



**“Mother’s Day: A Mother’s Great Faith”
Matthew 15:21-28**

Sometimes Jesus deliberately responds to our pain with silence in order to test our faith.

The events of today’s lesson took place outside the borders of Israel. Like an American traveling out of country to Canada or Mexico for rest and relaxation, Jesus leaves the stress of the crowds in Israel to rest at the home of an unnamed disciple in the region of Tyre & Sidon (modern day Lebanon). Mark 3:8 tells us that people from that region knew who he was from his ministry activities; Jesus was not incognito for very long until he was approached by a loving mother, aching because her daughter suffered from demon possession.

Look at v. 23. We’re not accustomed to reading about the silence of Christ in this way, are we? In Kenneth Bailey’s fascinating study, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, he wrote:

Is this indifference and rejection? It is important to note that Jesus is dealing with the woman *and* at the same time educating the disciples. As to the woman, he gives her a critical test. Tough exams are not a negative putdown. As to the disciples, Jesus is preparing them for ministry beyond Israel’s borders.

When this happens, Jesus waits to see if we will worship Him for who He is and what He has done, regardless of what He might do for us.

There are questions behind these vv. which follow Job 1:9, “*Does Job fear God for nothing?*” Am I only willing to serve God when it benefits me? Or am I willing to serve God for who He is? Do I have to figure out all that’s in God’s mind in order for me to worship Him? Is the Jesus I worship the Jesus of the Bible or merely a “vending machine Jesus?” Jesus brings her to the brink to see if her trust is authentic. If God took away every visible reason to trust Him, would we still trust Him?

It's interesting that up to the point of actually healing her, Jesus responded to this desperate mother *exactly the way the disciples had expected*. For instance, in that culture, self-respecting rabbis simply did not engage in conversation with members of the opposite sex in such public settings. Secondly, in v. 24 Jesus was simply verbalizing what the disciples were thinking regarding the pre-eminence of their own country. We see this even after Christ's Resurrection in Acts 1:6, "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*" (In truth, Genesis 12 makes it clear that the purpose of Abraham's call was that through him all nations would be blessed!) And thirdly, when Jesus called her a dog¹—actually, a little dog, that is, a puppy—he was "verbalizing their theology." In other words, Jesus was letting his disciples hear what their own thoughts sounded like so that they would understand how ridiculous they really were!

Jesus Christ rewards unrelenting faith! He answers us with His healing power in such a way as to reveal that He is Lord—not merely of Israel—but of the nations.

The disciples are absolutely amazed as Jesus expresses his admiration for this non-Hebrew mother's faith. Granting her request, He treats her as if she were from Israel as well. And of course, the point is that it's not one's DNA that makes one a part of the true Israel; it is faith (Romans 9:8). Here is a great summary of this wonderful woman of faith:

This is a Gentile who gets her daughter healed; this is a woman who disdains status more than men do; this is an insightful petitioner who understands better than the disciples do; this is an "impure" person who has greater access to God than the so-called "pure" leaders of Israel; this is a woman whose story leads hearers to overcome a hostility which would set limits to the children of God. In this episode, Matthew attacks the very heart of human resistance to the universality of the gospel and in so doing calls his hearers to sow the seeds of the kingdom everywhere.

All of this is made possible because of "the hour" which will befall Christ. He will hang on a Roman Cross, suspended between heaven and earth. He will cry out to His Heavenly Father, "Help me!" And His Father will be silent. He will die a slave's death at a place where dogs scavenge the corpses of criminals. He will be despised and rejected so that we—of every nation and race—will be welcomed, loved, and commissioned as His kingdom of priests.

"In the Kingdom of God, the most desirable society in the cosmos turns out to be the humblest. None are left out except those who refuse to enter."

—John Ortberg

¹ "Dogs in the Middle Eastern traditional culture, Jewish and non-Jewish, are almost as despised as pigs. Pigs are worse, but only slightly so. Dogs are never pets. They are kept as half-wild guard dogs or left to wander unattended as dangerous street scavengers who feed on garbage" (Bailey 2008, 224).