

Research: Matt. 15:21-28
Healing of the Daughter of Syro-Phoenician woman

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

“Jesus ‘withdraws’ to the region of Tyre and Sidon, cities on the Mediterranean coast lying about thirty and fifty miles respectively from Galilee. The vicinity of Tyre leads us to ask whether Jesus entered the region of Tyre and Sidon or went only to the border—which would mean the woman came out to meet him. But verse 21 and Mark 7:31 make it clear that Jesus left Galilee and entered pagan territory” (*EBC* 8.354).

“These cities were on the sea-coast or shore of the Mediterranean. He went there for the purpose of concealment, perhaps still to avoid Herod” (Barnes 73).

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

“The country, including Tyre and Sidon, was called Phoenicia, or Syro-Phoenicia. That country was taken by the Greeks under Alexander the Great, and those cities, in the time of Christ, were Greek cities. This woman was therefore a Gentile, living under the Greek government, and probably speaking the Greek language. She was by birth a Syro-Phoenician, born in that country and descended, therefore, from the ancient Canaanites” (Barnes 73).

“*Cried*. With a loud, importunate cry: from behind” (Vincent 1.83).

“*Me*. Making her daughter’s misery her own” (Vincent 1.83).

“The words *grievously vexed with a devil* are *daimonizomai* in Greek which means ‘to be under the power of a demon; possessed with devils; vexed with a devil.’ In the N.T. these are persons afflicted with especially severe diseases, either bodily or mental (such as paralysis, blindness, deafness, loss of speech, epilepsy, insanity, etc.) whose bodies, in the opinion of the Jews, demons had entered and so held possession of them as not only to afflict them with ills, but also to dethrone the reason and take its place themselves; accordingly, the possessed were wont to express the mind and consciousness of the demons dwelling in them; and their cure was thought to require the expulsion of the demon” (Thayer 123).

“*Thou son of David*. How did she know that Jesus was descended from David? Not because she was a proselyte, for below she is called ‘a dog,’ i.e. a heathen. Probably because the fame

of Jesus, and the popular title by which he was known, had spread far beyond the confines of Galilee” (Dummelow 678).

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

“That these verses (23 and 24) are peculiar to Matthew is not surprising. Matthew’s Jewish readers would be intensely interested in Jesus’ doing a miracle to aid a Gentile, on Gentile territory. Mark’s Gentile readers would, however, have needed much explanation had this saying been included in his Gospel. Jesus had healed Gentiles before, but always in Jewish territory” (EBC 8.354).

“*But he answered her not a word.* This was done to test her faith, and that there might be exhibited to the apostles an example of the effect of persevering supplication. The result shows that it was not unwillingness to aid her or neglect of her. It was proper that the strength of her faith should be fully tried” (Barnes 73).

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

But he answered and said, I am not sent . . . - This answer was made to the woman, not to the disciples.

The "lost sheep of the house of Israel" were the Jews. He came first to them. He came as their expected Messiah. He came to preach the gospel himself to the Jews only.

“Afterward it was preached to the Gentiles; but the ministry of
25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

“The woman knelt before Jesus and cried, as only the mother of an afflicted child could, ‘Lord, help me!’ ” (EBC 8.354).

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

“*It is not meet.* That is, it is not *fit or proper*” (Barnes 73).

“*Dogs*. Little dogs or little whelps. The picture is of a family meal, with the pet house-dogs running round the table” (Vincent 1.89).

To cast it to dogs.—The word used was diminutive in its form, and as such pointed not to the wild, unclean beasts that haunt the streets of an Eastern city ([Psalm 59:6](#)), but to the tamer animals that were bred in the house, and kept as pets. (Ellicott’s commentary

“The children are the Jews; the dogs are the Gentiles. Christ here speaks as a Jew, not yet revealing his true sentiments towards the Gentiles. . . . The rabbis often spoke of the Gentiles as dogs, e.g. ‘he who eats with an idolater is like one who eats with a dog, for as a dog is uncircumcised, so also is an idolater’ ” (Dummelow 679).

“The question is one of precedence: the children get fed *first*” (*EBC* 8.354).

The “children” are the Jews; the “dogs” are the Gentiles. This was the name applied by the Jews to all outside the chosen race, the dog being in the East a symbol of impurity. (Cambridge Bible).

To all other nations they were accustomed to apply terms of contempt, of which dogs was the most common. The Muslims still apply the term "dogs" to Christians, and Christians and Jews to each other. The term is designed as an expression of the highest contempt. The Saviour means to say that he was sent to the Jews. The woman was a Gentile. He meant merely using a term in common use, and designed to test her faith in the strongest manner - (Barnes Notes).

“He meant to try her faith. As if he had said, ‘you are a Gentile. I am a Jew. The Jews call themselves children of God. You, they vilify, and abuse, calling you a dog. Are you willing to receive of a Jew, then, a favor? Are you willing to submit to these appellations to receive a favor of one of that nation, and to acknowledge your dependence on a people that so despise you?’ ” (Barnes 73).

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

“The woman is humble. She is willing to be called a dog, and to acknowledge the Jews as masters” (Dummelow 679).

“ . . . Jesus, in adopting the contemptuous expression, slightly softens it. He says not ‘dogs,’ but ‘little dogs,’ i.e. household, favorite dogs, and the woman cleverly catches at the expression, arguing that if the Gentiles are household dogs, then it is only right that they should be fed with the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (Dummelow 679).

“*And she said, Truth, Lord,* etc. ‘What you say is true. Let it be that the best food should be given to the children. Let the Jews have the chief benefit of thy ministry. But the dogs, beneath the table, eat the crumbs. So let me be regarded as a dog, a heathen, as unworthy of everything.

Yet grant one exertion of that almighty power, displayed so signally among the Jews, and heal the despised daughter of a despised heathen mother” (Barnes 73).

“She does not argue that her needs make her an exception, or that she has a right to Israel’s covenanted mercies, or that the mysterious ways of divine election and justice are unfair. She abandons mention of Jesus as ‘Son of David’ and simply asks for help; ‘ and she is confident that even if she is not entitled to sit down as a guest at Messiah’s table, Gentile ‘dog’ that she is, yet at least she may be allowed to receive a crumb of the uncovenanted mercies of God” (EBC 8.354).

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

“*O woman, great is thy faith.* Why did Jesus speak to her so harshly and wait so long before granting her request? 1) To test the strength of her faith; 2) to teach her the lesson that persistence and importunity in prayer will finally meet their reward; 3) to teach the disciples that greater faith was often to be found among the heathen than in Israel” (Dummalow 679).

“*faith.* Once again, trust and confidence has compelled Jesus to extend his mission to a Gentile” (AYB Matthew 187).

The word *faith* in Greek is *pistis* which means “the conviction of the truth of anything; the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things; a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation” (Thayer 512).

The word *whole* is *iaomai* in Greek which means “to cure, heal, to make whole, to free from errors and sins, to bring about (one’s salvation)” (Thayer 296).