

Matthew 15:21-39 | “Bread at the Master’s Table”
Preached on November 5, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to Matthew 15, verse 21 today. *[pause]*

Do you remember in school sometimes you would be taking a quiz or a test, and the question you had told you to compare and contrast something?

So you would have to write out the differences between two things. *[pause]*

Sometimes it would be tough!

You would sit there and rack your brain trying to come up with what you saw as the differences between two topics. *[pause]*

Well as you look at our story this morning, the contrast between it and what we just learned in the first half of Matthew 15 couldn’t be more clear. *[pause]*

Remember last week?

The scribes and Pharisees were the religious elites of the day, yet they were all a show.

They were ‘hypocrites’, who focused on the disciples not washing their hands, all the while, they broke God’s commandments. *[pause]*

They were offended by Jesus, and refused to believe in Him. *[pause]*

So the very ones who should have recognized and submitted to Christ were the ones furthest away from Him in rebellion.

Yet in our story this morning, we will find a woman, who by all accounts should have been the farthest from Jesus, yet she draws near to Him in “great faith”. *[pause]*

So while the scribes and Pharisees are condemning and heartless, we come to find a humble, genuine, faith-filled Canaanite in the pages in front of us.

And it’s interesting how Jesus has already called out the disciples “little faith” and lack of grasping truth, yet here Jesus commends a Canaanite woman’s “great faith” and recognition of the truth.

Let’s READ the story, starting in verse 21. *[READ 21-28]*

Jesus travels into a Gentile-populated area in the district of Tyre and Sidon, and this Canaanite woman sees him. *[pause]*

Now when Jews would read that word ‘Canaanite’, lots of stuff would instantly come to their mind.

Think back to the Old Testament, and how the Canaanites were essentially seen as the enemies of God.

They were the people who lived in Israel's promised land, and who the Lord told Israel to drive out of the land.

They were pagans, who were antithetical to Israel's religion and Israel's God. [pause]

So now think once again about this story.

Here is this woman, who many would see as an outsider, an enemy, and distant from God.

Yet she has more insight and faith than the religious leaders and disciples! *[pause]*

Notice how she calls Jesus, "Lord," and "Son of David."

She knew his identity more than those who should have known it.

And she knew that Jesus had the power to heal, while the religious leaders criticized Jesus' healing ability.¹ [pause]

And to think that Jesus calls this Canaanite woman's faith "great"! *[pauseeee]*

It is very rare that Jesus highlights someone's great faith.

He certainly recognized when people had faith, and emphasized little faith or a lack of faith, but there's only two times where he highlighted great faith.

This story, and the centurion's faith back in chapter 8 - both of which were Gentiles! [pauseeee]

So right off the bat, we are introduced to this Canaanite woman, and she pleads for Jesus to help her daughter who is tormented by a demon.

But Jesus doesn't answer right away. [pause]

His disciples finally get annoyed with her crying out after them, and ask Jesus to do something to make her go away.

But interestingly, Jesus says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." [pause]

Now what's with that?

Well if you think about it, Jesus' mission was actually primarily focused on the Jews first, and it didn't expand until the Great Commission after He rose from the dead. [pause]

¹ See Matthew 16:1-4 & Matthew 12:9-14 for examples.

As one commentator put it, “He had come to offer to His own people the kingdom promised through David centuries before. Thus it was inappropriate for Him to bring blessings on Gentiles before blessings fell on Israel.”² *[pause]*

Just listen to a passage from Romans 15...

“For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”³ *[pause]*

So Jesus ministered to Israel, but then His work would extend to all peoples.

So at this point, the Gentiles weren’t the focus, and that’s what He’s bringing out. *[pause]*

But the shocking response of Jesus doesn’t end there, for Jesus even goes on to say, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” *[pause]*

To our modern ears, that sounds so rude, and it seems as though Jesus isn’t being like the typical Jesus that we think.

For He is, first, not seemingly willing to help someone.

But secondly, He even calls her a dog, unworthy to receive bread, like the children of Israel. *[pause]*

So what’s going on here?

I believe that Jesus is testing her faith throughout this whole episode.

Would she simply walk away quietly when an obstacle was put up in her way, or would she persevere in faith?

But this story is also meant to teach His disciples (and us) something about faith. *[pause]*

Think about it.

Jesus is always teaching his disciples, and this story is no different.

It is only because of the obstacles that Jesus put in her way that we see the greatness of her faith all the more.

So Jesus is using this to teach his disciples (and us) something about faith.

For the whole story changes once He makes the pronouncement, “O woman, great is your faith!” *[pauseeee]*

² Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 56.

³ Romans 15:8-9.

Our world has a certain idea of what greatness is.

We think that the greatest are the ones with the greatest strength, the most knowledge, or the most wins in the win column.

We think that the greatest is the person who can convincingly defeat all of their challengers to be the “king of the hill”. *[pause]*

This idea of greatness is reiterated to us by the voices in our culture, who say that greatness produces results.

They say that someone who is great is the one who is out there working, working, working.

They are the ones who have a champion’s mindset. *[pause]*

So often we have debates about who the best sports player is, or actor, or this or that.

And when we see someone who is victorious we think, “Now that person is great.” *[pause]*

But is that true greatness according to Christ?

We often think of those with great faith as the most assured, confident ones who have it all together, but let’s consider this woman’s faith.

For if Jesus tells us it is “great faith”, then there is something crucial to be learned about faith here. *[pause]*

First, this woman’s faith shows us that....

I. We are to plead at the Master’s table. (21-28)

I get that idea from what the woman says in verse 27, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

This woman’s faith was like a dog pleading for crumbs at its master’s table. *[pause]*

Think about it.

When Jesus tells her that it’s not right to throw bread to the dogs, she doesn’t act offended and say, “Hey! I’m not a dog! I deserve the bread!”

Rather, she in a way admits that she’s a dog, and so uses that image to plead for mere crumbs.

This is because *great faith is characterized by great humility. [pauseeee]*

Faith recognizes its unworthiness; it doesn’t demand its presumed rights.

She admitted that she was unworthy of bread, but only pleaded for mere crumbs. *[pause]*

This is so important for each of us to grasp - we are not worthy to receive anything from the Lord.

We don't receive forgiveness or salvation or life because we are so spectacular and deserving.

God didn't say, "I'll send my Son because you guys are just so awesome down there!"

No, He sent His Son to save the condemned and to rescue the perishing. [pauseeeee]

The self-confident do not have great faith, but little to no faith.

No, it's actually the ones who *know* they aren't great who have great faith! [pauseeee]

You see, great faith is paradoxical.

Usually when we think of greatness, we think of inherent greatness of ability, value, and self-confidence, but great faith actually admits that it is nothing.

Yet that's what makes it great because it humbly rests in the greatness of Christ alone! [pauseeee]

Jesus continually makes it clear that the greatest are actually the humblest.

They are the ones who will be exalted by the Lord, for they are the ones who are humble enough to serve others.⁴ [pauseeee]

This Canaanite woman didn't come to Jesus thinking she was big stuff.

This woman wasn't so proud that she couldn't be called a dog, but came with a humility that admitted her unworthiness. [pauseeeee]

So you want to grow in faith? Grow in humility.

You can't go to the Lord, thinking, "I've got all I need in myself."

How could faith survive with that amount of self-sufficiency?

No, intrinsic to faith in Christ is a trust in Him, not you. [pauseeeee]

Do you approach God with humility?

Or do you go to Him thinking, "Come on, I deserve this! Look at what I've done!" [pause]

Let's always remember that we are unworthy and undeserving, yet God showers mercy upon such people. [pauseeeee]

Similar to this, we see that *great faith is characterized by feeling great need.* [pause]

⁴ See Matthew 23:11-12.

This woman knew she was needy and felt her need. *[pause]*

Did you notice her desperation?

She cried out and continued crying out to Jesus, “Have mercy on me, O Lord”!

She was so desperate that the disciples got irritated with her calls for help. *[pause]*

She wasn't afraid to look bad in front of others, for she understood her plight.

She didn't care if she was labeled as “that distressed woman crying after us”.

She didn't care if she was seen as “that needy Canaanite lady”, for she knew she was. *[pause]*

This is because great faith is seen in our utter dependence on Christ.

In faith, we should be able to say, “Have mercy on me, O Lord!”

In faith, we shouldn't be afraid to be seen as a needy person. *[pause]*

We should recognize that without Christ, we are nothing and have nothing.

We should be so humble, and recognize our need so greatly that we would be content with crumbs from the table of our Master...

...For we know that our need is that great, and that there is mercy even in His crumbs. *[pauseeee]*

Do you recognize your need for the Lord?

Do you realize that all that you have is from God, and so you must rely upon Him for even your ‘daily bread’?⁵ *[pause]*

As individuals and as a church, we should humbly recognize our need, always.

May we never become self-sufficient, independent people, who feel like we have the resources in ourselves or the capability within us.

But may we be people on our knees, who are willing to plead for even the crumbs off of His table. *[pause]*

May we say like the hymn says, “I need Thee ev'ry hour, in joy or pain; come quickly and abide, or life is vain.”⁶ *[pauseeeee]*

Something else that we see about great faith here is that *great faith is characterized by great persistence.* *[pause]*

⁵ A reference to Matthew 6:11.

⁶ “I Need Thee Every Hour” by Annie S. Hawks (1872).

This woman was persistent, wasn't she?

She kept crying out to the Lord, even though He didn't respond at first.

As the text says, "He did not answer her a word." *[pause]*

With every cry, there was only silence in return. *[pause]*

Have you ever felt that when you have prayed to the Lord?

You pleaded, pleaded, and pleaded, but all you heard was silence. *[pause]*

C.S. Lewis gave this memorable quote speaking about the feeling of hearing silence from God, as he says...

"When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be—or so it feels—welcomed with open arms.

But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence.

You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once."⁷ *[pause]*

That's sometimes what it feels like when we only hear silence, but the truth is that the door never was slammed in our face and locked.

Rather, the Lord is often teaching us something through the silence, and we learn that He's not distant or indifferent, but He's doing something that is ultimately for our good.

So we persistently push through the silence and pray and plead through the silence, knowing that He's there and He cares.

As Jesus says, "[we] ought always to pray and not lose heart."⁸ *[pauseeee]*

The Canaanite woman heard silence at first, but she kept at it in faith, and it paid off in the end.

This is because faith persists through apparent obstacles.

Jesus actually put up obstacle after obstacle in front of this woman in order that we would see her faith push through them all. *[pause]*

⁷ C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed.

⁸ Luke 18:1.

Silence was first, then it was sharing that his mission was only to Israel, and then it was the illustration of not taking away the bread from the children.

But with each one, she never gave up, but was insistent on needing help. *[pauseeee]*

Does your faith persist even amid silence?

Does it continue even when there are obstacles? *[pause]*

In faith, push through the obstacle that has ‘silence’ written on it.

No, keep knocking on the door in faith!

In faith, burst through the obstacle that says, “this seems impossible.”

Burst through it, not by saying, “I can do it,” but by saying, “God can do anything.” *[pause]*

Remember that silence and a closed door doesn’t always mean that it will be like that forever.

Sometimes God says, “Just wait, I’ve got a better time for this.”

Other times He says, “I’ve got something better altogether.”

We just keep going to Him, submitting our will to His. *[pauseeee]*

It’s interesting that after Jesus says that He was sent to the lost sheep of Israel, the woman kneels before Him and simply says, “Lord, help me.” *[pause]*

She didn’t use some 5-point argument to defend herself and get help, but simply presented her need to Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever gotten to the point in your desperate situation, where all you could say to God was, “Lord, help me”?

It’s the plight of the needy, who know that they cannot do anything to help themselves, who reach out to the Lord for aid, and simply say, “Lord, help me.” *[pause]*

Like this woman, we plead at the Master’s table, for even crumbs of mercy. *[pause]*

When you are up in the middle of the night in pain, simply cry out for crumbs of mercy, pleading, “Lord, help me!”

When you hear of the loss of your loved one, all you can do is plead, “Lord, help me!”

When you don’t know how you are going to make it through the day, go to Him for help. *[pauseeee]*

How can we do this, and how did this woman do this?

That is, what led her to persist? *[pause]*

It was certainly her desperate need, but that's only one part of it.

It was because of the object of her faith: Jesus.

She had a confident trust in who Jesus was, which led her to be persistent.

And so great faith is characterized by confident trust in Jesus. [pause]

When you know that the Lord is powerful to help, you can't help but persistently reach out to Him in neediness.

You can't help thinking about how He is your hope. *[pauseee]*

You see, this woman recognized how great Christ was.

She calls Him, "Lord" twice and also "Son of David" once.

This woman saw who Jesus was more clearly than most everyone we have encountered in the book of Matthew so far.

And she knew, oh did she know, that Jesus had the power to heal. [pause]

She goes to Him confident in His ability, not even having a hint of doubt in her speech.

Now that's faith! *[pause]*

Faith isn't just some wavering trust that comes out of thin air.

No faith is an assurance and conviction⁹ of who Christ truly is and what He can do. *[pause]*

Do you trust in who Christ is and what He can do?

He is the Lord, the Son of David, who has power to heal even the most oppressed soul.

So we plead at His table for even the mercy of His crumbs!

Now that's faith! *[pause]*

We humbly and persistently kneel before the Lord in our need, knowing that He can help.

And the amazing thing is that...

II. We receive satisfaction at the Master's table. (28-39)

The Master is a Giver.

⁹ An allusion to Hebrews 11:1.

He is not a begrudging Giver, or a Giver who gives only scant blessings to us.

Instead, He satisfies us when we go to Him in faith and plead for His help. *[pause]*

Notice how Jesus gives to this woman what she desires, as He heals her daughter.

He can tell that this woman has a great need and has great faith, so He gives her what she needs, and satisfies her desire. *[pause]*

What a wonderful Savior and Lord that we have!

In fact, He not only heals this woman's daughter, but he goes on to heal many others.

Look down at verses 29-31. *[READ]*

So many different kinds of people with differing kinds of afflictions are brought to Him.

And the result was the crowd stood amazed and marveling.

They couldn't help but give glory to God for what Christ was doing.

And this should be the normal, natural response of those who witness the work of Christ. *[pause]*

Do you stand amazed at Him and give God glory?

Just look at the healing He brought us through the Cross and the Grave.

Through His death and resurrection, we are forgiven, reconciled back to God, and given eternal life.

He has opened our eyes, and freed us from sin's dominion.

Now that's something to wonder over! *[pauseeee]*

This giving Christ doesn't stop there, for look at verses 32-39. *[READ]*

Here we see once again Jesus does a feeding miracle, this time being a crowd of 4,000 men, besides women and children. *[pause]*

Once again the disciples didn't know how they were going to feed this crowd, lacking the faith they needed.

But once again, Jesus amazingly feeds and satisfies this hungry crowd. *[pauseeee]*

Many people note how this was most likely a Gentile crowd, showing us that Jesus was giving bread to the Gentiles.

So the woman asked for mere crumbs, and here we see that Jesus gives over and above that to people. *[pause]*

They received bread from the Master's table, and what a generous Master He is and what an abundant table He has!

His meals always bring satisfaction with some leftovers to spare. *[pauseeee]*

He is a compassionate Master, for notice what he says in verse 32, "I have compassion on the crowd." *[pause]*

He doesn't see the needs of the people and become distant and cold.

No, He saw the hunger of this crowd, and didn't want to see them faint on the way.

He cared, and knew that He could provide. *[pause]*

This compassionate Christ has compassion *for you*.

He isn't unmoved by your needs, by your hard situations, and by your trials.

But He sees, knows, and cares.

And He provides the satisfaction that we need from His merciful, plentiful table. *[pauseeee]*

The Canaanite woman had a need, the afflicted that were brought to Him had needs, and this crowd had a need.

Jesus provided, and He shows us that He has what we need!

He has the compassion and power to supply us with all that we need. *[pauseeee]*

These stories teach us that...

Disciples plead at the Master's table, knowing that only He can satisfy and provide!

We go to Him in faith like the Canaanite woman.

Humbly and persistently, we kneel before the Lord in our need, knowing that He can help. *[pause]*

We strive to have great faith in our great Christ, remembering who He is and what He can do. *[pause]*

If you have never trusted in Jesus Christ, then go to Him in faith.

Recognize your need to be saved from your sins, for your sins deserve God's wrath.

But the great Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, died on the Cross for sins, so that all those who trust in Him may be forgiven and given eternal life.

And know that once you trust in Him, He will free you slavery to sin and save you to the uttermost.¹⁰ *[pauseee]*

For those of us who trust in Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, we don't just stop having faith.

No, we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us.¹¹ *[pause]*

We humbly go to Him with our needs, knowing that anything we receive is mercy.

We persistently go to Him in faith, knowing that He has the answers.

And we do all of this because we know in whom we have believed¹² -- the Lord, the Son of David, who can do all things.

And the amazing thing is that He listens, He cares, and He is compassionate.

For though we deserve only crumbs of His mercy, yet He spreads a table for us with a satisfying meal of blessing.

¹⁰ A reference to Hebrews 7:25.

¹¹ A reference to Galatians 2:20.

¹² A reference to 2 Timothy 1:12.