

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church  
**Matthew 15:21-28 | The Lord's Mercy**  
Sunday August 18, 2024

**WELCOME:**

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 15.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- Notes are in the foyer, so take them home with you.

**REVIEW:**

For the past two weeks, we have learned about religious traditions in our verse-by-verse study of Matthew's Gospel.

Last Sunday, The Holy Spirit taught us *The Parable of the Heart*.

There were many takeaways from that passage, but the main keypoint is that our mouth/words are connected to our hearts.

**KEYPOINT 5:**

*Our words reveal the wickedness in our hearts.*

Our words and the tone in which we speak them—reveal the condition of our character.

Why is that?

**KEYPOINT 6:**

*We all suffer from heart disease.*

And that disease is a spiritual disease— called sin.

It's impossible to bypass sin because we're all born with this disease.

**Psalm 51:5**—Indeed, I was guilty when I was born;  
I was sinful when my mother conceived me.

This Psalm leads to a great trivia question...

*How many sins does it take for a person to be a sinner?*

Psalm 51:5 says, zero.

We were guilty of sin at the moment of conception.

So Jesus taught us last Sunday that our hearts are the source of our sin.

**Jeremiah 17:9**—The heart is more deceitful than all else  
And is desperately sick; —Incurable  
Who can understand it?

It is the depravity of our hearts that corrupts our minds, and our minds desire evil thoughts.

Evil thoughts lead to evil actions.

One of the proofs of our heart's condition is what comes out of our mouths.

### KEYPOINT 7:

*Our hearts are only as clean as our words.*

I then closed Sunday's sermon by encouraging you to examine your heart and your words.

- Are the words—and the tone of your words—*kind, gentle*? If not, why?
- Have you asked forgiveness from someone because of your words?
- How many broken relationships do you have because of your words?

Are you a person who has burned bridges—yet is still so proud that you're unwilling to go to that person and ask for forgiveness?

- What's preventing you from asking for forgiveness today?

All that is a review from last Sunday.

## INTRODUCTION:

Today, Matthew, our Gospel writer, takes us on a road trip.

We have an unusual passage before us today.

It's a passage that causes many church people—especially the really nice, kind, merciful, and compassionate church person—some angst and apprehension.

It is true that the Lord's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:9).

Especially when it comes to God's mercy!

And that's the topic of our passage today—The Lord's Mercy.

We will meet a new character in our Gospel study this morning.

This woman has everything against her—everything!—Even the Twelve Disciples don't like her.

The question becomes: *Does this woman deserve mercy?*

How does the mercy that she may or may not receive impact you?

Let's find out!

*\*Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.\**

**SCRIPTURE:**

**Matthew 15:21**—When Jesus left there, he withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon.

**Matthew 15:22**—Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came and kept crying out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely tormented by a demon."

**Matthew 15:23**—Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples approached him and urged him, "Send her away because she's crying out after us."

**Matthew 15:24**—He replied, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

**Matthew 15:25**—But she came, knelt before him, and said, "Lord, help me!"

**Matthew 15:26**—He answered, "It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

**Matthew 15:27**—"Yes, Lord," she said, "yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

**Matthew 15:28**—Then Jesus replied to her, "Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want." And from that moment her daughter was healed.

*These are the very words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word of Almighty God.*

**PRAY:**

*I cry aloud to the Lord;*

*I plead aloud to the Lord for mercy. (Psalm 142:1)*

**EXEGESIS:**

**Matthew 15:21**—When Jesus left there, he withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon.

Last week, we learned that Jesus offended the scribes and Pharisees by completely rebuking their religious traditions and correcting their theology through the Word of God.

Matthew gives us an important leadership principle today—

Jesus withdrew from Capernaum (Gennesaret) to avoid unnecessary conflict, more confrontation, and even danger.

Think about all the pressure that Jesus is under at this moment.

First, Jesus was under the pressure of the crowds.

Many people were convinced that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.

However, they wanted Jesus to liberate them from the oppression of Rome—right now.

They didn't know that Jesus would first liberate all who called on His name spiritually.

The physical bondage and oppression that come from man will take place at His Second Coming.

The second pressure Jesus was under was from Herod Antipas.

Antipas thought Jesus was John the Baptizer who had returned from the dead (Matt. 14:2).

So Antipas, as neurotic as he was, was anxious to kill Jesus just as he did John.

Third, the greatest pressure that Jesus was under—was from His own people— the Jewish leaders.

The scribes and Pharisees had made up their minds to kill Jesus. (Matt. 12:14).

Over the past several weeks, we watched Jesus rebuke and embarrass these men by correcting their theology and discounting their man-made traditions (Matt. 15:1–9).

All of this escalated their anger and hatred of Jesus.

So, Jesus wisely decides to withdraw from the frenzy of activity in Galilee.

**Matthew 15:21**—When Jesus left there, he withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon.

Jesus chooses to do something rather bizarre.

He takes the Twelve out of Jewish territory into the region of the Phoenicians.

*North of Israel*

So this Gentile (aka pagan) territory.

*↳ Non Jewish*

Tyre and Sidon are two major cities in Phoenicia.

Believe it or not, Tyre and Sidon still exist today in Lebanon.

Tyre is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

Sidon is the third-largest city in Lebanon.

These cities are just south of Beirut today.

In OT times, the Israelites called these cities... *rich heathen neighbors*.

This is the region where King Ahab introduced Baal worship to the Israelites.

This is the home of the most wicked woman in the OT, Ahab's wife, Jezebel (1 Kings 18)

This is the same area where the pre-incarnate Lord had sent Elijah to get some rest.

If you remember the story of the the widow at Zarephath/Sidon (1 Kings 17:9).

This is where Elijah resurrects this widow's son.

Tyre and Sidon were denounced in Isaiah 23 and Ezekiel 28 because of their wickedness.

*Lots of history w/ these Areas.*

By Jesus' time, however, Phoenicia had long since fallen, and Tyre and Sidon were part of the Roman province of Syria.

That's why Mark's Gospel states...

**+** **Mark 7:26**—*The woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth,*

Syro-Phoenician means a resident of Syria. *Syro* = Syria

So, the first-century Jews viewed these cities as incredibly wicked and deserving of God's divine wrath.

The obvious question is—Why would Jesus walk to Tyre (35 miles) and then from Tyre up to Sidon (25 miles)?

That's like walking from here to Prescott Valley via Jerome and then to Cordes Lakes.

That's a long way to walk. And why walk *there?*

Two Reasons:

1. Time is short.
2. Discipleship.

Jesus knows that He only has a year or so left with the Disciples—and He still has much to teach them.

So, Jesus takes these men away from home to get some rest and, specifically, discipleship.

**Matthew 15:22**—Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came and kept crying out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely tormented by a demon."

What does the word "Canaanite" conjure up in your minds?

The Canaanites are the bad guys.

This is the group of people who lived in the land of Canaan before and during the rise of the Israelites.

These guys are Israel's enemies!

The Canaanites were birthed out of a man named Canaan who fathered ten wicked nations (Genesis 10).

There are the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Canaanites, Jebusites, and Amorites—and includes the nations of Sodom and Gomorrah—all Israel's archenemies.

The Israelites were supposed to destroy the Canaanites when they conquered the Promised Land under Joshua—but they didn't do that.

Yet, here's the incredible irony: In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, two women, Rahab and Tamar, are Canaanites.



**Matthew 15:22**— Just then a Canaanite woman (enemy of God) from that region came and kept crying out.

Mark's Gospel fills in some holes in the story—

**Mark 7:24**— He (Jesus) got up and departed from there to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, but he could not escape notice.

Here's the scene—we have a woman who is ethnically different from the Jews.

She and her ancestors are Israel's arch-enemy!

This division and hatred between the two nations has existed for thousands of years.

Regardless of the political drama, this Canaanite woman cries for mercy at the top of her voice.

This poor woman is in agony—she is beside herself.

**Matthew 15:22**— "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely tormented by a demon."

Now, this is very interesting.

It's clear that this woman has heard of Jesus—and somehow and in some way, she found out where He was staying.

We don't know how long a demon has possessed her daughter.

Mark tells us that her daughter is a "child." (Mark 7:30).

So, we can guess that she's been trying to get help for quite some time.

Being a Canaanite, she already went to her pagan god of Eshmun—a false god of healing.

In fact, she probably passed Eshmun's temple, which was only three miles northwest of Sidon, to get to Jesus.

**Matthew 15:22**— "Have mercy on me,

Humanly speaking...

**KEYPOINT 1:**

*Mercy—Compassion for the miserable.*

However, Heavenly speaking...

**KEYPOINT 2:**

*Mercy is a gift of compassion that we don't deserve.*

God loves to reveal His mercy to us—starting with Moses.

God told Moses...

**Exodus 34:6**—The Lord—the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God (aka mercy), slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth.

But this woman doesn't know that.

She doesn't know Israel's God.

But look what she says to Jesus!

**Matthew 15:22**— "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!"

This arch-enemy of God has now put herself on Jewish ground.

She came to Jesus on Jewish terms! But she is anything but Jewish!

The Twelve Disciples watching this whole thing were probably freaked out when she called Jesus that title!

*(Can she do that?! Is she even allowed to do that?!)*

She has no Jewish inheritance. *-she doesn't know who King David is - let alone the Davidic Covenant*

She knows nothing of God's Word or God's promises.

She certainly doesn't deserve any of God's blessings.

She knows nothing of God's Tabernacle, Temple, priesthood, or prophets.

She's never kept the Moral Law and is clueless about dietary and civil laws.

She knows nothing about anything!

And yet, she says...



**Matthew 15:22**— "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!"

Where did she hear that? She had to hear it somewhere.

Keep in mind that Jesus is famous—his fame has spread throughout Israel into the Gentile nations, and that's exactly where Jesus is at this moment.

This woman has heard the healing stories.

That's why she tracked down Jesus.

She says the same exact thing as the two blind men who cried out to Jesus in Matthew 9.

**Matthew 9:27**—As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

*she says the same exact thing!*

**Matthew 9:28**—When he entered the house, the blind men approached him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I can do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord."

**Matthew 9:29**—Then he touched their eyes, saying, "Let it be done for you according to your faith."

**Matthew 9:30**—And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus warned them sternly, "Be sure that no one finds out."

**Matthew 9:31**—But they went out and spread the news about him throughout that whole area.

Back to our passage today, and that story spread 50 miles north to Tyre and Sidon.

**Matthew 15:22**—"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!"

And the Twelve look at her...*say what?!*

Maybe there's awkward silence...

**Matthew 15:22**—My daughter is severely tormented by a demon."

Demon possession is a tragedy.

However, please know that this tragedy did not happen by accident.

People do become possessed by demons at random.

Someone in her family—maybe the whole family—worshipped these Canaanite false gods, which opened the door to possession.

I'm guessing ~~here~~ that as distraught as this mother is, she may have had something to do with it.

**Matthew 15:22**— "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely tormented by a demon."

Many of us have been taught in this passage that this woman was calling Jesus "Lord" because it means "sir."

And that she used the title "Son of David" out of respect.

That may or may not be true, but let me offer a different perspective.

This woman doesn't know what she's saying— and she doesn't know who she's speaking to.

And we have this distraught mother—regurgitating what she's heard. *from that story.*

She's like a parrot saying words she doesn't understand.

It's as if she plagiarized these words from the Jewish playbook.

She heard that this phrase was used to heal two blind men.

She, most likely, has been to other religious men and attended pagan rituals—but nothing has helped—her daughter remains possessed by a demon.

How scary is that?

So, she is doing what she's been taught to do.

The Canaanites were taught that to summon a god, they had to use a magic formula, say the right words, and chant a certain chant.

A great example of this is found in Scripture when Elijah called down fire from heaven and killed the false prophets of Baal.

**1 Kings 18:22 NLT**—Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only prophet of the Lord who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets.

**1 Kings 18:23 NLT**— Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it.

**1 Kings 18:24 NLT**— Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!" And all the people agreed.

**1 Kings 18:26 NLT**— So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.

**1 Kings 18:27 NLT**— About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!"

**1 Kings 18:28 NLT**— So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out.

**1 Kings 18:29 NLT**— They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response.

This is what this mom's version of religion is.

And she got no help, just like the Baal prophets—no sound, no reply, and no response.

She is trying to use the same type of formula to invoke Jesus to heal her daughter—it's all she knows.

**Matthew 15:23**—Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples approached him and urged him, "Send her away because she's crying out after us."

Many people read this story and their first response is to get upset because Jesus isn't helping this distraught mother—and the Twelve Disciples are anything but compassionate.

**Matthew 15:23**—Jesus did not say a word to her.

There was absolute silence on Jesus' part.

Jesus acted as if he didn't even hear her! She's not even there!

**QUESTION:** Is Jesus obligated to answer or help her?

Keep in mind that God's mercy is an undeserved gift of compassion.

The apostle Paul says,

**Romans 9:15**—For he tells Moses, *I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

This is an amazing truth, yet extremely unpopular Biblical truth—*The only thing this woman deserves is the same thing you and I deserve.*

And it's not mercy—it's justice.

Because all sinners deserve the wrath of God and eternity in hell.

Yet, that's what makes grace and mercy so unique—God is a God of compassion, and He gives it away to whom He chooses.

### **KEYPOINT 3:**

*Jesus does nothing unloving and without a divine purpose.*

*We can't say that about the 12.*

**Matthew 15:23**— His disciples approached him and urged him, "Send her away because she's crying out after us."

The Twelve could be saying a couple of things:

1. "Jesus, please give her what she wants— so we can get rid of her."
2. Or, "Get rid of her!"

Either way, the Disciples will not win the *Compassion of the Year* award.

Now, that doesn't sit well with us.

If there were ever a situation in which Jesus and the Twelve should help someone quickly-- it would be right now!

A mother is crying helplessly and desperately over her child.

However, the Disciples are not as hardened as we may think.

In the first century, the Messiah belonged exclusively to Israel.

Jesus was sent from Heaven to serve, heal, and liberate His fellow Jews.

A Messiah can only be a Messiah *from* Israel *for* the Israelites.

And Jesus confirms this to be true.

**Matthew 15:24**— He replied, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."



It sounds like Jesus may finally be responding to the woman, but He's not.

**Matthew 15:23**— *His disciples approached him and urged him, "Send her away because she's crying out after us."*

**Matthew 15:24**— *He replied, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

Jesus is speaking directly to the Disciples. *—Not the woman.*

But the woman is listening.

### **ILLUSTRATION:**

*Have you ever said something that wasn't intended for the person you're speaking to but someone else in the room?*

That's what Jesus does here.

The Twelve already know that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah—He's not saying it for their benefit—they already know that—but she doesn't.

At this point, the Twelve must be confused.

Because they have watched Jesus heal the servant of a Roman Centurion.

They watched Jesus offer salvation to the Samaritan woman at the well—both people are non-Jews (Gentiles).

So what's going on?

Is Jesus having a bad day?

We look at this passage, and it seems like Jesus is not acting like Jesus at this moment.

We have watched Jesus for the past 2.5 years (Matthew chapters 1-15), helping anyone who asked.

We've watched him stop in his tracks to help people, but with this woman, Jesus ignores her and now only speaks to the Twelve.

**Matthew 15:24**—He replied, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

There is a deep theological lesson here.

And that is the Order of Salvation.

**Romans 1:16**—For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.

Regardless of that theological truth, if I were this woman, I would have tucked my tail between my legs and left.

Think about it; she has *nothing* going for her.

Her race is against her. She is a Canaanite—an enemy of the very people she's trying to get help from.

Her sex is against her. She is a woman—in a time when women were not respected.

Even the disciples were against her.

But what happens next is remarkable.

**Matthew 15:25**—But she came, knelt before him,

Can you picture the humility of this woman?

**Matthew 15:25**—and said, "Lord, help me!"

This is a beautiful moment.

This could be the moment of her salvation. Why?

The mantra, the religious facade, and the religious veneer all stop.

And this woman asks for help from her heart.

She is no longer worried about saying the right thing.

She doesn't give a rip about proper Jewish presentation.

She throws the formula away.

She's finally herself, and she opens up and says the three most important words any human being can ever utter: "**Lord, help me.**"

How can Jesus say no?

Verse 26, "*Jesus gives her eternal life, heals her daughter—and everybody sings "Kum ba yah."*

*-The 12 Apologies*

**Matthew 15:26**—He answered, "It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

This is the first thing that Jesus says to her—quite odd.

A little background is important—the Jews referred to the Gentiles as dogs.

Some people make a big deal about the dog itself—that Jesus was referring to a puppy instead of a wild dog—

So, Jesus' statement is not a compliment.

In ancient Israel, one of the worst ways to insult someone was to call them a dog.

But it's amazing what you can get away with the correct tone of voice.

**Proverbs 15:1**—A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath. = Deliberate

It's like people who write ugly emails and then put a smiley face behind every statement, so it's not so harsh.

Regardless, Jesus' statement is amazing—this woman is bowing at Jesus' feet and still calls her a dog.

And Jesus knows that she has just had a spiritual breakthrough.

So, tone is everything in this verse.

We know that Jesus is a God of compassion—so picture Jesus saying this statement—as odd as it is to us today— with a grin on his face.

**Matthew 15:26**—He answered, "It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

**Matthew 15:27**—"Yes, Lord,"

of SALVATION

The woman agrees with Jesus about the priority of the Jews over Gentiles.

**Matthew 15:27**—"yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

This woman is among the most remarkable people we have met anywhere in Scripture.

This woman came to Jesus with a plan—thinking to herself...

*If I say the right thing, perform the right task, and participate in the proper ceremony, then this Jewish God named Jesus can heal my daughter. (He's one of many gods; I must find the right one at the right time.)*

But what she found out is that Jesus is the only God.

→ "The Lord!"

→ "Son of David!"

And in doing so, she realized who she was speaking to—and what that title truly meant. —

This also means she knew who she was—unworthy to even ask for such a healing.

She did not come with a sense of entitlement.

She demonstrated a complete absence of the pride and self-righteousness that characterized most Jews.

Amazingly, she even adapts Jesus's metaphor about the dogs—and expands on it!

She continues to request that Jesus give her mercy as a dog might beg for table scraps.

#### **KEYPOINT 4:**

*She was willing to settle for ~~the~~ crumbs because those crumbs would be enough to heal her daughter.*

She wasn't asking for what belonged to the Jews.

However, she was asking for anything that was extended to the Gentiles.

Maybe she was persistent because she heard the stories of Jesus healing the Gentiles.

Regardless, with this woman's humility— and the Lord's willingness to offer mercy— Jesus says...

**Matthew 15:28**— *"Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want."* And from that moment her daughter was healed.

She fulfilled the pledge of...

**Jeremiah 29:13**—*You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.*

**Jeremiah 29:14**—*I will be found by you.*

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Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 7

**Matthew 7:7**—*"Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you.*

**Matthew 7:8**—*For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

She did all those things! So Jesus says...

**Matthew 15:28**— *"Woman, your faith is great.*

The word "woman" is a term of respect.

Jesus used the same word when He spoke of His mother.

Isn't it interesting that two people in Matthew's Gospel had "great faith."

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It just so happens that both of these people are non-Jews (Gentiles.)

This Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5–13).

## **PREACH:**

So what made this Canaanite woman's faith so great?—According to Jesus?

*What are the characteristics of great faith?* Let me give you four things:

### **1. Her faith was in Jesus.**

We watched her faith develop and grow.

She went from a being “religious” person with a motive—chanting a formula—thinking that if she had the secret handshake—that this Jewish God would answer her—

To a personal saving relationship with the Lord of lords and King of kings—the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **2. She appealed to Jesus solely on the basis of His mercy.**

This is how we all must come to Jesus—begging for mercy.

Begging for a gift that we don't deserve—because we are all sinners.

*Who deserve justice*

### **3. She was repentant.**

Although she didn't specifically ask for the forgiveness of her sins, her actions reveal her repentance. She wept, was humble, and persistent.

### **4. She was reverent.**

Unlike the Jews in the Gospel, and unlike us today (American Church)—she laid aside all self-righteousness, she was not entitled to anything, and made no demands—she was respectful, fearful, and reverent.

## **PRAYER**

## **BENEDICTION**

*May the Lord bless you and protect you; may the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the Lord look with favor on you and give you peace.” ’ (Num. 6:25)*

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