

Matthew 15:21-28 - What if it seems the Lord is not listening or answering?

²¹ Jesus left that place and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² 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!"

²³ But he did not answer her a word.

His disciples came and pleaded, "Send her away, because she keeps crying out after us."

²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

²⁵ But she came and knelt in front of him, saying, "Lord, help me."

²⁶ He answered her, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to their little dogs."

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she said, "yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire." And her daughter was healed at that very hour.

Insensitive. Indifferent. Insulting.

We should understand how individuals might perceive Jesus' actions and words in this account.

Anti-woman. Discriminatory. Exclusionary.

An honest, in-depth look peels away such judgments. And some perceptions like these may simply be because we are onlookers almost 20 centuries removed from the scene. So let's take a look to the central people in the scene.

Do you want to understand what's really going on in this exchange? The Canaanite woman's reaction to Jesus is probably the best place to start.

And what she *doesn't do* might be as beneficial for us to note, as what she does do.

You see, the Canaanite woman *doesn't* think the worst of the Lord when His reply is silence at first. She doesn't accuse Him of not listening.

Instead, she clings in faith to what she knows & trusts about Jesus. She had come to know Jesus as the *Son of David*. She calls out that name. She calls Jesus *Lord*. Understand the significance of these names. This expressed that Jesus was the fulfillment and the fulfiller of the Old Testament promises. The Savior had come, full of mercy. Here He is. One who owed her nothing. But of whom she asked help, because she trusted in His love.

You and I might feel the need for an explanation at this point. "Why the silence, Lord?" It may be even out of a sense of wanting to defend Jesus - to have an explanation ready for anyone who would challenge Jesus' behavior this day.

But He obviously has a point to his silence. He could have just said "no." But He didn't.

The Canaanite woman, in reply, doesn't cry out for an explanation for his silence. She – in faith – holds onto what she knows about the Lord. And she keeps calling out to Him.

Are you making a connection yet to your life? As you dig into this exchange between our Lord & the Canaanite woman, are you seeing anything that relates to your own faith life, prayer life?

Maybe your initial reaction to Jesus' silence in this account was a wince because it hit a tender spot for you personally. Sometimes it might feel like the Lord's doing nothing in reply to our requests. Maybe you've had times that you felt some resentment: "Don't you see the urgency, Lord?" Maybe you've felt neglected on some level or abandoned: "Lord, where are you? Are you even listening?"

We're tempted to think the worst of the Lord. The devil fights to get us to do that. Our sinful flesh tugs at us to do that. Have you had it happen? A failure to trust the Lord because it seemed He wasn't listening. When we admit to such times of weakness / failure of faith, the answer for us comes in the Lord's Word to us.

Listen – in faith – to what He has put down here in writing in the Bible: certain, unchanging. He replies to your plea of "Lord, Have Mercy on me a sinner" with the Word of Truth: "I tell you: your guilt is taken away. You are forgiven. Go home in peace. You are my child through faith, you are washed of sin, robed in my righteous life." And so God, first, renews in you – through this – the humble confidence that you rest in the hands of a gracious Lord.

As we return then to the scene this day in Matthew ch.15, take in again the Canaanite woman's reaction – this time to what Jesus says in vs.24.

The Canaanite woman *doesn't* react to the situation based on mere human feelings or human reason. Those, after all, are so often misleading.

We hear her CALLING again. She didn't hear a "no" to her request after all. And she is TRUSTING still in what she knows: the Lord, my Lord, is merciful.

Then she LISTENS again when the Lord speaks. One thing that flows all the way through out her responses is: She *doesn't* raise any objection to the Lord's Word.

Read vs.24-27 again.

She picked up on the depth of what Jesus said to her. First, she accepts God's divine plan as told in His Word. It's good for us to understand what Jesus was expressing with "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

That means that in God's divine plan, Jesus' three years of public ministry would be spent among the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - reaching out to the house of Israel. That doesn't mean other people were being kicked to the curb by the Son of God. It doesn't take away from the fact that: Jesus came to take away the sins of the people of all nations. God still wanted everyone of every race to come to a knowledge of His saving truth. This was simply part of God's chosen plan – part of the plan to get the Word out was: those in Israel sat at Jesus' feet and heard him tell how he came to save. They heard him yell his work's completion – "Paid in full!" – at its Finish. And those who believed, our Resurrected Lord told to take the good news to all the world. The message of Jesus as Savior is – and always has been – meant for all people.

And if the way God chose to do things still seems a bit hard to wrap your mind around, well then, we find ourselves again at the all-important topic: trust. Where human reason might tug at you to conclude "that doesn't seem fair" or "why didn't he do this instead" you must say: "Reason, you've gone beyond your limits!" When emotions might

lead one to feel slighted, we must stand our ground: “I will not follow where my emotions are leading me right now!”

We hear God speak. His Word is clear. “Yes, Lord.”

Think on a broader scale of all the examples where this applies. Sciences challenge what God’s Word says about how the world – and we – got here. Our culture attacks the God-given blueprint for marriage, how men and women have complementary-but-different roles in a marriage (also in the life of a church family). The importance of holding to all God’s teachings, and what that means in answering where and with whom you join for acts of worship, and the times and places you won’t. The Lord speaks on all of these in His Word. “Yes, Lord!” God grant us hearts that reply: “Yes, Lord!”

The Canaanite woman says to Jesus: “Yes, Lord!” There is no objection raised to the truth Jesus shared. She says, “Yes, Lord, and also (or, for also)…”

Not only does she accept what the Lord told her, she bases her request to Jesus on His very words to her. There is a subtle nuance that comes out when one knows the culture of Jesus’ day and the language/the usage of different terms. And so what might sound like an insulting word to our ears is in fact a word that rings with invitation in the woman’s ears. Jesus said:

“It isn’t right to take the children’s food and throw it to the little dogs.”

Many times the Jews would refer to the gentiles in a derogatory way by calling them wild dogs, ownerless, unclean dogs that you’d find on the streets. Jesus used a different term, the term translated “little dogs,” the kind that would live within the house and sit and play with the children, becoming part of the family.

And the woman replies to this: *“Yes, Lord, you’re right, [and also] those little dogs eat the scraps of food which fall to the floor from their master’s table.”*

Do you hear it? The Canaanite woman reply expresses: “Lord, I accept your Divine plan. I do not ask you to take anything away from your ministry among the Jewish people (I know you will thereby bless people of all nations through them). And I am more than satisfied to receive the crumbs that happen to fall my way. For I trust even the crumbs of your mercy will be enough for me – for my daughter.”

This morning we learn about faith. And in the process we gain direction about prayer and the importance of listening attentively to the Lord’s Word. Jesus calls the Canaanite woman’s faith “great.” It:

- _28Calls humbly & confidently to the Lord.
- Trusts Him.
- Exhibits patience while waiting.
- Continues to listen to Him.
- Accepts what He says.
- Goes on requesting and praying to Him (on the basis of his Word).



Lord, grant us such faith as this. Amen.