

Gospel of Matthew 15:21-28

# *The Nature of True Faith*

## *The Gentile Woman*



Last weekend, our entire family – all 11 of us – were gathered together in one place, and we had the rare opportunity to conduct our own worship service. With everyone gathered around, the adults seated and the children on the floor or on laps, my son, Hans, led the worship on the guitar, and then I read the scripture and led the discussion. I read this scripture – our text for today – and asked them for their help in creating a sermon from it. I told them that what they came up with, I would include. The children took this very seriously and the looks on their faces told me that they had their thinking caps on. But when I was done reading, there was a prolonged silence. Like Curly from the 3 Stooges, they were trying to think but nothing was happening! Finally some observations began to be voiced. Jesus wasn't being very nice to the poor woman. That was a very good observation and obviously a major feature of this particular text! Here was a woman greatly distressed! Her daughter was afflicted with something very dark that seemed common in that place – demonic oppression!



## Satanic Activity

Hoping for some anonymity and a chance to get away, Jesus and His disciples had previously gotten into a boat, and sailed across the big lake of Galilee to its western shores, and in doing so had crossed over into territory where Satan had great power and authority. It was gentile territory! Also, Satan had also seemed to have stepped up His activity in that entire region since Jesus had been born and settled into the area of Galilee. We never hear of this much demonic activity targeted at individuals in the Old Testament times, even though idol worship was rampant in that area of the world. Rev. 12 recounts that during the time of Christ – especially as a child - Satan, was truly hunting the Son of God and trying to thwart His ministry before it was even begun, and/or ***kill Him*** during His time on earth. But many lives were being affected by this increased satanic activity. Even in Israel this was being seen, and Jesus was continually having to cast out demon who were plaguing their human hosts! Some people were afflicted with blindness, some were deafened and made mute, some had epileptic seizures! Some were beset with madness, or were irresistibly compelled to hurt themselves, or even to attempt suicide! We are not told *how* the demon afflicted this particular child, but her mother says that the girl was suffering terribly!



\*I think of my precious granddaughters it fills me with apprehension to that they could suffer so. Life can take some very difficult turns and our loved ones can suddenly be suffering. Suffering is very much a part of life on this fallen planet! It became so when we decided we did not need our Creator/God, and so He cursed the earth, taking away His protective hand, and letting Satan have his way with us! There is a terrible price to pay for rebellion! Remember that! Rebellion always gravitates toward evil - immorality, dishonesty, what is false and destructive, the insanity of upside down values, etc. – *ALWAYS!* So it plays right into Satan's hands, who is more than happy to help us rebel and destroy our own lives - or to do so himself, like with this innocent little girl!





So getting back to the original observation. Why did Jesus seem to be purposefully mean to this poor mother?!

**First**,... I don't think this is the reason, but Jesus was trying to get away from it all. This woman, along with others who had gotten wind of the presence of Jesus, would not let him be alone. The disciples tried to get between her and Jesus, but she just wouldn't shut up! Initially that had to be disappointing, even aggravating! Compassion fatigue is a real thing! If everyone is clamoring for your compassion and help, it can become a blur, and compassion can become a problem. This does not apply to God, of course! If it did, we would be better off not asking for anything in our prayers. He hears an endless litany of begging for help from millions around the world, 24 hours a day, almost since the beginning when the first humans rebelled in Eden! He handles it just fine. Jesus, in His humanness, had to have been tempted to be overwhelmed by the insistent, pleading voices of need that constantly surrounded Him at this point in His ministry! Yet, He did not shut them out!

**Secondly**, this young woman was not a Jew. The Gospel of Mark says that she was actually a Greek that had grown up in the region of Syrian Phoenicia, Phoenicia about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Devout Jewish men would not even speak to non-Jewish women, so the initial silence of Jesus was probably what this woman expected. But she was not put out, and she was not to be denied. She kept after Him, and finally He answered her. In so doing He elevated her and lowered Himself,.. and He knew it, and **STILL** broke His silence! We'll talk about what He actually said in a minute.



**Third**, I think this rough treatment was nothing but a test. Jesus was testing this woman to see what she was made of! Her persistence proved that she was, A), a devoted mother who was willing to do anything - endure any humiliation to get help for her daughter! B) – she believed that Jesus was her only hope to help her daughter and that He absolutely could set her daughter free if He so chose! BTW - what she believed about Jesus was absolutely TRUE! What she exhibited was FAITH! True faith required that we place our faith in something that is true! It is not meritorious to place our faith in something that we are not sure about or have not personally verified to the fullest extent, or worse, that we know is unlikely to be true! Some people actually think faith with evidence to the contrary is virtuous! It is not! It is only ridiculous! I think it is even ridiculous to believe in the Bible unless you have the work ethic to read it, to check it out! You shouldn't be depending on another human being to do that for you, no matter if he has a Reverend in front of his name. You should encounter it personally. Only THEN can you really know!



This woman had heard what Jesus could do from people that had no motivation to deceive! She made the effort to hunt Him down and lay eyes on Him. When she saw and heard Jesus, she knew,.. and she believed!

Every key human emotional attribute has a foundational aspect to it, some underlying motivation, perspective, emotion, mindset, or world view, etc... that effects the quality and quantity of that attribute. The underlying motivation for **love**, (for instance), is the human need to connect on a deep emotional level with others. The underlying motivation for **courage** is to overcome fear – to have a great desire to be a brave person and to have honor. This enables more courageous acts and to be heroic. The underlying motivation for **peacefulness** might be freedom from constant worry and the need to control. There is joy, wisdom, perseverance, etc., all which have something underlying that makes these valuable attributes possible for a person to obtain.



But we are actually talking about one human attribute here - that of **faith**. The foundational aspect of **true faith** is *humility*! True faith is not possible without a foundation of humility in a person. Of course, faith is gaining understanding. We need to have understanding or we will not know what we are believing in. But there has to be an emotional response – and adjustment of our attitudes, our perspectives, our values, even our sense of self!

In true faith, humility is needful because we are dealing with the Creator/God! He is great (beyond great) – He is perfect – He is pure and just - He is powerful beyond comprehension – He is unfathomably intelligent and wise! **[1 Pet. 5:6]**

We are none of those things! A heartfelt, even enthusiastic acknowledgement that we are not dealing with one of our equals is vitally important!

\*Down through the ages, people have known how to approach a great sovereign power – a human one – like a king, queen, emperor or empress. Everyone knew that one had to approach them humbly, perhaps even crawling on your knees! You certainly would have to kneel in the King's presence, until he gives permission to stand or sit. Some sovereigns in history have insisted on no eye contact, no speaking unless commanded to, no turning your back on them. Break any of the rules (and more), and it was into the *dungeons* with you, or even a mandatory and immediate *death sentence*! The rule was that you had better learn to humble yourself before your betters – *especially* the sovereign ruler of the land.



The problem is that no one seems to get that concept these days. All are created equal, right?! That may be true, but we are certainly *not equal* with our Creator!





When we come to faith in Jesus, it is critical that we humble ourselves before Him. You cannot follow Him without humility. He insists upon it! He will test you for it! This woman wormed her way through the disciples, fell to her knees before Jesus and



pleaded with Him – “*Help me! Lord, please help me!*”. And Jesus tries one more time to bring out some kind of a resistance, some streak of defiance! But she has none! She is done with that! She has emptied herself of all of that! She has become... true faith! **[James 4:10]**

Listen - when we humble ourselves before God we have to go all the way. I’ve seen people attempt to hang on to some of their pride and dignity when they come to Jesus. That doesn’t work! When push comes to shove, and it gets hard - they will toss faith, snatch back their life, rebel against what they know Jesus would tell them, and instead go do as they please!

True faith, on the other hand, is a matter of laying it all down, letting go, and trusting Jesus to do as He said He would! And then continuing to lay it all down – laying aside our own opinions, our own desires, our own inclinations, our old practices, and daily taking up our cross, denying ourselves, and following Him – trusting Him to lead us in all things pertaining to life and godliness, and that is true ESPECIALLY when things are at their hardest! Either He is in charge, or He isn’t. True faith decides that He is,.. when it is hardest to trust!

This woman hears Jesus say that Her race disqualifies her from His help. She ignores that and presses on. Today she would have started swearing at Him and accusing Jesus of being a racist! But this Greek woman only persists! Then Jesus says the worst thing of all, about not giving the food that belongs to the children (of Israel) to the dogs – goyim, or gentile dogs of the world! She answers that even the dogs get breadcrumbs that spill from the table! What a spectacular answer! \*This truly resonated with my grandkids - who have household dogs! They keep the floor clean. Did you know that dogs also like potato chips that fall from the table, and dogs like dropped peanut butter, and, surprisingly, dogs like watermelon! Yup! They do!



Well, all this humble woman asked for was a crumb from Jesus! And He melted! *“You have great faith! Your daughter is healed”*