

Example of Great Faith: the Canaanite Woman

Matthew's gospel account, written with a Jewish audience in mind, makes the point of mentioning the ethnicity of the woman. Despised as a historical enemy, Canaanite can be seen as a racist term; but, juxtaposed with the house of Israel, this periscope is making a statement about faith – great faith.

Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

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

And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. (Matt 15:21-28, NKJV)

1. What do you observe of the Gentile woman addressing Jesus with the title "Lord, Son of David?" A concordance search, using "Son of David," found two relevant and contrasting passages: the Pharisees and Jesus' mother Mary. What evidence do you observe that indicates the Canaanite woman's religious view?

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"

They said to Him, "The Son of David."

He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying:

'The LORD said to my Lord,

"Sit at My right hand,

Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"?"

If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore. (Matt 22:41-45, NKJV)

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. (Luke 1:31-32, NKJV)

2. What do you observe of Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman: "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and "it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs?" What does Jesus' figure of speech represent?

3. What is the Canaanite woman saying when she states, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Why does Jesus laud her faith?

The Teacher Note for this lesson is at:

<http://Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/25Curriculum/Class9-12/print/Salvation.Faith.GreatFaithCanaaniteWoman.9-12.pdf>

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Teacher Notes

The lesson “Who does God draw?” is a prerequisite for this class in order that the student understand Jesus’ statement of, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

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Ask the student: what is the Canaanite woman asking for?

Inform the student that everyone knew that exorcism was only possible through God.

Ask the student: what do you observe of the title that the Canaanite woman addresses Jesus by? Can you explain the title? Start the discussion with “Son of David.” If necessary, encourage the class to consult a Bible dictionary – for example: search online for “studylight holman” and use StudyLight.org’s Holman Dictionary.

Lord is a title for anyone with authority and power. The Canaanite woman was aware of Jesus’ ability to exorcise; thus, her use of the title “Lord,” associated with “Son of David” was in the context of God the Messiah.

Son of David indicates the direct successor to king David. The Canaanite woman was aware of that the Davidic Covenant promised that the King with the everlasting kingdom will come from the House of David.

In conclusion, the Gentile woman was an Old Testament Believer.

Ask the student: compare the Gentile woman's identification of Jesus with the Pharisees mentioned in Matthew 22:41-45. Do you see the difference and how this determines whether one has faith or not?

2. What do you observe of Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman: "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and "it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs?" What does Jesus' figure of speech represent?

Ask the student: who are the "little dogs?"

Jews called Gentiles dogs as a derogatory term of their ethnic and pagan status.

Food for thought: did Jesus respond intentionally in this manner to expose the disciples' prejudice of Gentiles fully aware of the Canaanite woman's genuine faith in Him?

Ask the student: what is the "children's bread?"

Remind the student that the best practice in Bible study is to let the Bible interpret itself. Here is where a concordance is helpful. When you search for "bread," you'll discover:

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (John 6:35, NKJV)

Jesus is referring to Himself when He speaks of bread. While on earth, Jesus came first for the Jews. It is after His resurrection that He "draws all men."

3. What is the Canaanite woman saying when she states, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Why does Jesus laud her faith?

Ask the student: why does the Canaanite woman call herself a dog? What evidence is there that indicates the Canaanite woman's trust in Jesus? Encourage discussion.

The Canaanite woman acknowledges the contemptuous term "dog" that would be said of her race and perhaps of her social position; however, more importantly, she saw Jesus as the "Master."

The Canaanite woman is unwavering in her recognition that Jesus the Messiah is the source of life and does not doubt that He could heal.

The Canaanite woman's faith: an Old Testament Believer who a) recognized that Jesus was God the Messiah, and b) placed a trust in His words that could heal.