

JJ¹

Your child is sick and isn't getting better. Finally you find a doctor who has the skill and access to medicines that would cure your child. What if that doctor straight up ignored you? What if that doctor's nurses and interns tried to keep you away? What if that doctor finally did say something, but said your child wasn't a candidate for treatment, not because it wouldn't help your child, but simply because of your ethnicity? You'd probably lose it! And who could blame you?

First impressions might tell us that's exactly what we find in Matthew's Gospel today. A woman's daughter is sick, terribly sick. But not in her body. Far worse, she's sick in her soul from demon possession. In fact, spiritually, her daughter is dead!

Matthew writes: Jesus...withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. There a Canaanite woman from that territory came and kept crying out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!"

The situation is amazing when you think about it. Jesus has left Israel, and gone north into pagan Gentile land. And this woman who approaches him is a Canaanite. They were the pagan people living in the Promised Land whom God had the Israelites destroy for two reasons:

1) to give that land as promised to Israel; and 2) because the wickedness of the Canaanites was so great, God could not tolerate it any longer! She belongs to the people who were sworn enemies of the Israelites. Yet this woman runs out to Jesus crying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!"

This woman cries out to Jesus, knowing and believing that he is the promised Messiah! She cries out to Jesus, knowing and believing he is the only one who can save her daughter from the demon tormenting her soul!

She keeps on crying out to Jesus. Why? In part because her need is desperate, but also because Jesus ignores her! He doesn't say one word!

Finally, the disciples had had enough of this. Frustrated with this woman's persistence, and maybe a little embarrassed that Jesus has ignored her so much, they plead, "Send her away, because she keeps crying out after us." Jesus' response? "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Basically, Jesus tells the disciples he hasn't granted her request because she's the wrong ethnicity. She certainly hears what Jesus says, but doesn't give up. Matthew's Greek emphasizes that she falls on her knees in worship and pleads, "Lord, help me!"

He answered her, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Is this where you'd give up? Is this where you would storm away, angry and insulted? A dog?!!! Granted, the word Jesus uses isn't the dangerous street-dog, but a household dog, but still...he calls her a dog! Why? Because she isn't a Jew. As far as I know, none of you are Jews either. We're all a bunch of dogs according to Jesus.

Now understand that Jesus wasn't insulting her. Although most wouldn't recognize the test and storm away in a fury, Jesus is testing her. He's also testing his disciples. Jesus is using an analogy to remind her of a particular truth. The nation of Israel was God's chosen nation. The nation God set apart beginning with Abraham to bring the Savior into the world.

Everyone else in the world is a Gentile. Jesus' mission was first to the Jews. Why? Not because they were better than anybody else, but simply because by grace, God chose them to be his instrument. According to God's eternal plan and will, this was the way things are.

This woman obviously knows her Scripture. She knows this truth about

Jews and Gentiles, but she also obviously knows and believes words like what we find in our first lesson today from Isaiah: "...foreigners, who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him and to love the name of the LORD and to become his servants...[these] I will bring...to my holy mountain, and I will make them glad in my house of prayer" (Is. 56:6-7). She knows that The Church, God's family, is **A CHURCH FOR DOGS.**



"Yes, Lord, yet the dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She knew that spiritually, she was a rabid dog who deserved to be ignored and put down because of her sin. She also knew that even a little crumb of gospel, a little crumb of God's love and mercy would be enough. Why? Because she knew who Jesus really was and what he came to do.

Our Lord came, teaching and preaching. He came with love so we would share in that love and faithfully follow him. But look at what happened! The world turned on him. Like a pack of wolves, Jesus' enemies stalked him, waiting for the moment to pounce. And pounce they did! They were vicious and merciless. Blood thirsty teeth gnawed at him with false accusations. They dug their sharp claws into him by nailing him to a cross!

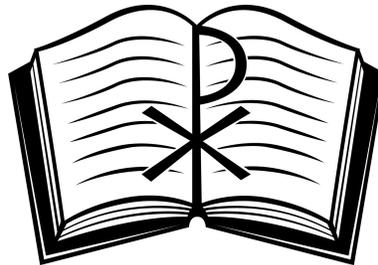
Our Master and King was treated like a mangy wild dog. And it wasn't just the Jews who did this. You and I as 21st century Gentile dogs were right there too! Every sin pressed into his soul until there was nothing left of it that his heavenly Father could love! And so, even He abandoned Jesus!

But Jesus did all this not just that you would get scraps at his table, which would be more than enough. He did all this so that you and I, dogs that we are, could sit at his table, be numbered as his children, and eat the whole meal!!! This is what this Canaanite woman believed. And Jesus responds, "Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire." And her daughter was healed at that very hour.

Only two times in all the New Testament does Jesus say someone has great faith. Both of them were Gentiles! But what made this woman's faith great? Was it her cleverness in catching on to Jesus' analogy? Was it because she debated her way into Jesus' favor? NO! Not at all! Then her faith would have been in herself. Jesus said her faith was great because it was a simple and strong trust that God's plan was what was best for her and her child. She trusted that God's ways were not her ways and she was satisfied with that. Her faith was great because of who it clung to—Jesus. She let it all rest on Jesus even

when it appeared Jesus had no interest of helping her or her daughter. She knew that Jesus not only could help, but wanted to help. Why? Because she knew and believed that Jesus had come into this world to help her with her greatest need—her need for a Savior—her daughter's need for a Savior.

This exercise of faith-growing was complete for her. She reached the end of the test and passed with flying colors. But did you notice that we don't hear about the disciples? They're involved in the test too, but we don't hear whether or not they pass their test.



Jesus gave one test, but tweaked it to meet the specific needs of the test takers. The woman's test: to recognize her place in God's plan as a Gentile but to also trust that Jesus was her Savior and she

could trust him and turn to him with relentless, humble prayer. The disciples' test: to recognize their place in God's plan as Jews, but also see that God's Church is **A CHURCH FOR DOGS**. He needed them to see that God's family of faith is for all.

How have you done with the test today? Have you seen that you're a Gentile dog? Have you seen that because of your sin, you're like a mangy dog who should be put down? Have you seen that mangy mutt prowling in your heart as you've been doubting God's promises and his

ability to hear and help? Have you seen that rabid dog rear his ugly head as you've considered other people as less worthy of God's love than you and therefore not worth your time and effort? Pleading with God, "Send them away!" like the disciples, instead of, "Lord, give me your patience and love and more opportunities to reach the straying and the lost!"

So often we fail both sides of the test. And Jesus knows. He knows because it was those sins which nailed him to the cross. But therein lies the beauty that is the perfect justice and perfect love of our Savior, the Lord, the Son of David. Jesus knew exactly what he was getting himself into when he came into this world, and still he came. He came not just that you would get scraps at his table, which would be more than enough. He gave himself for us so that you and I, dogs that we are, could sit at his table, be numbered as his children, and eat the whole meal!!! He feeds you with his Word. He feeds you with this Holy Supper. He feeds you so that your faith and confidence in him grows and grows. He feeds you to give you the strength and love you need to help bring other dogs to church.

Friends, rejoice that God's Church is **A CHURCH FOR DOGS!** Rejoice that even if God gives you crumbs, it's more than enough to forgive your sins, heal your pain, feed your soul and give you life eternal where the feast will never end! Amen.

SDG²

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

Artwork by Ian M. Welch—Copyright 2013 Ian M. Welch. All Rights Reserved. paramentics.com

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is taken from: The Holy Bible, Evangelical Heritage Version™ (EHV™) copyright © 2016 The Wartburg Project. All rights reserved. www.wartburgproject.org