

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
REMINISCERE

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Travis Loeslie



Matthew 15:21–28 ESV

Author and Date:

St. Matthew's Gospel was written ca. AD 50 by Matthew Levi the Apostle. This account is also found in Mark 7:24-30.

What an astonishing Gospel we have before us! This poor Gentile woman calls on Jesus. It is an exercise in eternal questions and answers, or "dialectic." The woman is all-in. She will not stop begging our Lord until He grants what she needs. Just as Jacob wrestles Yahweh until he receives a blessing, so also we see a dogged faith in this Canaanite woman.

²¹ And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

- The account begins with Jesus on a tour through the nations north of Judea. These people were Gentiles – Phoenicians by birth. The Light Himself was shining in the dark places.

²² 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."

- A "Canaanite" was left over from the peoples God (through Moses) ordered Joshua and the Israelites to exterminate in Deuteronomy 20:17. The Canaanites were pagan idol worshipers.
- "Have mercy on me" – the cry of this woman shows the desperate need.
- "O Lord, Son of David" – These words are an amazing confession of Jesus' kingship in the line of David. This woman knows more than most Canaanites. She pleads for help from the Messiah of God. She is an example of faith.
- "Severely oppressed by a demon" – The word for "severely oppressed" can also mean "possessed" by a demon. Demons are real. In Jesus' ministry, He came into contact with what seems like heightened demonic activity. What pagan god could hold them back?

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²³ But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”

- Jesus is quiet. The disciples are bothered by the woman. She keeps on crying out.

²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

- Jesus tests and tries her faith. What could be more terrifying than the question of election? He is sent only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” She is not one of them. She is a Canaanite. Her people were devoted to destruction for their idolatry. How can this obstacle be overcome?
- “Lord, help me” - She continues to plead for help and cling to Jesus, even when God seems not to hear her lament.

²⁶ And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

- Jesus compares the faith of Israel to “children’s bread.” More surprising than that, Jesus compares her to a dog! As a Gentile dog, how could she be worthy of the Lord’s care?

²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

- The woman catches Jesus in His Word: “Yes, Lord, even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the masters’ table.” She is content to be a dog if it means to receive the little crumbs that fall from the scraps of Jesus’ table. This woman displays great humility before the Lord.

- Jesus is impressed by her unceasing show of faith in Him. He rewards her faith by healing her daughter of her demon possession right away.

- From the Canaanite woman, the Christian learns to have a dogged faith, persistent in prayer and lament to our Savior Jesus Christ in every trial and need. God may test us. So be it. If God grants what she desired, how much more will He give to us who have been grafted into Him of the scraps of His table – His forgiveness by His body and blood! As she clings to Jesus, so also may every one of Christ’s baptized holy ones cling to Him in trial and testing, in the confidence of being justified by His blood.



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