouldn't pick the passage we're going to look at today.

In fact, if you just read through these verses and moved on to the rest of the chapter without really examining the deeper storyline you could come away with the idea that Jesus could be very cold and uncaring at times.

Is that really true? Was Jesus just like everybody else and had bad days? Did He just get maxed out with caring for people and once in a while told someone to buzz off?

This is week six of a six week series were calling "They Met Jesus." Jesus didn't send out tweets. He didn't keep people updated on His ministry by email. He didn't even have a You-Tube channel or a Face Book page.

It's hard to believe, but the most influential man who ever walked the planet did all His communication in person. The four gospels are literally catalogues of Jesus' interactions with people face-to-face.

This is the sixth encounter that we're looking at in detail in this series. It's an encounter that raises a lot of questions because it could easily be misunderstood. But I believe when we analyze the details there's some powerful lessons to learn about God's nature and His character.

Open your Bible to Matthew 15 page 961

By the time of our passage for today Jesus had been busy. He had been rejected in His own hometown, begun to teach in parables because of the rejection of the Jewish leadership, fed the 5000, walked on water, and healed multitudes in the area of Gennesaret.

Finally Jesus did something that He hadn't done before, or would ever do again, He left Jewish territory and traveled north through Galilee to the notoriously pagan region of Tyre and Sidon.

Each city was a historic center of Canaanite paganism, with temples to Melqart, Astarte and other deities.

These were Phoenician cities and part of the Promised Land, given to the tribe of Asher to conquer and destroy.

Needless to say it didn't happen, and instead they were a trouble to Israel ever since. Today Tyre and Sidon are located in modern Lebanon.

Now you'd have thought that Jesus wouldn't have been so well known there and He might get a bit of rest but that's not what happens.

I. God Often Doesn't Fit Our Preconceived Ideas

Read verses 21, 22

Here's a Canaanite woman. The Canaanites were like the original enemies of Israel. They were the ones they fought against as Israel moved into the Promised Land.

But this woman had a problem that she had never been able to find help for. Her daughter was severely demon possessed. I'm not sure if it's possible to be mildly demon possessed, but obviously this Canaanite woman's daughter was in bad shape.

As we saw two weeks ago, demon possession is a reality although it's nothing like Hollywood's depiction. There is a spirit world and at times those spirits can influence and even possess individuals.

In fact, in Mark 9 there's an account of a young man who was possessed and when his father was asked how long this had been going on he said, *From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him.* (Mark 9:22)

We don't know what this Canaanite woman and her daughter have been though, but it was obviously harrowing. So she cries out to Jesus, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!"

Can you imagine the helpless feeling this mother must have been experiencing? She was

loosing her little girl and she was running out of places to try and get help.

Who knows what she was thinking before this. Maybe this would just be her daughter's lot in life. Maybe she should be put away like the neighbors have been saying all along.

Then one day word comes to her village that a man was coming into her town. This was a man who looked like any other man but the word on the street said He was unlike any other man.

In fact, rumor had it that this Jewish rabbi had given sight to the blind, caused the dumb to speak, made the lame walk, and cast out demons.

I'm not sure how much she knew and understood.

I don't know exactly what this non-Jewish woman believed at this point, but I know this. When your desperate you're willing to open up to things you might never have considered under normal circumstances.

Suddenly this Gentile woman is calling out to a Jewish rabbi calling Him "Lord" and "Son of David."

Both of those are Messianic titles. Israel's Messiah was prophesied to be a direct descendant of King David. So when she called Jesus "Lord" and "Son of David" she was putting herself on Jewish ground. At the very least, she believed the reports that had filtered in about Jesus being the long awaited One for the Jews.

The biblical commentator Lenski writes, "She surely had tried the remedies offered in her neighborhood for her daughter's recovery, all of which had proved ineffective. Then she heard of Jesus and how he, with a mere word had expelled demons from poor sufferers like her daughter. These reports found fertile soil in her heart. How she had longed to reach this mighty Helper! Now he had come to this far corner of Galilee, and here she finds him with her fervent prayer."

This whole story is charged with emotion. It grips you when you think about this mothers anguish and heartache.

But (verse 23a) *He answered her not a word.*

We read that and it's like , "What?" He doesn't offer her any words of comfort. He

doesn't follow her home to heal her daughter. He doesn't say anything at all. It's like Jesus totally ignores this desperate mother's cries for help.

The verse continues, *And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."*

Jesus traveled into this area for a break. He wasn't there to draw crowds. Now there's a woman following them crying out for her daughter.

This was really uncomfortable for the disciples. There's 13 men walking down a road with a woman following behind crying out. This was embarrassing, undignified, unseemly.

So they say, "Send her away." We don't know whether they were saying, "Give her what she wants and get rid of her," or just "Get rid of her!"

What do you do when God seems silent? What do you do when it seems like God isn't answering your prayer?

Don't we all wish God would be so obvious. That God would just kind of thunder out of heaven, "This is the way. Walk in it." That God would answer all our prayers on the spot? That God would always be apparent to us?

What do you do with the silence of God? Do you stop praying? Do you give up and walk away?

Do you get frustrated or angry at God?

Remember, God often doesn't fit our preconceived ideas. He doesn't fit into our little box. He doesn't jump through our hoops.

But what God does do, is to always act intentionally. What He does, what He doesn't do, what He says, what He doesn't say, it's all calculated. It's all purposeful.

Read verse 24

When God works there are times when what He's doing doesn't seem fair. The truth was, Jesus came to fulfill and demonstrate God's love for the world by dieing for all sin on the cross.

The Bible clearly says, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16)

In Romans 1:16 a Jewish believer in Jesus would declare, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*

All of us, the people of the world, are sinners before a holy God. Some people commit more gross, obvious sins but compared to God we all fall short of His perfect standard.

We all deserve judgment. God has declared judgment on sinners. But then He sent His Son to take the punishment for those sins upon Himself.

So God's salvation isn't just for Jews who believe, it's for everyone who believes. But..

When Jesus came He came as a Jew. He came to fulfill Jewish scripture. He was foretold by Jewish prophets. Everything Jesus said and did was in the setting of Jewishness.

God's plan was to sacrifice His Son in the context of Israel so the good news of salvation could move out from Israel to impact the world.

It might not seem fair on the surface, but up until the cross God didn't give His word to non-Jews. He gave His laws to Israel, He gave His prophets to Israel, He sent His Son to Israel.

And so Jesus says, "This is where I was sent. This is my focus. To God, the Jews are lost sheep. They're wandering in need of a shepherd."

In John 10 Jesus said, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.* (John 10:10)

I. God Often Doesn't Fit Our Preconceived Ideas

II. God Always Cares About Our True Needs

Read verse 25

While Jesus is answering His disciples, the woman presses in and prostrates herself at the feet of Jesus. She's truly worshipping. She's begging.

And notice, now she's not invoking any Messianic titles. She's acknowledging Him as Lord and she's crying out for mercy. She's not making any demands. She's just crying out for mercy.

It's like she's saying, "You don't have to help me. You don't owe me anything and I don't deserve anything. But Lord, please help me by helping my daughter."

Read verse 26

Wow. You're probably thinking, "Is Jesus ever going to let up on this poor woman? What's He doing? This isn't the Jesus I'm used to reading about. I mean, was He calling her a dog? That sounds so harsh.

Well today we say that a dog is a man's best friend but back in Jesus' day most dogs were miserable creatures. For the most part they weren't domesticated. They lived by roaming the streets and eating from garbage heaps and dumps. They would tear into the strewn, rotting carcasses of dead and decomposing animals. They were nasty scavengers. (Had your breakfast yet?)

It's still that way today in a lot of countries. Go into any city in India and you'll see a large stray dog population. The first thing I thought when I saw the canine population of Delhi was, "Wow, they treat their dogs like dogs. They don't pamper them and treat them like family members like we do."

Now if Jesus was calling this woman that kind of dog, wouldn't He be completely justified? Isn't it true that if you compare any of us to Almighty God in His purity and holiness we're miserable creatures?

If that wasn't true then Jesus Christ wouldn't have needed to suffer a horrible criminal's death to pay for our sins. But our God is gracious. In spite of our sin God is gracious.

Instead of calling her a mangy, scavenging dog, which is what the Jews generally called non-Jews, Jesus uses a word which means "a little pet dog, a house dog."

The strays stink, eat garbage, and annoy everyone around them. But the pet dog gets his food differently. He isn't allowed to get up at the table. He's still a dog. But he licks up the crumbs which fall on the master's floor.

The disciples were missing it, but all along Jesus was drawing out the woman's faith. It

wasn't so much that He was testing her to see if her faith was real, He already knew her heart. But He was helping her express her faith. He was strengthening her faith by challenging her to think through and express what she really believed.

Jesus wasn't playing games with this poor woman. He wasn't trying to make her situation more difficult.

God cares most about our greatest need. He cares about all of our needs, but He cares about our greatest need more than any other and our greatest need is to have our faith honed and sharpened so that we can trust God implicitly.

How do you respond when God's blessings seem unevenly distributed? This image of the "children's bread" points to all the great Messianic blessings that were promised to Israel. They weren't promised to the Gentiles. They weren't promised to this woman.

I mean, she's a Canaanite of all things. She's like at the bottom of the blessing chain. But she realized something very important.

You don't worship God based on the number of blessings. You worship God because He's Lord and deserves your worship.

It's so easy for us to get focused on ourselves and complain because we believe that God is giving other people things, is working in their lives, is helping them through in ways that He's not doing in our life.

What's God's goal for us? To mature us to the point where instead of saying, "Lord, why aren't I blessed like other people?" we start thinking and saying, "Lord why am I blessed so much? I don't deserve anything, and yet You've done so much for me!"

I. God Often Doesn't Fit Our Preconceived Ideas

II. God Always Cares About Our True Needs

III. Faith Is Refined In Unanswered Prayer

Now at this point the woman's prayer is still unanswered. For all she knows this Jesus will keep on walking and not even respond to her plea. That's enough to make a lot of us fold up. That's enough to make a lot of us give up in frustration and despair.

But instead of giving up, look what happens next. **Read verse 27**

You might paraphrase the woman this way: “I accept what you’re saying, Jesus. I accept without question that God chose to bless the Jews with the riches of His favor and His grace. I accept without question that we Gentiles are like the family dog, not fit to eat at the table but fully willing to catch the crumbs that hit the floor. I accept the fact that you came to fulfill a divine plan that is centered in Israel.”

“That’s OK. It’s OK because it’s God’s plan, not mine. But I would ask for a crumb.

Your blessings are so powerful that just a crumb, just a little bit that spills over is good enough for me.”

We get all excited when we see the answers to prayer, and we should. One of the reasons that God commands us to pray is so we’ll be aware of what He’s doing in our lives. Prayer draws us in. Prayer confesses our own inability and God’s ability.

When we see answers to prayer we thank God so that He gets the recognition.

God is certainly at work in our world, even when we don’t pray God is still at work. But when we pray and we see the answer it draws all of our attention to God. It draws the attention away from us, away from other people, away from circumstances and causes us to thank God.

But at this point this Canaanite woman isn’t overflowing with faith because she’s seen the answer to her requests. It’s just the opposite. Her faith is being proven and refined by not getting her answer.

Sometimes you’ll hear people say, unanswered prayer is a sign of a weak faith. That’s not true. Faith is not proven true by answered prayer but by unanswered prayer that doesn’t make us waver or give up on God.

When things just flow and life’s working for us and God’s providing this for us and making that happen right before our eyes, is that really the time our faith gets solidified and strengthened? Is that when we really grow?

God’s in His heaven and all’s right with the world. Life is just happening our way.

That may be the way we’d like it, but it’s not the way to grow our faith. If that was the way life always was, we’d have a pretty flimsy foundation for our faith. If that’s the way

life always was, we'd trust God based on what He did for us, not based on who He is.

This woman had faith. Her faith was great. That's what Jesus was bringing out for the disciples to see but most of all for the woman to see. And here's the result.

Read verse 28

There are only two people in the gospels said to have a great faith. One was the centurion that we looked at last week and the other is this woman in Matthew 15.

Here's what's striking about that. Both are Gentiles. Both are outsiders. Both are strangers from the commonwealth of Israel. Both are "little dogs" who are more than willing to eat the crumbs from the master's table.

This woman's faith was great because she persisted in asking and trusting when everything seemed against her. Her race was against her, she was a Gentile. Her gender was against her, most Rabbi's wouldn't so much as talk to a woman, let alone a Gentile woman.

The disciples seemed like they were against her, and Jesus words might have led her to believe that even He was against her. All those obstacles only helped to fine-tune her faith.

The question for all of us this morning is obvious; can you be satisfied with crumbs?

Crumbs, the remnants of the meal. Crumbs, what no one wants anymore. Crumbs, the fragments of a satisfying dinner. Crumbs what you wipe off your mouth and the plate. Is that really all you need, the crumbs?

Have you recognized that Jesus Christ was no ordinary man?

He doesn't just have some power. He has all power. He isn't just a historical religious figure, He's the Lord. The Son of David.

His crumbs are better than everyone else's dinner.

Can you say, Lord, just your crumbs alone will satisfy me?

Just a little morsel from your hand will give me more than I ever needed.

Just a touch from you O, Lord will make me whole.

Just a word from you will soothe my aching soul.
Just a move of your Spirit will change my life.
Just your crumbs, O Lord will satisfy me.

I just think it's so awesome that Jesus answered the woman's prayer. Can you imagine the scene back at her home when this mother got her daughter back. I thank God today that He is still in the business of putting families and lives back together.

But here's the ultimate good news. One day, Jesus came down from glory and opened the door of salvation on its hinges of grace and mercy and let dogs like you and me in.

And now He doesn't call us stray dogs. He doesn't even call us little house dogs. He calls us sons and daughters of God. Joint heirs with Jesus Christ. We are known and prized by majesty!

Where's your faith this morning? Is your hope for this life, and the life to come, in the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Bible says, *God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.* (II Timothy 1:9)

John 1 explains how we appropriate this amazing grace of our amazing God.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12, 13)