

DOGGED FAITH

Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30
Yeshua §80

Years ago, I tuned into a television documentary highlighting the design and manufacture of the Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet. Keep in mind it costs 220 million dollars today to build one 747. At one point in the show, hydraulic rams were installed from mid-wing to wing-tip on both wings. The rams were powered and began bending the wings upwards. It was incredible to watch.

Long before they stopped, I was convinced the wings were going to explode.

Why would Boeing put such an expensive aircraft through such a test and risk its destruction? This test proved the structural design and strength of the wings under extreme loads.

A test proves the quality of the thing tested.

In our story today, Jesus tested a woman. As the story unfolds, we'll see why.

A GENTILE WOMAN SEEKS HELP FROM THE JEWISH MESSIAH (MATTHEW 15:21-22)



MATTHEW 15:21 (ESV)

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

Following Jesus' confrontation with the delegation of Pharisees and scribes sent by the Great Sanhedrin from Jerusalem (15:1-20), Jesus left Capernaum and traveled northwest to the coast to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon were outside Israel in what is modern-day Lebanon. During His lifetime, Jesus rarely traveled outside non-Jewish areas.

It's possible Jesus made this trip outside Israel to "shake off" the Pharisees and scribes persecuting Him (Matt. 15:1-20). He knew they wouldn't follow Him into

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pagan, gentile territory. He may also have traveled to this region to get away from the crowds so that He and His disciples could finally get some down time.

Mark 7:24 tells us Jesus intended to “lay low”.

24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden.

As so often happened, when Jesus attempted to get away alone with His disciples, people found Him.

In this case, Jesus was found by a woman desperate to help her demon-possessed daughter.

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.”

Both Matthew and Mark emphasize this woman was not a Jewess, but a Gentile. Referring to her as a *Canaanite* associated her with the pagan people groups of Israel’s past. Yet, by addressing Jesus as *Lord* and *Son of David*, this woman demonstrated knowledge of and faith in the Jewish Messiah. Further, she believed the Jewish Messiah would help people like her and her daughter who were not Jews. Perhaps she was familiar with God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants, through which all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3).

The plight of her daughter drove this mother to seek Jesus’ help.

Jesus’ response was shocking.

JESUS PUT HER FAITH TO THE TEST (MATT. 15:23-26)

23a But he did not answer her a word.

After months of healing the sick and casting out demons from the possessed, Jesus completely ignored this hurting woman. There’s a reason for His response, but for now we’re left to wonder at Jesus’ behavior.

The woman would not be put off; she wasn’t going to give up. She kept pleading to the point of irritating the disciples. They suggested either Jesus give her what she requested and get rid of her or He just send her away.

23b And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

On the surface it seemed Jesus agreed with the disciples. Again, Jesus ignored the woman and spoke to His disciples reminding them He was *sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. He did not make it easy on this lady!

But she wasn't going away. She came again and knelt before Jesus and pleaded again.

25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Did Jesus call her a *dog*?

He used the word for little dogs or puppies, referring to dogs that were permitted in the house. But they were not pets in the sense that we relate to our pets.

We need to keep in mind that Jesus wasn't calling her a name; referring to her as a dog was part of an analogy. To take the bread prepared for the children of the house and give it instead to the dogs under the table would be completely inappropriate. In the analogy, the bread is the blessing of God; the children are the Jews and the dogs are the Gentiles.

The point Jesus was making is that it is inappropriate to give to Gentiles the blessings of God intended for the Jews.

Even though His analogy is shocking it reflected the common understanding of the day that the great blessings given to Israel were not to be desecrated by the pagans.

At this point, we would not be surprised if she gave up. But she didn't.

HER FAITH PROVED GENUINE AND STRONG (MATTHEW 15:27)

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

She didn't disagree with Jesus' analogy, but she did point out a practical exception; even the dogs underfoot get to eat the crumbs that fall on the floor.

At this point it was abundantly clear this dear lady sincerely believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

JESUS REWARDED THE WOMAN'S GREAT FAITH (MATTHEW 15:28)

We believe her response brought delight and joy to Jesus' heart. His response was enthusiastic and complimentary. Like the Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:5-13) Jesus commended her great faith and granted her request.

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.

This encounter illustrates many fascinating dynamics in first-century Jewish culture. The shocking responses of Jesus are understandable when we consider both Scripture and first-century Judaism.

First, it was not yet time for the good news of Messiah to go forth to the world. We saw that in Jesus' instructions to the Apostles to go only to the lost sheep of Israel on their first preaching tour (Matt. 10:6). As the Apostle Paul wrote years later, the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to the Jews first and also to the Greeks (Rom. 1:16).

Second, Jesus' treatment of this Gentile woman reflected a traditional rabbinic view of how to deal with seeking Gentiles. While it has always been possible for Gentiles to convert to Judaism to worship the true God, the rabbis did not make it easy. Out of fear of insincere converts or pagan cultural influences, it was required that a Gentile clearly prove his or her commitment. The most pessimistic view stated that "proselytes are as hard for Israel to endure as a sore."¹ Because of these suspicions, it was understood that if a rabbi was approached by a Gentile seeker, the rabbi was obligated to initially reject the person.

In this context, Jesus' response to this pagan woman reflects a very natural response of a rabbi to a potential follower. Her perseverance in the face of His harsh responses proved beyond all doubt the sincerity and strength of her faith in Jesus. Having tested and validated her faith as genuine, Jesus responded with grace and power.

Third, this encounter reminds us that God's story centers on the Jews and the nation of Israel. Our Savior is a Jewish man Who came in fulfillment of covenant promises made to the Jews. By God's grace, we Gentiles have been graciously grafted into the spiritual blessings of Israel (Rom. 11). We reject the heresy that God has rejected Israel and the Church replaces Israel in God's program. God will never forsake Israel; even now He is working to fulfill His unconditional covenant

¹ Tractate Yevamot 47b

promises to Israel of the land, Seed and blessing. In humility we should be thankful for Israel even as we pray for her salvation.

Fourth, this encounter again reveals Jesus' authority in the spiritual realm. Even though physically separated from the woman's daughter, Jesus' authority transcends physical space such that with a command transmitted by His thoughts, Jesus ordered the demon out and it obeyed.

Finally, consider the contrast between the way Jesus interacted with this woman and the way some churches go about trying to get people saved. Jesus tested this woman's faith, putting difficult things in her path to see if she would persevere and her faith prove genuine. By contrast, some churches dumb down the teaching of the Bible, avoid potentially controversial topics and do everything possible to make "getting saved" as easy as possible.

Jesus didn't "make it easy". As we saw in the *bread of life* confrontation (John 6:22-71) Jesus didn't let up, but spoke hard words; one must eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to have eternal life. Many of His disciples (not the Twelve) stopped following Him over these hard words. But in this same context, as we observed, Jesus spoke of God's election. To the crowds who wanted physical bread, Jesus said:

JOHN 6:37 (ESV)

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

And to the Jews, the religious leaders of Capernaum, who rejected His claim that He came from heaven; to them Jesus said:

JOHN 6:44 (ESV)

44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

The point Jesus was making is that those who reject Him do so because they have not been chosen by God; they have not been given by the Father to Jesus to be saved. They rejected Jesus, not because Jesus was not true or because Jesus said hard things. They rejected Jesus because they were not chosen by God to be saved.

The doctrine of election frees us from fear in our evangelism. It frees us from the fear that we might say something that will cause a person to reject Jesus who would have otherwise trusted in Jesus. That person doesn't exist.

The doctrine of election frees us from the fear that people might become offended by Biblical doctrine and walk away from Jesus. If they do, it proves they are not chosen by God.

The doctrine of election does not free us from our responsibility and privilege to share the Gospel with those not yet saved. We are the means God has chosen to draw unbelievers to faith in Jesus. We should be committed to sharing the way of salvation as the Lord opens up the opportunities. And we should do so with kindness, good will and skill.

The doctrine of election leads us, not to “dumb down” the Gospel, but to clearly and accurately declare truths such as God’s holiness, man’s fall and depravity, spiritual death, the Lake of Fire, God’s love, the Trinity, Jesus the God/Man, blood sacrifice, the Cross, the Resurrection. We should not rush any of this. We should not move ahead in explaining the way of salvation if the person is not understanding or rejecting these fundamental truths. And even when they do profess faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin and eternal life, we should be cautious not to offer assurance of their salvation too quickly. Time will tell. If they are truly born again, signs of that new birth will emerge such as a genuine, persistent hunger for the milk of the Word and a love for the church family.

As we see from our passage today, Jesus is not seeking a lot of people who say they believe; Jesus is seeking and saving those who genuinely believe.