

Cheltenham
Ps Rob Buckingham
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TOSS IT TO THE DOGS

MESSAGE NOTES

Text: Matthew 15:21-28

Mark's Gospel gives a little more detail of this story in chapter 7:

²⁴Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter...

³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

At first glance this story seems so out of character for Jesus – He ignores her, insults her race and insults her personally...

Let's go behind the scenes to find out what's happening...

1. The events take place in community

I.e. they are not to be understood in isolation, they are happening in front of Jesus' disciples and Jesus is using this situation to teach them some important truth:

This is taking place in community – Jesus is dealing with the woman (testing her) and the disciples (educating them)

2. The woman is being tested and so are the disciples

Jesus often tests people before helping them

Jesus tests the woman and the disciples are watching:

Test 1: Indifference – Jesus simply ignores her

"Jesus did not answer a word"

That was completely acceptable in first century Middle Eastern culture. Jewish Rabbis wouldn't even talk to female members of their own family in public, let alone a perfect stranger...

But Jesus' is just feigning indifference for two reasons:

1. He wants to draw out the faith of this woman

2. He wants to draw out the prejudice in his disciples

Jesus' disciples would see nothing wrong with Jesus' lack of response; in fact it would endorse views of Gentiles and women with which they felt totally comfortable...

"His disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

She's a bother, a pest, a Gentile, a woman get rid of her!

(Cf. John 4:27)

The disciples are demonstrating this same level of prejudice towards this Greek woman and so Jesus plays along with it...

Kenneth Bailey in his brilliant book, Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes puts it this way, *"The text can be understood as follows: Jesus is irritated by the disciples' attitudes regarding women and Gentiles. The woman's love for her daughter and her confidence in him impress Jesus. He decides to use the occasion to help her and challenge the deeply rooted prejudices in the hearts of his disciples. In the process he gives the woman a chance to expose the depth of her courage and faith."*

Test 2: You're not a Jew so it's not for you
"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

Notice how Jesus doesn't give his disciples a lecture on prejudice. He actually appears to agree with their bigotry...

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."
That's right, all the blessings of God and his Kingdom are just for us, not for Gentiles and certainly not for women...

What follows is a stunning exchange of banter:

The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Dogs were unclean animals to the Jews, only slightly better than pigs. They were either savage guard dogs or scavengers feeding on garbage

but they were never pets. And even though Jesus uses the Greek word meaning "little dogs or puppies" it's still an insult. Jesus is verbalizing what the disciples were thinking: The promises and blessings of God are for the Jews, not Gentile dogs. How would she respond?

"Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the [little] dogs eat the [little] crumbs that fall from their master's table."

Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Practical Application

1. This story demonstrates God's love for ALL people

The prejudices in the disciples took years to overcome. Much of the New Testament Scriptures address deeply rooted bigotry, intolerance, small-mindedness and racism as God constantly encouraged His people that His blessings were not just for their benefit, but that as they had freely received they were also to freely give to others. The gospel is for ALL people; *"that God was reconciling THE WORLD to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation"* (2 Cor. 5:19)

I'm so glad that in this day and age the church has finally overcome all of its biases and prejudice. We are no longer intolerant of other people, Christians are not known anymore for their bigotry or bias. On Social Media, blogs and sermons you never hear a negative or judgmental comment from a Christian about women or refugees or Muslims or gay people – or anyone!

If only what I just said was true! As I heard someone say this week, *"Racism is a pigment of the imagination!"*

And so the first practical application of this story is this question: *"Are there any people that you think Jesus is not interested in helping?"* Can you relate to the disciples' prejudice towards this Gentile woman?

If so pray a simple prayer like: *"Holy Spirit, please shine your light into my heart and mind and reveal any prejudices that dwell there."* And if he reveals them then ask his forgiveness and strength to overcome.

2. This woman was desperate for help for herself

Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me

Lord, help me!

Yes she wanted healing for her daughter but she was also a person in pain. She needed help too!

Further Study

Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes:

By Brandon J. O'Brien and E. Randolph Richards

Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes

By Kenneth E. Bailey

Discussion Questions

1. "Are there any people that you think Jesus is not interested in helping?"
Can you relate to the disciples' prejudice towards this Gentile woman?
2. What are the main biases that the Christian church is known for today in Australia? How can we change this perception?
3. In what ways have you been affected by the individualism of Western culture? How can you become more community-focused in faith and practice?
4. Jesus often tests people before helping them. Can you recall a time in your life when you've experienced this?

5. Have you ever thought that all the blessings of God and his Kingdom are just for Christians and not for others? What practical things can you do to show other people that God loves them and is vitally interested in impacting their lives?

6. Are you a caregiver or do you know someone who is? Think of a practical way that you personally – or as a Connect Group – can help this person.