

## Why Did Jesus Insult This Woman?

Matthew 15:21–31

(black Bibles page 821; Children's Bibles page 1182)

The pain of being excluded... *but Jesus wouldn't exclude people, right?*

- Well, he chose only 12 disciples, turned back others, and sometimes only 3 disciples gained access to what he was doing (Matt 17:1)
- In today's passage, he ignores a woman calling out to him in desperation. When Jesus does talk to her, he makes it abundantly clear – *woman, you are not one of us.*

Let's read 15:21-28

About the woman: she's a Canaanite (15:22)

- The Canaanites! "For they did all these things" (Leviticus 20:23), including child sacrifice, many forms of sexual immorality, etc. Some of the worst Gentiles in the Old Testament.
- She's from Tyre and Sidon (15:21). You might think of Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31)
- *And yet...* She addresses Jesus as "Son of David!" – high respect for Israel and perhaps even a messianic title!

How does Jesus feel about the woman?

- *He calls her a dog!??* (15:26) Here *the children = Israel*, and *dogs = Gentiles*.
- Is Jesus a rude, prejudiced, narrow-minded nationalist? No. Consider two key observations in our passage:
  - *Eventually, Jesus gives her his biggest compliment: "Great is your faith!"* (15:28) Hardly a sign of deep-seated prejudice.
  - *Jesus refuses to send her away, as the disciples begged.* In fact, he begins the conversation with her. Hmm... is he testing her perhaps?

Was Jesus sent only to Israel? (15:24) Wasn't he sent for the world, too?

- This passage is a transition point: Jesus is moving from his ministry to Israel *first* and *alone*, to an ultimate ministry *to all nations*.
- To Israel alone: "These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles...but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel...'" (Matt 10:5-6)
- Ultimately, to the nations: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt 28:19)
- Paul would duplicate the same principle in his own ministry: "First for the Jew, then for the Gentile." (Rom 1:16; see also Acts 18:1-6)

What is "great faith"?

- Only two things amazed Jesus: great faith (Matt 8:10) and lack of faith (in his hometown, Mark 6:6)
- Faith = trust, belief. But we see it in technicolor in this passage, especially two qualities:
  - **Undeservedness**
    - "I am a mere creature." (Luke 17:7-10) "I am a sinner." (Luke 18:13)
    - In today's passage: "I am not an Israelite, a Jew. I am not part of God's chosen people."
  - **Tenacity**
    - She is persistent! (Luke 18:1-8)
    - 'Where else can we go?' (Peter in John 6:68)

She is excluded at first... But then included in Jesus *because of faith!*

The rest of our passage: 15:29-31. Notice *which* God these Gentiles praise!