



## No.26 The Syrophoenician woman - demon dogs

### **Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30**

Like many of the woman we have looked at in this series we do not even know this woman's name. She was so unimportant, or so she seemed to the disciples who wanted Jesus to send her away. But they witnessed her exchange with Jesus, saw her faith, heard the outcome and both Mark and Matthew wrote about her. What she proclaimed and what she exemplified continues to challenge and encourage us today. She had a desperate need for her daughter who was demon possessed, and she knew exactly where to go to for help. 'They had hardly arrived when a Canaanite woman came down from the hills and pleaded, "Mercy, Master,

Son of David! My daughter is cruelly afflicted by an evil spirit." Jesus ignored her. The disciples came and complained; "Now she's bothering us. Would you please take care of her? She's driving us crazy'. **Matthew 15:22-23 TM**. Ever heard that exasperation in your own situation, run to Jesus with it, and see what He does.

### **Our relation to the Jews:**

The Syrophoenician woman emerges as a model for Gentile Christians trying to figure out what their proper relationship to Judaism should be. The biblical order of salvation is first to the Jew then to the Gentiles. On the one hand, the woman accepts the priority of the Jewish community without question and with humility. On the other hand, that priority does not deter her from making her own full claim on Jesus. It is important that we who are Gentile Christians honour and with humility relate to God's own people. This does not mean that they are doing everything politically and physically correctly. It does mean without them we would not have a Saviour and because of their rejection of Jesus it opened the door for us to be grafted into the family of God. Both Jew and Gentile share the same outcome based on faith in Jesus Christ alone not on inheritance, position or good works.

Do not assume that this humility and begging would come easily to her. In the time of Jesus, Greeks had been recognized as the most intelligent nation on earth. Philosophers like Socrates, Plato and mathematicians like Pythagoras were Greeks. For a Greek to ask a Jew for help was completely unheard of. At first Jesus did not reply until after the disciples pressured Him. Jesus then replied to the woman's request by comparing the children of the household (the privileged position of Israel) with the little dogs that were kept as household pets (less privileged Gentiles). Jesus' statement is extremely important, because it reminds us that Jesus was Himself a Jew and a rabbi, although He was a great critic of His own Jewish tradition. He asserted the priority of the Jewish people in God's eyes, and the irrevocable covenant binding them to God and God to them.

For Jesus, His whole message of liberation and reconciliation which He preached and lived out is first of all a word for the Jews. Remember Jesus was in Gentile territory at this time trying to reach out to Gentiles as well as His own people. So although He said 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel' He may have been stretching her faith to see if she would give up. The Syrophoenician woman provides a model for all women as we see her greatness in her humility, and we see her greatness in her refusal to take Jesus' initial "No" for an answer. When the woman points out that even the dogs underneath the table eat from the children's leftovers, she is saying that there is more than enough salvation to go round.

Her willingness to put the claim of others ahead of herself and even ahead of her daughter goes hand in hand with an extraordinary spiritual assertiveness. But the humility and the persistence are not at odds with one another. If we look closely at her response to Jesus, we will see why this is so.

It all goes together; because the woman doesn't care what her status is in the economy of God, relative to other people, she understands how God's kingdom works. If you don't care what your position is, then you are free from the need to compete with others for a better position in the Kingdom, and therefore free to love. And if you are free to love, you are already fully part of that Kingdom.

She is a model, not only for Jewish-Christian relations, but for every possible kind of relation a Christian may consider. We stand empty-handed before God which is not so hard to take. But then in most situations we take second place in relation to others, who we think are either richer, stronger, have more friends, more popular, not fearful, not troubled, not suffered loss, or perhaps simply and for no particular reason we think they are closer to God than we are! She shows us how to deal with our enemies, or those who try to stop us

getting close to Jesus. Nothing should get between us and our Saviour. We need to be single minded and pushing forward in our relationship with Jesus and following His Word 'not as a hearer only but as a doer'. Jesus also challenged the disciples on their attitude to someone they would have seen as an outcast. They wanted to get rid of her and send her away even though she was so desperate, they did not yet have Jesus' heart for the hurting people who they were later to minister to. We need to be constantly guarding our hearts regarding those people from different cultures and races, making sure we remember that 'God so loved the world that He gave' His all!

### **Persistent.**

Persistency is an essential quality for every woman to have victory in her life. We all need to be persistent if we want to encounter God's power in our situations. All women need to learn to pray without ceasing, **1 Thessalonians 5:17**, when we feel the need for a miracle. Also when we just want to enjoy the presence of Jesus, we need to learn as busy women that we do not always have to have a closet experience for prayer. Our Father shares every activity with us, and He wants to fellowship with us through it all. We need to enjoy Jesus in freedom not under law, which this wonderful woman knew about. If she had stuck to the law she would never have spoken to Jesus as both a woman and a Gentile! Most of us are not persistent in asking. We let disappointments of unanswered prayer to overcome our faith.

Jesus taught the principal of persistency in **Luke 11:5-13**, in the story of the persistent neighbour who got the three loaves he requested for his visitor, 'because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.'

We do not deserve anything from God; we have salvation that should be more than enough! But if we go before God with a humble attitude and ask Him in the name of Jesus in accord with the Word it will be granted because God loves us. God is sovereign and some times we might not experience His power at once. So we join our humble attitude with persistent prayer and faith. We show our faith in persistent praise, never giving up and seeing great victory!

### **Faith for today.**

Most of the time Gentiles had more faith in Jesus than the religious Jews did. Jesus told her, 'Because of this saying, you may go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter [permanently]'. **Mark 7:29 Amp.** When she went she found out the demon had left the girl. The Jews did not believe unless Jesus laid His hands on them. But this woman believed Jesus' words alone. Many say 'Show me first then I will believe'. But God's says 'Believe first and you will see'. Precisely because she is humble, she grasps the Gospel by faith and welcomes it; and because she knows the Gospel is about abundance, she does not, in fact, ask for crumbs or leftovers, but for the Kingdom itself. In Mark, liberation from demons means liberation out of isolation and alienation into fellowship with God and one another. The woman assumes that if Jesus gives her anything at all, it will be full freedom for her daughter, because she knows that the gift God gives can be nothing less. Every encounter with God's mercy is a completely new beginning, and there is no such thing as a crumb from God, He only gives the whole Kingdom to each individual.

People who wanted healing followed Jesus wherever He went, even up mountains to receive from Him as they had faith in His Word. So today we need to draw close to Him and Him alone, not the latest fad healer or leader, our faith must be in Jesus Himself. Jesus gives us the gift of faith to follow Him in the first place (**Ephesians 2:8-9**) then after that we have to look after our faith, strengthen it and guard it by hearing the Word, **Romans 10:17**. We don't just hear it we must believe it, and we show we do that by acting on it. If we already do this and our faith is strong like this lady, it will be tested. He does not make us 'rich in every way' if He can't trust us. We ask 'why doesn't God bless me more?' He asks 'why doesn't she trust Me more?' If our faith is strong and we follow and obey the Word we never need to worry about answers to prayer.

Is our faith a dead or alive faith? Does our faith have love at the centre? Does our faith have respect for people? Is our faith obedient and active? Is our faith protected? SO how do we react to a crisis, God tells us from **James 1:2-8**, to 'count it all joy when you face trials'. That is a God test!! Do not be tempted to doubt God's Word; just keep repeating it to yourself, throw your hands in the air and praise Him for the Truth, which may be very different from the circumstances. Focus on Jesus, run towards Him rather than away from Him. Doubt cuts off His power from working on our behalf. We will no longer be anxious when we look to Him with a grateful heart fully trusting His power and omniscience. 'The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.' Peace is a huge need in all of our lives!

Use this woman's example. Therefore be persistent. Go to the heavenly Father with a humble and open attitude. Have faith. Surely you will receive your reward.

## No.26 The Syrophenician woman - demon dogs! Challenge Questions

### **Read all the notes about the Syrophenician woman – demon dogs?**

1. What 'challenge and encourages' you from this lady's testimony and Jesus' reaction to her?
2. How do you feel about your relationship to the Jews? Do you feel it is relevant to your life? How?
3. Read **Psalm 122:6-9** and do this regularly.
4. Can you give an example of a time in your life when you were persistent? Is there a situation at present where you feel God is asking you to be persistent? Would it help for someone to pray with you?
5. From the notes headed '**Faith for today**' how did you feel was the condition of your faith? What are you walking in faith for at this time?

### **Read John 7:32-53 and 8:1-11**

6. Where did Jesus spend the night after all this rejection? Who with?
7. Where did He go back to for more the next morning? Why do you think He did that? What would you have done in similar circumstances?
8. What was the woman doing and what did the Law say about her? Where was the man and where should he have been? **Deuteronomy 22:22** and **Leviticus 20:10**
9. What was the reason behind the Pharisees questions and what do they hope to gain from it? (**John 8:6**)
10. What did Jesus do? Why do you think He behaved like this?
11. In your opinion what do you think He wrote in the sand? (**John 8:6**)

12. What did Jesus say to the authorities and all those who were watching? (**John 8:7-8**)
  
13. Have you ever criticized anybody in the Body of Christ? If Jesus ever said this to you about your accusation how do you think you would feel?
  
14. What happened to the accusers? Who left first? (**John 8:9-10**)
  
15. How do you think the woman felt? What do you think the woman felt about Jesus?
  
16. What were Jesus' words to her even though He was the only one who could judge her?
  
17. What instructions did He give her? How do you think she responded to the whole situation and what do you think her life looked like from then on?
  
18. Can you use this Word in your own situation where the accuser (the devil) keeps reminding you of past sin?
  
19. Is there any sin where you need to receive the forgiveness of Jesus and get on with life and sin **NO MORE**? Write out verse **John 8:11**
  
20. Choose one verse to learn and remind yourself of all the previous memory verses in the series.