

HOPE FOR HEALING Sunday School- February 7, 2010

Unifying Topic: **RECOGNIZED BY A CANAANITE WOMAN**

Lesson Text

I. A Canaanite Woman Seeks Healing For her Daughter (Matthew 15:21-22)

III. Jesus Reveals His Intended Audience (Matthew 15:23-24)

III. Faith Transcends Barriers (Matthew 15:25-28)

The Main Thought: Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Matthew 15:28, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Family members face issues and often cannot find help. Where can we find resources to help? A Gentile woman came to Jesus with persistence, seeking healing for her daughter, and Jesus healed her daughter.

Lesson Aim: To show the students that it was the faith of the Canaanite woman that caused Jesus to heal her daughters.

Life aim: To get to see Jesus as the One who can meet our needs without prejudice.

15:21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

15:22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, [thou] Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

15:23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

15:25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

15:26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast [it] to dogs.

15:27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

15:28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great [is] thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

HISTORY:

The end of **Matthew Chapter 14**, (verses 34-36) the disciples came to Gennesaret located on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee. The men heard and brought all that were diseased beseeching only to touch Jesus' garment. As many as touched were made perfectly whole.

Traditions of the Elders

Matthew 15:1- 9 opens by focusing attention on some key people, Pharisees and scribes. They confront Jesus regarding tradition, in respect to the subject of hand washing. In this case, they were hassling Jesus about not insisting that His disciples go through the ceremonial washing of hands before eating food. They weren't concerned with the disciples not practicing good hygiene. They were upset because their tradition* taught that before every meal, hands were considered unclean and had to undergo a laborious ceremonial cleansing.

NOTE:

*The hands had to be pressed together and held upright, while one and a half eggshells of water was poured over them. The water had to then drip off of the wrists, otherwise the person's arms would become unclean. It was actually quite involved.

There are and always have been two religions in the world. There is the religion that stresses the outside and the religion that stresses the inside. Through the years, the Jewish religion, in an attempt to keep man religiously and morally clean, had come up with thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations governing man's behavior.

- External religion says be physically and morally clean – Internal religion says be spiritually regenerated and made into a new creature.
- External religion says that if a person keeps the outside clean the inside will be clean. – Internal religion says that if a person is clean on the inside then he will keep the outside clean.
- External religion develops a system of laws to govern behavior. – Internal religion behaves out of a heart of love and respect for God and man.
- External religion says be faithful to religion (the church) and its practices and moral teachings and you will be clean. Internal religion says be cleansed within by Christ and you will be faithful to the church and live justly.

- External religion is man-made religion of ritual, ceremony, laws, and works. Internal religion is God's religion based upon His Son Jesus Christ who changes or recreates the heart of man. This act of recreation gives man a new heart, a heart that reaches out to both God and man in love and respect.

The disciples apparently had failed to wash their hands before eating their meal, therefore, they had broken the tradition of the church and embarrassed the religious faithful of their day. Jesus was asked about the matter. He answered by charging the religionist with breaking God's law in order to keep the traditions of their religion. And He gave them an example. "*God says honor thy father and mother.*" But your tradition says that once a person vows to give a gift to the temple he can never back out of the vow, even if he later needs the gift to take care of his parents. They wanted to go to battle over traditions, yet they are breaking the Word of God! (funny)! Incidentally, any time someone is ready to battle over church traditions or religious practices, he really does not understand the Word of God. If he understood the Word of God, he would realize that the traditions have nothing to do with pleasing God. Traditions are related only to pleasing men. ***Matt. 15:6: "And by this you invalidated the Word of God for the sake of your tradition."*** The word translated "*invalidated*" is actually the word for "*authority*" with a negative prefix. He is saying that they have made the Word of God without authority, null and void.

Religionist / Tradition:

- Sets aside God's Word for tradition and can be described as institutional or personal.
 - Institutional traditions are such things as rituals, rules, regulations, schedules, form, services, procedures, organizations—anything that gives order and security to the persons involved.
 - Personal traditions are such things as church attendance, little rituals, prayers, habits, ceremonies, and objects which a person uses to keep himself religiously secure.
- Is hypocritical—gives lip service while keeping his heart far from God. He acknowledges God and attends worship, but this is about all he does. They study, witness, show care, help the needy, and keep the rules. They struggle and would fight to maintain religious tradition, yet Christ says they are hypocrites. Why? Because their heart is not God's. They do not know God personally, not in the depths of their heart Jh.14:6.
- Worship, but with an empty heart. True worship must be "*in spirit and in truth.*"
- Teaches tradition as God's commandments.

A three-step process that people follow to replace God's Word with man's religion:

- They add a tradition to the faith, which causes them to begin to neglect the Word of God.
- Then, when that tradition contradicts the Word, they have to set aside the Word to keep their tradition.
- Ultimately, the Word of God is entirely invalidated as that tradition is handed down through the generations.

This is why God says of religion, ***Matt. 15:9 ... "In vain do they worship ME, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men."*** False teachers teach as their doctrine the precepts (principle, rule, instruction) of men rather than the instructions of God, and the result is vain worship. The Pharisees knew a lot about God but didn't know God.

15:10-14 Man's Heart

Jesus deals with people in two different ways. When He deals with the multitude, the harlots, prostitutes, thieves and other sinners, He confronts them in compassion and invites them to His salvation. But when He deals with the religious leaders, He approaches them with bluntness and hardness. This approach is obviously not going to win Him any friends. He confronts them directly in verse 7 by saying, "*You hypocrites.*" Jesus has already said enough to set the Pharisees on edge, but He wants to be sure everybody knows what He is talking about.

So His next audience He addresses were the multitudes. When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "*Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.*" Washing with "*unclean hands*" or any other such thing that we "*put into us*" is not defiling. Rather, what comes out is what defiles, and it reveals that we have unclean (defiled) hearts. In this specific context, Jesus spoke about ceremonial cleanliness in regard to food. The idea in Judaism was that to eat the wrong sort of food deprived a man of holiness and ultimately, therefore, of acceptance with God. The Jewish leaders showed offense at this deliberate contradiction of their own teaching.

Now Jesus switches his conversation to the audience of His disciples. In two vivid pictures (*vss. 13-14*), the Lord tells His disciples that the Pharisees have no real mission from God and are themselves blind ("*Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind...*"). He's saying, they and their man-made doctrines shall be rooted up.

15:15-20 Understanding of the Parable

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More explanation is needed for the disciples, and Peter comes forward. Peter is referring to the difficult, harsh statement that Jesus made to the crowd in *Matthew 15:11*: **"It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."** The disciples didn't quite understand and Jesus explains,

"Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?" v17. "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man" v18. The heart is the inner man. It is what you are as a person. What you eat does not change you as a person, it simply passes right on through as some nourishment is taken out, but it does not change your character. But what comes out of your inner being reflects what you are. **"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" v.19.** We are defiled from the inside out rather than from the outside in. **"But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man"v20.** There is no connection between what we eat and spirituality. That is not to say that excessive eating and intemperance are not wrong. Lustful and excessive appetites come "out of the Heart." But when it comes to the items themselves—the food and drink we take into our mouths—there is no merit or value, no morality or virtue to these within themselves. It is what we do with things that make us either good or bad; spiritual or carnal. It is the heart that determines what we do with things. What comes out reveals what our heart is.

Saints, this is the key to understanding the right way to be a Christian. Forget the religion. Throw it all away. God wants from us only that which is in the Word. Any time anyone tries to say, **"A good Christian is supposed to do this, or not supposed to do that,"** simply and sincerely respond by asking, **"Where is that in the Bible?"** If they can show you, then incorporate it into your life. But if it's not in there, then it shouldn't be in your Christianity, either.

LESSON:

Matthew 15:21-22: A Canaanite Woman Seeks Healing For her Daughter

Jesus went to the district of Tyre and Sidon, about 40 or 50 miles to the northwest which is Gentile country. He went into a private home hoping to remain anonymous for a while. He was trying to escape the attention of the multitudes, but He could not do that because a Canaanite woman sought Him out. **"And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed'" Matt. 15:22.** Many of Jesus' own countrymen didn't know who Jesus was, but this woman of Canaan knew. This woman comes to intercede for her daughter, and she provides a picture of an intercessor. She makes her daughter's needs her own. She came seeking Jesus. His fame had spread, even in this non-Jewish (Gentile) territory.

The woman cried for three things:

1. She cried for mercy.
2. She cried for the Son of David.
3. She cried not for herself, but for another person, her daughter.

She addressed Him, **"Lord, Son of David"v.22.** It is remarkable that she acknowledged Him to be the Messiah of Israel. **"Son of David"** is a messianic title and its recognition that He is the prophesied descendant of David who would rule. She also recognized Him as the Lord. Her request related to her daughter whom she said was **"cruelly demon-possessed"** was not with her. Matthew does not tell how her demon-possession manifested itself. This woman was not a Jew - she was a Gentile of pagan religion. The Syrophenicians worshipped Ashtaroth, the moon goddess of beauty and pleasure. They believed in doing everything that seemed desirable, with no limits, without restraint.

Something to take note of here is that regardless of her religion, she has hit a crisis in her life that she knows only the Lord can deal with. How often we see people who say that they are Humanists, New Agers, or Agnostics turn to a Christian to pray when a loved one's life is in danger! You see, when life's circumstances become terribly real - like this woman's daughter being in danger - all of this worldly philosophy often goes out the window. That is because the world's religions and philosophies, beliefs, and practices will not do anything for anybody in times of crisis.

How did she know to turn to Him? Remember that people from Tyre and Sidon had come to Him Lk.6:17-19. She possessed two qualities:

1. She truly loved another person, her own daughter.
2. She approached the right person, Jesus himself.

Matthew 15:23-24: Jesus Reveals His Intended Audience

This woman had acknowledged Him to be the Messiah, had acknowledged her own unworthiness and His power. She had manifested faith that He had not found in Israel by asking for His mercy, yet Jesus totally ignored her. He did not tell her to go away. He did not tell her to be quiet. He did not say anything. His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "*Send her away, for she cries out after us.*" But He answered and said, "*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" There is nothing more frustrating than the silence of God to our prayers. But there is purpose for His silence here. This woman is not ready for the response God wants to give her. She must grow in her knowledge and understanding before she is ready to receive the answer.

POINT:

When it seems that God is silent to our prayers, it may be because He is waiting to teach us something. It is not because He has not heard our request, but because we are not ready yet. We must learn what He has for us.

The disciples were very frustrated with these events. Now the woman is not the only one who is pestering Him. She is crying out, "*Lord, Have mercy on me,*" and the disciples are saying, "*Send her away, for she is shouting at us.*" The disciples displayed no interest in the woman whatsoever. They had no compassion or concern for her needs. They just wanted a little peace and quiet.

Jesus used the occasion to instruct His disciples about the purpose of His ministry. "*But He answered and said, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" *Matt. 15:24*. He came to be the Messiah of Israel, and His ministry was to the Jews, but this woman was a Gentile asking for a blessing. Jesus was not angry with the woman, but also trying to teach the disciples a valuable lesson. So in effect, to His disciples, by saying nothing, in a round about way, "*Do you understand the purpose of My ministry? Do you understand why I am here?*" There was this silence of Jesus, there was the objection of the disciples yet, there's persistence in the Canaanite woman that would not quit. There is a difference in the way people seek Jesus and pray:

- There is the prayer of chance or of no expectancy. They pray because they think God just might hear.
- There is the prayer of persistence or perseverance. The prayer that will not take "no" or silence for an answer.

Matthew 15:25-28: Faith Transcends Barriers

"Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, help me!" The woman provides another picture of a dedicated intercessor by her persistence and she calls Him Lord. When Jesus finally responded to her, His response was more striking and shocking than His silence had been. "*And He answered and said, It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs*" **Matt. 15:26*.

NOTE:

*Gentiles were referred to as dogs by the Jews. The word Jesus uses is diminutive (very small), the term used for the little puppies that people kept in their houses.

And so, Jesus is making the simple statement that to take the Bread of Life which is first intended for the Children of Israel (Jews) and give it to the Gentiles (dogs) would not be right. Children's bread refers to the blessings the Messiah has for the nation of Israel. Food, the blessings of the messianic ministry, is for the Jews. If this lady did not get upset when Jesus did not answer her at the beginning, surely she had good reason to get upset when He did answer her. She had humbled herself before Him, worshiped Him, and acknowledged Him as the Messiah of Israel, the Lord who has all power.

Matt. 15:27: "But she said, Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters table."

- Against prejudice she came,
- Against silence she persevered,
- Against exclusion she proceeded,
- Against rebuff she won.

With great insight, she clearly saw and confessed in humility that she was nothing, she was only a dog, but being a dog in the family's house, she had the right to eat the crumbs that fell from his table. This woman submitted herself totally to what Jesus had to say about her. "*Then Jesus said to her, O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish. And her daughter was healed at once*" *Matt. 15:28*.

What caused Jesus to answer her prayer was her personal humility (surrender) and worship of Him as Lord.

What is great faith? The steps taken by this dear woman tell us:

1. It is a desperate cry of need v22
2. It is a persistence that will not quit v23-24
3. It is a spirit that worships Jesus as Lord v25
4. It is a spirit of humility and surrender to the Lord v26-27
5. It is a faith that receives its request v28

There are only two individual whose faith Jesus pronounced to be great: this woman's and the centurion (Matt.8:5-13). They were both Gentiles.

SUMMARY:

We literally come from Jesus not doing many mighty works in His hometown of Nazareth and now He comes to a Gentile region. Jesus ministers among these Gentiles who manifest faith and acceptance of Him. As Matthew unfolds the ministry of Christ as the Messiah of Israel, he makes even clearer the fact that the nation Israel has rejected Him.

Three separate incidents are mentioned in Matthew 15:21-39, (some that are not in our lesson, but needs to be mentioned), all of which relate to Gentiles. Christ honored the faith of a Canaanite woman who requested that Jesus heal her daughter, He healed multitudes of other Gentiles, and He fed over four thousand people, mostly Gentiles. Christ's ministry begins to focus mainly on Gentiles since He has been driven to them as a result of His rejection by the Jews.

Why did Jesus go through this procedure with this woman? I believe one of the reasons was so she could see herself as she was. She approached Christ initially on Jewish ground. But she had no claim on Christ as the Son of David, the Messiah of Israel, because she was not one of the covenant people of Israel. She had to see herself as she really was, (not of the household, a worshiper of other gods, a Gentile dog) and then Christ could deal with her. His delay was for her benefit until she could understand her position before Christ. After her asking, after Jesus' silence, after others remarks, her heart projected into an humble state of worship, not leaving but staying. She had staying power.

It is important to remember that it is not possible to come to the Savior on someone else's ground. This woman could not come as a Jew. She had to come as the Gentile she was. But when she saw herself in a proper relationship with Him and trusted Him as she was. When this woman came, she had a specific burden with a specific answer she wanted from the Lord. Her request had been solidified in her mind. She kept following the Lord step by step as He brought her along. His silence did not turn her away. The disciples' remarks did not turn her away.

- When she said, "Son of David," it was the hope of faith.
- When she said, "Lord, help me," it was the appeal of faith.
- When she said, "Truth, Lord, yet the little dogs eat of the crumbs," it was the tact of faith.

The explanation of His ministry and relationship to the Jews did not turn her away. She was persistent with what she wanted and was growing in recognition and understanding of her position before Him. As I look back at the Centurion and the Canaanite woman similarity, both did not even bring their loved one with them. That's how bad the situation was. Both displayed great faith in the one they were coming to. And Jesus recognized their pure heart in coming. (Read Matt.8:10; Matt.15:28)

APPLICATION:

Persevere in praying for others and watch God take care of your need! Be Persistent in thanking God for the answer even before it comes. You're entitled to all not just a crumb because of who you are in Christ!