

The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: Exorcising A Syro-Phoenecian (Part One)

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When Jesus exorcised a Syro-Phoenecian woman's daughter (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30), it was a time of peril for Him. Herod was suspicious, and the Pharisees no longer concealed their loathing of Him, having become openly hostile toward Him. Although many of the common people were enthusiastic over His marvelous works and profound teachings, many were also deeply offended by some of His words, which exposed them as sinners.

So Jesus saw a need to seek seclusion to rest and instruct His disciples in private. Mark records, however, "But He could not be hidden." The glory of Christ's teaching and miracles could not be concealed in this darkened world.

The disciples' appeal to get rid of the woman reveals their weariness of the crowd's incessant pleas for Jesus' intervention. Her persistent cries for her daughter's healing were just another aggravation and too much to deal with.

1. Why would a Gentile woman approach Jesus, a Jew, for miraculous help?

Comment: As a Phoenecian, the woman would likely have worshipped the mother-goddess "Ashtoreth" or "Astarte," also known as "the Queen of heaven," who was thought to be the giver of all life. This goddess supposedly allowed her worshippers to do all sorts of evil. This woman, then, from a background of total paganism, sought divine mercy both for herself and for her demon-possessed daughter.

Matthew's account expresses that the daughter was badly demonized, totally insane and disabled. Her anxious mother, unable to do anything for her relief, pleads with Jesus for mercy on her and her daughter. She addresses Him as "Lord," revealing her respect for Him as having authority and superiority. In calling Him "the Son of David," she recognizes Him as Israel's Messiah. She identifies herself with her daughter's need, implying that healing her daughter would mean mercy for her, as her child's misery was her own. No doubt, the merciful Jesus anticipated her need for Him as He had with others (John 5:6).

2. Why does Jesus seem to her put off? Matthew 15:24.

Comment: Jesus seems to encourage the woman's hopelessness by saying, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (see also Matthew 10:5-6). As a Gentile woman, she normally would not have had any right to receive help from and access to Jesus, since His responsibility at the time was to those of the circumcision, Israelites.

A contradiction seems to lurk here, since He came as the Promised Seed in whom *all nations* would be blessed (Psalm 72:11; Luke 2:32; Romans 15:9-12). He had also

declared that other sheep, not only Israelites, must be brought to Him (John 10:16). Although He came as Savior of the world, there was purpose in restricting His ministry to Israel (specifically to the Jews). His first priority was to fulfill the Messianic, redemptive promises to them. He was reserving the good news of the salvation of the Gentiles until He had fulfilled His God-given responsibility. In following this plan of salvation, His initial work was specifically to Israelites.

Jesus' work thus began locally in preparation for it to spread to all nations. His followers would go into the entire world and preach the gospel, which His death and resurrection made possible. Therefore, Jesus' personal, physical ministry was limited to Judea and Galilee where He performed the majority of His miracles and delivered His teachings. The scattered instances of Gentiles receiving His goodness are forerunners of the Spirit being poured out on Israelite and Gentile alike (Acts 10:1-31; Romans 11:11).

3. What is the significance of Jesus' use of the terms "children" and "dogs" in Matthew 15:26 and Mark 7:27?

Comment: When the Gentile woman says, "Lord, help me," Jesus up to this point had spoken only to His disciples. Now He speaks to the woman, telling her she is not of Israel and that, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." By "children" He means Israelites (Acts 10:36), while "dogs" were symbols of unclean Gentiles, a proverbial expression used by the Jews to represent their sense of national superiority over the nations.

Jesus does not Himself call the Gentiles "dogs," using the term only here to point out the normal antipathy between Jews and Gentiles, which His disciples had echoed. The word He uses for "dogs" is a mild one, meaning "little dogs" or "puppies"—not large, wild dogs native to the area but domesticated animals like those the Romans had introduced during their occupation. It suggests the family puppy under the table at dinnertime, begging for a scrap.

Because of her faith and humility, the woman does not take offense at this. His words do not discourage her because she was hopeful with faith, and her works demonstrate that hers was not a dead faith, but a strong one. She was resourceful and knew enough about Jesus to believe that He was both compassionate and powerful. Feeling deeply unworthy and contently accepting her place among the dogs, she merely asks for spiritual crumbs from His merciful table—a little crumb for her daughter is all she seeks.

Counting herself a "puppy," she faithfully looks forward to being counted by God as His child (Galatians 3:26). Although she stands outside of the elect family of Israel, she trusts that Jesus' goodness would impart a blessing. By intervening on her and her daughter's behalf, Jesus shows that the Gentiles' potential for salvation is no less than that of Israelites.