

In our scripture passage today, there is a lot going on. It is important to understand some history here about this location and the Canaanite woman who came to Jesus. The Canaanites were the ones that Israel had battled thousands of years ago, going all the way back to Joshua and the Israelites' entrance into the Promised Land. This woman is of Canaanite descent, and she is from the region of Tyre and Sidon. The cities of Tyre and Sidon were port cities on the Mediterranean Sea north of Israel. This place was mostly a Gentile, or non-Jewish region.

Jesus was Jewish and those who believed him to be the Messiah believed he was the Messiah for the Jewish people. Not everyone believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but for those who did, he was the Messiah for the Jewish people only.

This woman had no business hanging out with Jewish people. She was a Canaanite. The Canaanites and the Israelites didn't speak to each other and they wanted nothing to do with each other. They were ancient enemies. Yet this lady comes and cries out to Jesus "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!" She continued to cry out after Jesus to the point that the disciples felt like something needed to be done. They wanted nothing to do with her and she was irritating them. They asked Jesus to send her away. We're not sure if they wanted him to grant her request and then send her away, or just simply send her away, but nevertheless, they asked him to get rid of her.

Jesus tells her that he cannot help her because he was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, which would have been the Jews. Jesus' reply would have been very understandable for the Jewish people who were present as they expected their Messiah to help

them alone. The need in Israel was indeed great. Even the woman knew this. Remember, she had referred to Jesus as the Son of David, a very Jewish description of the Messiah. She recognized him as a rightful king, not just some roaming healer.

And this woman just keeps on going. She kneels before Jesus and simply says “Lord, help me.” She knelt before Jesus because she recognized his authority to not only sit on the throne of David, but also to wield power over evil. Jesus still puts her off, telling her it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs. What??? Some of you may be thinking “Did Jesus just call this woman a dog?”. Well, yes, he sort of did. However, there is a context here that is important for us to understand. Jesus is not calling her a dog in the sense that he’s trying to put her down, but to make the point that the precious gift he has brought is for the children of Israel, not for others. In other words, it is not fair to take blessings away from the Jewish people and give them to the Gentiles or Canaanites.

You would think she would give up at this point, but she still persists, telling Jesus that even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table. She is saying that even though she knows the blessings are not for her, just a small, tiny crumb of a blessing from Jesus is enough for her. She knew she didn’t deserve God’s grace. She knew she didn’t deserve the blessings of the Messiah. She was not even Jewish! But she also knew that the power of Jesus was so great that even the leftover crumbs were miraculous enough to set her daughter free from the demon that had possessed her. This woman would not take no for an answer. She would not give up. She wanted Jesus to bring rescue and healing for her daughter!

This woman did not hold the same religious beliefs as the Jews. She would not have been allowed into the synagogue where the Torah was read each Sabbath. She may have

initially thought Jesus was some sort of a magician who could perform miracles. She likely came to Jesus without wholehearted faith. But by the time she finished interacting with him, he praised her great faith and granted her request. Faith had come from her heart, faith that Jesus had enough power for Israel and enough power to also save her daughter. She somehow understood that Jesus was not just hope for Israel and the Jewish people but hope for the whole world.

If we compare ourselves to this Canaanite woman, how would we stack up? Here she had a daughter possessed by demons that she wanted desperately to help. Granted, she did not have Google or social media to consult for helpful suggestions. So she went straight to Jesus himself. We may not have demon possessed children (well sometimes they may act that way) but we have an ample amount of problems in our lives and in our world. Maybe some of you are more like this Canaanite woman and you go to Jesus in prayer first when something is troubling you. That is wonderful. But most of the people I know (including myself if I am being totally honest) tend to go to other places first.

When faced with some kind of problem or concern, we often search on Google for similar stories and advice. We spend considerable time googling our symptoms and self-diagnosing our health concerns. We post on Facebook, Next Door, or other social media to see what our friends and acquaintances would do in our position. We want to see what others think, have experienced, or would do if they were in our shoes. According to Forbes, 1 in 10 Americans look to social media for reliable health information. There are 4.9 billion social media users across the world. Facebook has 3 billion monthly active users. 77% of internet

users read blogs, not just about food or travel, but for parenting, lifestyle, health, and fitness advice.

Some of you may remember the old game show “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” with its “ask the audience” or “phone a friend” options to help you answer a question. The Canaanite woman did not have these options, so she went straight to Jesus himself. We are not able to physically walk up to Jesus and bow at his feet with our requests like she did, but we can certainly go to him in prayer with them!

When friends tell me about their family or health struggles and lament that they don’t know what to do, I want to gently suggest that they pray about it first before they seek other advice. We can learn from this Canaanite woman and her persistence. People may not totally understand your burdens or your particular situation, but Jesus does. His ears are always open for our petitions and intercessions. He really does want to meet our needs.

Whether you need healing, restoration, or forgiveness, take a lesson from this woman and get that need to Jesus! He can meet your needs, move your mountain, save your soul, forgive your sins, touch the hearts of your loved ones. Don’t be afraid to call on him.

Sometimes we don’t get our requests granted as quickly as this woman did. Her interaction with Jesus was short, but her faith grew in that brief time that she asked for his help. Sometimes our courage and faith are tested as we present our petitions to our God. Sometimes he throws in a few things to see if we really want what we say we want, or to see if we really, really believe. Obstacles in our way usually always turn out to be blessings in disguise.

Is there something you are tired of praying about? I can’t promise that you will get your answer soon, but I know that if you keep praying God will answer when the time is right. Keep

praying with an expectant and hopeful attitude. He pays attention to prayers that keep coming. When we continue to seek him, we will eventually see him do what we need done.

We can learn from the Canaanite woman that we need to remain humble, put away our pride, and remain persistent in our faith no matter what others think or tell us to do. Jesus wants to help us grow in our faith. Not only is he available for those who have strong faith, he is available for everyone. Long before Jesus and the Canaanite woman had this interaction, our Hebrew scripture today tells us that God's blessings are for all people, even foreigners and those who were not considered citizens in Israel. Whatever your race, social position, vocation, or financial situation, God's blessings are as much for you as anyone else. God continues to meet outsiders and grant them not just a crumb, but a place at the table.

This woman's story was preserved for a reason. She saw the greatness of the Lord Jesus and believed in him. When you see him for who he is, nothing can deter you from him. His people know that apart from him, there is no hope, no blessings, no salvation. Whatever you do, be sure of Christ and cling to him. Never, ever stop praying! Maybe we will keep looking for answers and advice online like we tend to, but our best hope still lies in taking our troubles directly to Jesus. He knows our situation and what to do about it much better than our friends, contacts, or random blog posts do.

Friends, I pray that God will give you the strength to have the kind of persistent faith that the Canaanite woman had. I pray that you will boldly take your requests to Jesus through prayer and petition and never stop praying. He is always, always there for the asking!
Amen.