

Takeaway Lesson - 8/16/26

Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28 — Great Faith: A Canaanite Woman Comes to Jesus

Scripture Focus

Jesus teaches that true uncleanness comes not from external things but from the sinful human heart. He then travels into Gentile territory, where a Canaanite woman approaches Him and persistently begs Him to heal her daughter. Although she is an outsider by every conventional measure, she recognizes Jesus as Lord and trusts completely in His mercy. Her encounter with Jesus challenges assumptions about who belongs, what genuine faith looks like, and how boldly we may approach Christ for mercy.

Read the verse(s) aloud

Memorable quotes/notes:

Historical / Linguistic Context

- In verses 10–20, Jesus challenges the religious understanding of "clean" and "unclean." He explains that what ultimately defiles a person is not what enters the mouth but what comes from the heart—evil thoughts, murder, adultery, theft, false testimony, and slander.
- Matthew deliberately identifies the woman as a **Canaanite**, an ancient designation loaded with historical significance. Canaanites were traditional enemies of Israel. She is therefore presented as an unmistakable outsider, making her faith even more striking.
- The woman calls Jesus **"Lord, Son of David."** "Son of David" was a distinctly Jewish messianic title. Ironically, this Gentile woman recognizes something about Jesus that many of Israel's religious leaders fail to recognize.
- Jesus' initial silence and His statement that He was sent "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" can sound harsh to modern readers. They reflect the biblical order of Jesus' earthly mission: the Messiah comes first to Israel, although God's saving purpose ultimately extends to all nations.
- The reference to "dogs" is uncomfortable and should not be ignored. The Greek word used here (*kynaria*) refers to small or household dogs rather than wild scavengers. The woman does not argue that she deserves a place at the table. Instead, she boldly takes Jesus' own image and appeals entirely to His abundant mercy: even the crumbs are enough.
- Jesus praises her with words rarely heard in the Gospels: **"Woman, great is your faith!"** Her faith is great not because she proves herself worthy, but because she refuses to stop trusting in the mercy and power of Jesus.
- This encounter anticipates the widening mission of the Gospel. Matthew's Gospel will conclude with Jesus commanding His disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

Discussion Questions

1. In verses 10–20, Jesus says that what defiles us comes from within the human heart. Why are we often more comfortable identifying external sins or judging other people's behavior than examining our own hearts?

2. The woman does not argue that she deserves Jesus' help; instead, she trusts that even the "crumbs" of His mercy are sufficient. How is this different from the way our culture often thinks about what we deserve from God?
3. Jesus' disciples initially want the woman sent away, yet Jesus ultimately praises her faith. Who are the people Christians or churches might unintentionally treat as "outsiders" today?
4. Read **Ephesians 2:13-19**. How does Paul's description of those who were once "far off" being brought near through Christ help us understand the larger significance of this encounter?
5. Jesus says, "Woman, great is your faith!" What specifically makes her faith "great," and what might her example teach us about the nature of genuine Christian faith?

CLOSING PRAYER

Merciful Lord Jesus, we come before You with nothing to claim except our need for Your grace. Search our hearts and forgive the sin that comes from within us. When You seem silent, give us faith to continue calling upon You. When we are tempted to decide who is worthy of Your mercy, remind us that we too live entirely by grace. Give us the persistent faith of the Canaanite woman, trusting that Your mercy is greater than our sin and Your grace is abundant enough for all who call upon You. Help us welcome others as You have welcomed us and proclaim Your saving love to all people. Amen.