

After hearing that passage, you might be thinking to yourself:

Where has Jesus, the gracious, compassionate, friend of sinners gone?

You see instead of initially helping a woman whose daughter's being cruelly tormented by a demon, Jesus repeatedly ignores her request for help and then calls her a dog.

Verse 21 says:

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, have mercy on me, O, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.

Now at this point it'd be normal for us to assume that out of compassion Jesus will do something to help the plight of this desperate mother.

You'd also expect him to be pleased that this Gentile woman recognises him as the Messiah, when a lot of his own people reject him.

But instead verse 23 says. "Jesus did not answer her a word."

Or to put it another way he completely ignores the woman's cry for help and pays her absolutely no attention.

And it seems incredible that Jesus would act in what appears to be such callous and cold-hearted way.

And if that's not bad enough, we're then told in verse 23 that the disciples don't have much sympathy for the woman either.

And so, they tell Jesus to get rid of her. It says:

And his disciples begged him, saying, send her away, for she is crying out to after us.

Now to give you a bit background, in the Old Testament, during the reigns of King David, and King Solomon, Israel had a good political alliance with the cities of Tyre and Sidon.

In fact, Hiram the King of Tyre provided building materials when Solomon constructed the temple.

But fast forward a few years and Ahab, who was considered one of Israel's worst kings, married the King of Tyre's daughter, Jezebel, a relationship that led Israel into idolatrous Baal worship that split the nation.

As a result, the alliance with Tyre and Sidon broke down and there was bad blood between the people of Israel and the people of those two cities.

And so, it's within that historical context of hostility that Jesus seems to ignore the woman, and the disciples want to get rid her,

But to her credit the woman doesn't give up does she; instead, she falls to her knees and continues to plead for Jesus to help.

And then when she finally gets his attention, he says to her in verse 26:

"I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, it's not right to take the children's bread, and throw it to the dogs."

Now at the time calling someone a dog was equivalent to a racial slur to describe non-Jews; and so, for Jesus to call this woman a dog seems really shocking doesn't it.

As a result, some commentators have suggested the term Jesus uses isn't the common insult that compared Gentiles to the half wild scavengers that would roam the cities at night; but an affectionate term to describe a domesticated pet.

Well, whatever it is there's no getting away from the fact that Jesus calls the woman a dog and it has us squirming a bit.

So, I read this week that someone said:

It's a good thing the woman changed the outcome of the conversation, because by the end Jesus is less racist.

Well that's what you'd think; but of course, this is Jesus we're talking about; and when we look at the woman's response, we see that things aren't initially what they seem to be.

So, in verse 27 she says:

“Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters table.”

You see instead of giving up, walking away, and screaming: How dare you call me a dog, she latches on to what Jesus has said.

Now most of you know that we've got a dog, and we have rule never to feed him scraps directly from our plate.

And so, he always waits patiently for us to finish a meal before running to his bowl; because he knows it's only when we've finished, that he'll get a few leftovers. That's the rule!

But if something accidentally falls off my plate, he quickly eats it up.

Now of course we love our dog like one of the family, but we wouldn't treat a child like that.

Well it's that kind of illustration that Jesus uses here, he says:

“I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, it's not right to take the children's bread, and throw it to the dogs.”

In other words, his mission is to the Jews first, and then the Gentiles.

You see initially people from other nations were outsiders; and so, they had to wait before they could receive God's blessings and full inclusion into his family

That's why the woman comes back at Jesus with this really clever reply:

“Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters table.”

Or to put it another way she says:

Yes, I know I'm a dog, and understand that I don't have the same rights or entitlements to feast on the food that you set before your children, because I'm not one of them.

“But just give me one crumb of your mercy Lord, and I'll be satisfied: Heal my daughter.”

You see if Jesus will allow just one scrap of mercy to drop from his table: she'll be happy.

Well you can see why Jesus says in verse 28,

“O Woman great is your faith!”

And so this seemingly awkward account of Jesus ignoring and then seemingly insulting this Gentile woman; is actually allowing her faith in him to shine and be on full display, as she persistently, patiently, and humbly, puts her trust in Jesus to help her.

And although his mission was to the Jews first, this encounter is a foretaste of the Gospel being preached to every nation, race, and culture, which of course started on the day of Pentecost.

As a result, we see that church is a global family; because Jesus welcomes people of all nationalities; who go to him with the same faith as this Canaanite woman.

And we can learn a lot from her can't we.

So, for example This woman comes to Jesus with no rights, or entitlements, just empty hands; a desperate plea; and a humble and persistent faith.

And although everyone and everything seems to be against her she doesn't give up, so for example her where she's from, her gender, the disciples, and seemingly even Jesus himself; but that doesn't stop her persistence.

As a result, Jesus commended her for having a bold and determined faith; that results in her not just receive scraps of grace, she ends up as one of the family, sitting at the table; and her daughter's healed.

And it's amazing because we see the same kind of persistent faith in the Psalms:

So, listen to this:

When the Psalmists meet rejection from God, they reject the rejection. Any time God say's no, they say you can't say no, you have to say yes.

And the repeated cry from the Psalmists is that for God to be God he has to stick to his word and not go back on his promise to be faithful.

And the Psalmists do that all the time don't they.

You see like this woman, faith clings to Christ in the apparent no.

In the silence of God, faith clings to his promise to be faithful.

And when we feel guilty because we sin, Faith clings to the promise of forgiveness and the healing only Jesus can give.

Jesus says in verse 28: O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire. And her daughter was healed instantly.

Well you know in the same way as members of God's family; Jesus invites us to approach him in our time of need.

And we can go to him with complete confidence, in the knowledge that he'll answer us.

Maybe not immediately or in the way we'd like, but always in a way that's best for us.

And so, when God seems to say no, cling to his yes, when we feel guilty because of our sin, cling to his mercy, and hold on to what God has promised in Jesus:

Grace, Forgiveness, and Healing.

So finally, like the woman, let's be encouraged to have a humble and persistent faith, that trust's in God's grace to bless and to save.

And let's continue to pray even when God seems to be ignoring us or when all we seem to hear is no.

You see when we go to Jesus with that kind of attitude that we'll experience his faithfulness and hear him say:

"Son, daughter great is your faith, be it done for you as you desire." AMEN