

Even the Crumbs

Please open your Bible to the book of Matthew 15, or turn to page _____ in the Bible under the chair in front of you.

At this point in Matthew's gospel, Jesus has begun to focus His teaching more on His disciples. He's preparing them for the day coming in which they will follow His example and go and make other disciples. And He wants to show them His heart for people and the unexpected way of His Kingdom.

And we certainly have some unexpected things in our text today. We have before us a passage that will require us to do some wrestling. Jesus will say some hard things here, things that will seek to draw out from us a response. What will we do with Jesus's words here? How will we respond? And we'll see the heart of Jesus in response to people who are desperate for Him.

Read **Matthew 15:21-31**

Intro

Many times the location in which words are said has a great impact on the meaning of those words. We might think of the word 'chips' which in the U.S. means thin, fried crisps, but in England means what we would call thick cut French Fries. Or the word 'braces' here refers to those things that hold your teeth in the right place, but in England 'braces' means those things that hold up a man's pants – we might say 'suspenders.' And I won't use examples here, but there are also words that sounds offensive in one place and be seen as a swear word, which may not be offensive at all in another place.

The point is that where you say something matters...

And so here in our passage, we need to understand the context in which Jesus is speaking these words. Maybe when I read them a moment ago, you asked yourself, is Jesus being prejudice here? Is He anti-women or anti-Gentile?

Well, as we'll see, Jesus is doing something unusual, and I think rather provocative. But he's not being prejudice or hateful, far from it, in fact. And to see that, we need to recognize where He is when this conversation takes place.

(show map) I showed this map of the area a few weeks ago when we discussed Herod Antipas. But here I want you to see that Jesus has largely been ministering and preaching in the area of Galilee. But now, He's moved from there into Gentile territory.

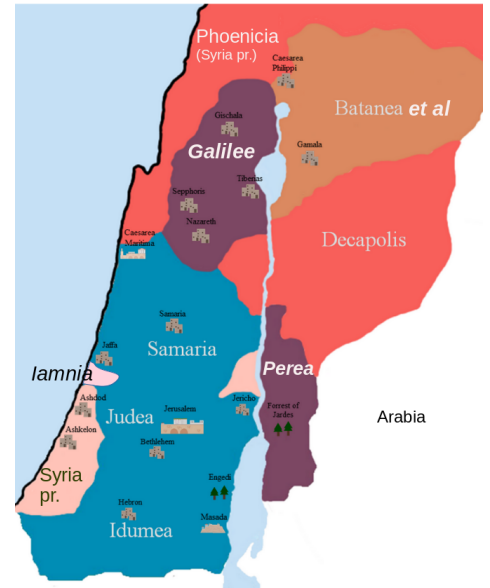
Listen to verse 21...

Matthew 15:21

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

What is significant about this area?

You can't see it on this map, but there's a mountain on the north side of Galilee (Mt. Meron) which means that people would usually walk around it on the west side of the sea of Galilee to get to that area up north. And that journey would take you through an area with some Jews, but which is largely Gentile. For the first time, Jesus is going into Gentile territory.



Why? Well, remember the interaction Jesus just had with the Pharisees. He's told them that it's not about external rules and regulations, but about obedience to God. Being unclean is about the heart, not the traditions of man. And now, he's going to go himself into an area filled with people the Pharisees would have thought of as unclean and beyond the mercy of God.

It would be like if Jesus were to say, "Being poor isn't about how much money you have in the bank," and then He went to visit one of the poorest parts of town and began to minister there." That's kind of what's happening here.

So here we have Jesus foreshadowing what will become the mission to the whole world in the Great Commission at the end of this book. Here, Jesus is going to give His disciples a preview of His mission by going into Gentile territory Himself.

And He knows that He has a divine appointment with this woman. So this is a picture of Jesus leaving the ninety-nine in order to pursue the one who is in a desperate situation.

Her Desperate Situation

And who is this one? Who is this woman? Look again at verse 22...

Matthew 15:22

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."

In the parallel account in Mark 7, she's called a Syrophenician woman. Matthew notes that she's a Canaanite woman. That's an outdated term – Canaanite. It'd be like talking with a woman from Iraq and calling her a Babylonian. Or talking with a man from Germany can calling him a Prussian. It seems that Matthew wants to highlight that she's come from the people who have long been the enemies of Israel. She's a Canaanite. So she has several strikes against her. She's a Gentile, a woman, from Syria, from the descendants of the Canaanites.

Pastor Ligon Duncan says, "If Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, this woman was a Gentile of Gentiles. If ever someone was a Gentile in the flesh, part of the uncircumcision, separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger to the covenants of promise, having no hope without God in this world – it was this woman."¹

In other words, this woman had no grounds to make a claim on Jesus or His mercy. But yet, here she was. She came to Jesus. She found Him. Or rather...Jesus had found her. He had come to her, in her territory, among the people whom the Jews avoided.

She throws herself at Jesus's feet, crying out for mercy. Why? Because her beloved daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.

J.C. Ryle,

"Hopeless and desperate as her case appeared, she had a praying mother. And where there is a praying mother, there is always hope."²

Sometimes, the only thing and yet also the greatest thing that we can do for our kids – is to pray for them – to go to God and beg for mercy.

So this Canaanite woman is in a desperate situation. She's feeling the kind of pain that only a mother could know. Her daughter isn't just having a hard time at school, or have some physical illness or disease, as hard as that would be. No, her daughter is caught up in being severely oppressed by a demon.

And so this woman finds herself in the region of Tyre and Sidon, not Israel. She's a Gentile, a Canaanite, and she's a woman. And her daughter is suffering. She's desperate and she goes to Jesus.

¹Ligon Duncan, "A Pagan Woman Who Understands Grace," 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=kN7ERUhnEW4

²J.C. Ryle, *The Gospel of Mark*, (1857), <https://www.gracegems.org/08/06/demon.html>

Maybe you have found yourself in a situation like this. Things in your life are causing you tremendous grief and pain. And it may feel like you're a stranger to God, and His promises are for other people – but not for you. Your situation feels desperate.

When was the last time that you were desperate for Jesus? When was the last time that you went to Him, over and over and over again? And you said, "Only you Jesus! You're my only hope!"

Do times like that come when everything is going great? When life is amazing? No, not usually. They come in those times come when our lives are falling apart. It is the trials and difficulties in our lives that shake us out of our self-sufficiency and lead us to realize just how desperate for Jesus we really were the whole time. They show us that we are utterly and absolutely in need of Jesus.

As I've watched my mother struggle through chronic pain, I've been able to witness, at least from the outside, what it looks like for a person to wrestle with God to the point that she is utterly desperate for Jesus.

And without trying to downplay her suffering, what we can see in times like that is how utterly and absolutely we all are in our need of Jesus.

It is the painful and dark times of our lives that God uses to till up the hard soil of our lives in order to make it fertile for great faith to grow and God's mercy to be applied.

Brothers and sisters, Matthew has recorded this story to teach us that there is no amount of sin or suffering or darkness that puts us beyond the hope of Jesus. As we look at this passage, we'll see that often God wants to grow our faith, not in spite of the darkness, not in spite of the suffering, but through the darkness and through the suffering. Here God uses something as dreadful as demonic oppression as an instrument to bring this woman close to Jesus, and I believe into His kingdom.

If her situation wasn't as dire, if it wasn't as desperate, she might have been tempted to go to something else or to someone else for her hope. That's what the culture around her would do.

But it was precisely because she was in such a desperate situation that she came to realize that *only* Jesus could help her. Only Jesus could bring her daughter freedom, only He could heal her. No one else could do it. Jesus was her only hope.

And so somehow this woman learns of this man Jesus, and she finds him in her own region, among her people. And she goes and cries out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son

of David!” She knows that she needs mercy, and she sees that He is the Son of David. She sees what the disciples have yet to fully grasp – that Jesus is the one the people have been waiting for. He is the promised king who will fulfill all the hopes and promises given to King David hundreds of years before. She has great faith.

And what is Jesus’s response? Look at the beginning of verse 23...

Matthew 15:23

But he did not answer her a word.

He did not answer her a word. She has this incredible faith. And yet Jesus doesn’t reply. The early church father Chrysostom said, “The Word has no word. The Fountain is sealed. The Physician holds back His remedy.”³

This is so unlike Him, right? Doesn’t this feel like something is off? When we first read this, it feels like it’s unfair? Jesus said, “Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest.” And yet, this weary woman comes to Him, and He does not give her rest. He does not answer her a word. At least...not yet.

Have you ever been in a situation like this before? You’ve prayed and prayed and prayed, and yet it feels like Jesus has not answered you a word? Have you felt like the Lord has ignored your requests? That you’ve been desperate for Him, and yet He doesn’t seem desperate for you?

And in those times, the Enemy comes with whispers that say, “Your Savior doesn’t care. He’s not listening. He cares about that person over there, who isn’t always giving in to pride and lust and anger. But you? No, Jesus doesn’t care about you.”

Have you felt that before? Well, if you have, then I want you to see something here. With this silence, Jesus is not ignoring her. He’s not casting her out. No, He’s drawing her in. And He’s putting her faith on display for His disciples and for us, and even for herself to see. He’s showing us that great faith is not dissuaded or deterred by silence.

So look at the response of the disciples that leads me to say that.

Matthew 15:23

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.”

³ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Gospel according to St. Matthew,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. George Prevost and M. B. Riddle, vol. 10, Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 321.

Think with me. What's the easiest way to send a beggar away? Just give them what they want, right? The disciples have seen Jesus grant requests, and perform healings, and exorcise demons for hundreds of people at this point. And so they saw, hundreds of times before, what happened afterwards. The people who got what they wanted, went back to their lives.

And that makes me wonder...how many of our prayer requests, if God were to grant them, would cause us to just walk away and go back to our lives, leaving Jesus behind until the next time we needed Him? When we finally got what we really want, we'd just go back to our lives like nothing had happened?

Brothers and sisters, Jesus doesn't just want your prayers or your requests, He wants you. He wants you, Cornerstone! And if answering your prayer, means that you would walk away from Him, then He may not answer your prayer.

As God's children, we have the blessings that at times, He answers our prayers. And we have the blessings that at times, He does not. The question is – do we have the faith to trust Him?

And so the disciples are now asking Jesus. She's so annoying – won't you send her away? She's so loud and persistent. Can't you just give her what she wants so that she'll leave us alone? We came out here to rest, can't you just make her go away?

And so by not answering her, Jesus is doing the opposite of what the disciples wanted Him to do. His silence is not because He's annoyed by her at all. As we'll see, Jesus loved to see her faith. He is thrilled that she's here. He's not trying to cast her out; He's seeking to draw her in. His silence is not cruelty, it's an invitation.

And when your prayers feel like they're being ignored, when you feel confused by the silence of God, know that it's an invitation. Jesus is saying, "Come in further. Come closer."

So in continuing to draw her in, now He is going to speak. But even His words seem to be confusing. Look at verse 24...

Matthew 15:24

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

And she is a Gentile. She isn't part of this group. She's not of the house of Israel. Jesus is saying, my mission is for the covenant people of Israel. They receive the promises first, and then they are to be priests who represent me to the nations. The mission will

extend to the nations, that's always been the plan, but it begins with the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

And then see how the great faith of this woman responds.

Matthew 15:25

But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."

What is she doing? She doesn't try to argue. She doesn't say, "Lord, that's not fair." No, she accepts it and simply reiterates her request – "Lord, help me!" She is showing a great faith.

Her Great Faith

So notice, she doesn't push back or withdraw. It's as if she's saying, "Yes, Jesus, that may be the case – but where else am I going to go? Who else can I turn to? You're my only hope!"

If we say that Abraham is the father of faith, then this woman is the mother of faith. It's like she is a female Jacob who has gotten ahold of Jesus and she's not going to let go until He blesses her. She's desperate and she's saying, "Help me! I've got no where else to go!"

But Jesus still isn't done. He wants to draw her in further. And so he answers, verse 26...

Matthew 15:26

And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Now, being silent is one thing. Even saying, "I'm not here for you" is one thing. But calling her a dog? That's a whole other thing. Jesus is going too far here, isn't He?

I know we live in a society that values dogs. Dogs are treated like family members. And people's dogs are very important to them. And that's great.

But even today, in a society that loves dogs, if someone called you a dog – that'd be offensive, wouldn't it? That would seem mean.

So why does Jesus say this? Well, we have to understand what He's doing here. First, we need to recognize that He's telling her a one-sentence parable. He's telling her that in His divine mission, He has come first to the Jewish people. God's plan is to save people from every tribe, nation, and tongue – including the Gentiles. But first, the gospel, or the bread in this parable – goes to the people of Israel. It's not right for Him to take from them in order to give it to others. That's His point.

So He's speaking with a parable. Other times when Jesus uses a parable, we don't tend to get upset. When He says, "I am the vine and you are the branches; we don't think, "Well, I'm not a branch!"

Jesus isn't aiming to offend her. He sees her great faith, and He wants to put it on display. He knows that she can bear even this test of being called a dog. And what is her response?

Matthew 15:27

She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Even being called a dog didn't discourage her faith. Instead of stomping off, completely offended, saying, "How dare you call me a dog!" No, instead she presses even harder on Jesus. She won't let go until He blesses her.

So what does she say? She says, "Yes Lord." She doesn't get mad or offended. She agrees with the premise of His parable. Yes, I am unworthy to eat at your table. She could have walked away in anger, and she doesn't. But also notice – she doesn't walk away in shame either.

She says, "Yes, I'm unworthy. I'm like a dog...but even dogs get crumbs from their master's table." What is she doing? She's answering Jesus from within the parable, and she presses the logic even further.

Even Jesus's disciples had to have His parables explained to them. But this woman gets it and turns it back. She says, "Yes, I know that I'm not worthy...but I know something else too... I know that you're merciful."

She's saying, I know that your table is full, and even though I don't deserve it, there are crumbs of mercy which may fall to me and yet not take away from your mission. And I know that you, Jesus, are full of mercy for even dogs like me.

In her great faith, she refused to walk away from Jesus, either out of being offended by Him or by being ashamed before Him.

Pastor Tim Keller says it this way, "If she walks away, if she bristles because she won't see the magnitude of her sin, then she will have failed to understand Jesus as Savior. But if she walks away because she won't see the magnitude of His mercy, she has also failed."⁴

⁴ Tim Keller, <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/goodness-and-severity/>

You see, it would be pride to say on the one hand, “I’m not a dog – I deserve more than that.” But it would also be pride to say, “Yes, Jesus, I’m a dog, and you are unable to save someone like me. My sins are too big for you to handle.”

Both are ways to reject Jesus. One is to hear the bad news – that all people, including you, are sinners by our nature and our choices. And we can get offended by that – I don’t deserve God’s anger. I don’t deserve His judgment! And you could walk away offended.

But there is another way to reject Jesus. And that is to walk away in shame – to say, “You’re right, I am a sinner. And there’s no hope for someone like me. There’s no way that God could love me and want a relationship with me.” And that person is accepting how sinful they are, but they are rejecting how merciful God is.

So while it appears to be humility, it’s another sort of pride. It’s a pride that looks at the Cross and says, “That’s not enough for me.” Or the attitude that says, “God may forgive me, but I can never forgive myself. My sins are greater than His mercy.”

You see, that attitude misses the true character of Jesus. In the Old Testament, we hear this repeated refrain, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” It’s shows up again and again in the writings of the prophets and in the Psalms.

And it comes from the book of Exodus when Moses asks God to show him His glory. So the Lord hides Moses in the cleft of the rock, and He passes by and declares His own name – God reveals who He is. And this is what He says...

Exodus 34:6-7

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, **7** keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, [that’s what God reveals first before He adds...] but who will by no means clear the guilty...”

You see, judgment is what God does, but mercy is who He is.

In the book *Gentle and Lowly*, Dane Ortlund writes,

“Left to our own natural intuitions about God, we will conclude that mercy is his strange work and judgment his natural work. Re-wiring our vision for God, as we

study the Scripture, we see that judgment is His strange work and mercy His natural work.”⁵

He goes on to say that not once are we told in the Bible that God has to be provoked to love. His anger requires provocation, but His mercy is pent up and ready to gush forth – it’s who He is!

And so this Canaanite woman and her great faith are clinging to Jesus. She’s saying, “I know I’m unworthy, but I also know that you’re worthy. I’m not coming to you on the basis of *my own* goodness, I’m coming to you on the basis of *your* goodness, not because of how deserving I am but based on how merciful you are.

She’s clinging to the fact that Jesus is the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. And so now her faith is fully on display for us and the disciples to see, a faith that overcomes all barriers and wrestles with God and refuses to let Him go.

And so now at last, we see the heart of Jesus in response to her words.

The Heart of Jesus

And what does He do? He shows her mercy. He delivers her daughter. And He gives her praise, unlike anything He’s said about anyone in Israel, not even His disciples. Look at verse 28...

Matthew 15:28

Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

So now Jesus it’s as though the heart of Jesus finally bursts forth. He exclaims, “Great is your faith!” He is delighting in her trust in Him. She has believed, despite every obstacle in her way. Now, His joy is overflowing.

Cornerstone family, it makes Jesus so happy to give you mercy. He is thrilled do that for you. You may think at times that when you go to Jesus, that He reluctantly does so. No, mercy is who He is – He is pent up with mercy! When we ask Jesus for mercy, we’re asking Jesus for Jesus. We’re asking Him to do what He loves to do! He loves to hear us ask Him *for Him!*

⁵ Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, 144

Imagine what it would be like for you to see Jesus and hear Him say, “Your faith was great! You make me so happy! Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.”

What is great faith? Great faith is finding Jesus wherever He may be and grabbing ahold of Him and saying, “I will not let you go until you bless me!”

And when you do that, you’ll find that the heart of Jesus will not let you down. The daughter of this Canaanite woman is healed instantly. But the ministry of Jesus among the Gentiles is not over. In verses 29-31, Jesus continues His journey outside of Israel. And the crowds come, with all of their needs and problems. And Jesus heals them. His compassion for them overflows. They too are receiving mercy from Jesus and being invited in.

Then notice what the text says in verses 30-31...

Matthew 15:30-31

And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, **31** so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

In response to witnessing the power and compassion of Jesus, the people glorified the God of Israel. It’s like Matthew wants to clarify – they’re worshipping the God of Israel. It’s not the pagan gods or the idols of the Gentiles – it’s the God of Israel.

I remember one of the first times I sat down with the staff here at Cornerstone to have a meal at some restaurant. And Pastor Mike had me pray to thank the Lord for the food before we ate. And so I prayed. And right when I said, “Amen,” Mike turned to the group and said, “Anyone want to pray to our God?”

Some of you have heard him say that before. Of course, he’s implying that my prayers were going to some false god.

Well here, Matthew wants us to see that the Gentiles are responding to Jesus by worshipping the Lord, the one true God.

And as we think about what our response should be to a passage like this, I think that’s a good one for us to imitate. What does this passage call forth from us?

First, it should provoke us to faith, the kind of faith that would wrestle with God until HE blesses us – not because we deserve it but because He is so good. So if you find yourself

in a place where you've been praying and praying and begging for the Lord to intervene, then this passage would show us that a great faith will press on and call on God to act according to His great mercy.

And then secondly, this passage should cause to do what the crowds do – to glorify the God of Israel. We should give thanks to the Lord because His mercy is more. He is deserving of all the glory because of who He is and what He has done.

There's a line in one of the modern hymns that we sing which I love. It says, "Two wonders here that I confess – my worth and my unworthiness. My value fixed, my ransom paid, at the Cross."

It's like this Canaanite woman could have written that line. Yes, Jesus, I don't deserve your help. I'm unworthy. But I know your mercy. And that is my plea.

And how do we know the worth that is ours in Christ? By looking at the Cross. It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we can know His love for us. It's a love that forgives us all the way down. It's a mercy that is more than all of our sin.

And if you don't know this mercy we've been talking about today. Friend, don't reject Him. Don't be offended by Him and walk away because He sees your sin. And don't walk away in shame because you don't think you can be forgiven. Turn to Him in faith today. There's room at the table for you.

I'll end with this quotation from Rebecca McLaughlin in her book, *Jesus through the Eyes of Women...*

"How do we see Jesus through this desperate Gentile woman's eyes? We see Him as the Son of David, with the power to heal and save from spiritual disease, and as the one we don't deserve, but who will nonetheless show us mercy. We see that *even the crumbs that fall from Jesus's table are enough for us*, but that Jesus will welcome all who trust in Him to the everlasting feast."⁶

Let's pray...

⁶ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Jesus through the Eyes of Women*, 95.

Lord's Supper

(invite deacons and band)

Yes, even the crumbs of God's mercy are enough. In our passage next week, we'll see that Jesus will take the crumbs that the crowd has and multiply them to feed thousands. And so when we come to this table, we should be reminded that His grace is enough for you today. Though these portions are small, they point us to something greater that lies ahead – the marriage feast of the Lamb in the kingdom of heaven.

The bread and the cup are symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. He laid down His life so that we might be forgiven. His sacrifice fully paid for all of our sins. And so this table is for those who have trusted in Christ for their salvation. If you're a baptized believer, then we invite you to come and partake as a sign of the unity of God's church. But if you have not trusted in the good news of Jesus, then I would invite you to put your faith in Him today. But I would ask that you heed the warnings of Scripture and refrain from partaking today.

The cup is grape juice and the bread is gluten-free. In just a moment, we'll pray and pass the elements. Please hold on to both of them, and we'll all partake together in a moment.

The Bible calls us to examine ourselves as we come to this table, so let us use this time to confess any sins that would hinder our communion with Christ and one another. And let's recall the great mercy of our great Savior. It's who He is.