

## Jesus casts a demon out of a Canaanite woman's daughter

Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities north of the land of Israel on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The Canaanites who lived there were descendants of those Canaanites whom the Israelites had failed to exterminate when they occupied the land. Most of them were gross unbelievers and idolaters, but this woman was an exception. We'll see that Jesus commended the greatness of her faith. There was only one other instance mentioned in the New Testament when Jesus commended someone's faith. That was the faith of another Gentile, a centurion, whose servant Jesus healed. Among the Jews we rather hear Jesus bemoaning the littleness and weakness of people's faith, and Jesus even made such observations about His 12 disciples on more than one occasion. So let us look to the faith of this Canaanite woman as an example and an inspiration.

We don't know exactly where Jesus was when this woman came to Him. Some believe that He was in the territory of Tyre and Sidon, while others are of the opinion that He was only close to their border. At any rate, this woman heard where Jesus was, and she came to Him to ask Him to free her daughter from demon possession. She addressed Him as "Lord, Son of David," recognising Him as the long-awaited Messiah from David's line.

Jesus' response, or rather lack of response, may surprise or even puzzle us. We have never before seen Jesus treat anyone this way, and we wonder why He did this. The disciples did not understand either, and after a while they urged Jesus to send her away. They evidently wanted Jesus to grant her request and send her home to her daughter, but their motive was not so much mercy as the desire not to be bothered by this woman.

Jesus' response to the disciples' suggestion was, "I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the family of Israel." That was a general statement. Jesus'

personal ministry was to be limited to Israel, even though He had come to redeem the whole world. But He never turned anybody away that came to Him for help, Jew or Gentile.

The woman fell to her knees and persevered with her request: “Lord, help me!” At that point Jesus spoke to her directly: “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the pet dogs.” To us that may sound like an insult and a total repudiation of her request. Jesus compared her to a dog! But His words were not an insult at all. The word He used for dog referred to little lap dogs such as children would have in the house as pets. The woman understood that and felt encouraged rather than rebuffed. “Yes, Lord,” she said, “yet even the pet dogs eat some of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters.” The crumbs included not only those that accidentally fell, but also some that members of the family would purposely drop for the dog’s benefit. Such crumbs were all that this woman wanted, and Jesus did not deny her request.

It is interesting to note the different ways that Jesus dealt with people who came to Him for help or for healing. He often surprises us by the way He treats people. When we analyse each episode, however, we see that He dealt with each person in exactly the right way, for He could look into their hearts, and He knew what would be best for them. In this way He also teaches us that He deals with us as individuals. He knows our needs, and He is always concerned about providing for us. His primary concern is to keep us in the saving faith to everlasting life. Nothing could be more important than that. We need to remember that always, especially when our gracious Lord deals with us in ways that we cannot immediately understand or appreciate. Any difficulties we have to endure in this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us in the life to come.

Brief life is here our portion,  
Brief sorrow, short-lived care;

The life that knows no ending,  
The tearless life, is there.

O happy retribution:  
Short toil, eternal rest;  
For mortals and for sinners  
A mansion with the blest.

There grief is turned to  
pleasure,  
Such pleasure as below  
No human voice can utter,  
No human heart can know.  
There God, our King and  
portion,  
In fullness of His grace,  
Shall we behold for ever,  
And worship face to face.

Hymn 493 v. 1, 4

