

## Matthew 15:21-28

### I. Introduction

When our family was living in VN, I had a visa-waiver glued into my passport. This entitled me to unlimited entries into VN for up to 6 months at a time. Every six months, I would extend my stay in VN by riding a bus to the border with Cambodia, entering Cambodia on a tourist visa, and then walking back across the border and entering VN for another 6 months stay.

This worked great until COVID hit. At that point, the government of VN decided that foreign nationals, even those with visa waivers like myself, would not be allowed to enter the country. Extensions of stays were allowed, but my usual 6 months was cut down to 3. Then, the 3 months were reduced to just one month. At this point, my ability to remain with my family in VN was dangling by a string. And I knew the rules could change again at any time.

At the immigration office, when my pleas for a reasonable solution seemed to fall on deaf ears, I felt anger rising within me. And yet, however reasonable my concerns may have felt, according to the letter of the law, VN did not owe me the right to stay in their country. Because I was not a citizen. I was a foreigner. According to the law, I had no inherent right to be there.

Yet, in God's kindness, an immigration officer had compassion on me. What had started as a tense exchange turned out to be God's means for opening up a new and better way for me to legally stay in VN.

In our Bible passage for today, we find another foreigner, a Canaanite woman, who encounters much greater difficulty. But not unlike my experience in VN, this woman's difficulty turns out to be the path God had prepared for her to receive an even greater mercy.

In the course of Jesus' ministry on earth, countless multitudes came to Him and were healed, and were set free from the power of sin and Satan. So, why did the Holy Spirit preserve

this particular account in which Jesus delivers this Canaanite woman's daughter from a demon?

Jesus Himself calls our attention to this woman's faith. Look in 15:28, "O woman, your faith is great" (15:28a). In Jesus' own evaluation, then, this woman's faith is remarkable. Accordingly, we will focus our study on learning from this Canaanite woman's faith.

What is true faith, according to the Bible? In Hebrews 11:1, the Bible tells us. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen. So, faith is a way of knowing and being convinced about the truth of God we hope for but do not see.

But where does such biblical faith come from, since it has to do with things unseen? And how is biblical faith to be distinguished from mere wishful thinking? Romans 10:17 says that true faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. In context, the word of Christ is referring to the word of the gospel being preached.

So, the essence of biblical faith is believing the truth of what God says about His Son Jesus in this book. That's what true faith is.

Therefore, in seeking to learn from this woman's faith, what we really are doing is trying to understand what she understood about the glory of Jesus, according to the words of this book, This woman was convinced there was sufficient mercy in Jesus even for such a one as she. And she was right!

**THESIS:** And so, looking at this woman's faith and Jesus' response to her faith, we will consider as our guiding question: **to whom does the kingdom of heaven truly belong?**

## **II. The clarity of faith: This woman clearly confesses who Jesus is.**

Consider first, the clarity of her faith. This woman clearly recognizes who Jesus is and what He has come to do.

1. Jesus is the promised King come to bring salvation.

For look how she addresses Him in 15:22. “Have mercy on Me, Lord, Son of David” (15:22). Before Jesus even speaks a word, this woman confesses a truth about Him which, up to this point in Matthew’s gospel, only two blind men have managed to see, namely, that Jesus is the Son of David!

The Son of David was a special title the Jews used for their long-awaited Messiah, the King whom God had promised to raise up for them out of the descendants of their ancient king David. The Messiah would bring the fullness of God’s salvation and kingdom to His people, fulfilling all the promises of God’s grace. In calling Jesus the Son of David, then, this foreign woman is addressing Him as Yahweh’s anointed King, come into the world to save and reign.

Do you see how utterly remarkable this is?

This woman, she is a foreigner, dwelling outside the borders of Israel, in the district of Tyre and Sidon. Living where she did, in the land of Israel’s enemies, she did not have this book. What particular snippets of God’s special revelation had reached her, we cannot know. Certainly, though, she had never heard Jesus or His disciples preaching or witnessed His miracles firsthand. For recall in Matthew 10, when Jesus sends out the twelve to preach the gospel, He forbids them from going into the Gentile cities. In comparison to Israel, then, she had received so little of God’s testimony concerning His Son. And yet, here she is, putting Israel’s unbelief to shame, by confidently confessing that Jesus is the promised Messiah!

Just how much of the sweeping implications of God’s covenant promise to David this woman understood, it is difficult to say. But she had heard enough and understood enough to confess what Israel could not or would not see, that Jesus is the true King and Savior, the hope of Israel, come into the world to save. The clarity and conviction of this woman’s faith. [7:00]

## 2. Jesus is Lord.

But this woman's faith sees even more of the glory of Jesus. Not only does she hail Him as King and Savior, she worships Him as Lord. For look just below in 15:25. Matthew records that this woman *bows down to Jesus*, saying "Lord, help me." The word Matthew uses here to describe this woman's *bowing down* to Jesus (15:25) is the same word he used to describe the disciples *worshiping* Jesus in 14:33. As many of you will recall from Chris' sermon a couple weeks ago, after the disciples see Jesus walking on water, they worshipped Him in the boat and said, "Truly You are the Son of God" (14:33). It is the same word here in 15:25, translated either to worship or bow down. Some of your translations may read, "she worshipped Him."

This woman has not seen what the disciples have seen. And yet, she too recognizes that Jesus the Messiah is God Himself come to save. She bows down and worships Jesus, and Jesus receives her worship.

Now again, one might ask, now how much could this woman truly have understood about the full deity of Jesus, the fact that Jesus is God the Son in the flesh, 100% true God and 100% true man? And we cannot answer that question exhaustively.

But consider a few things. Most significantly, note in 15:28 how Jesus praises this woman's faith: "O woman, your faith is great." The O in O woman carries emotional force. By the end of this story, Jesus is truly moved by this woman's faith! It has been noted that in the gospels Jesus never praises the faith of anyone in Israel as great. The Son of God reserves this special praise for the faith of two foreigners, this woman and the centurion from Matthew 8 whose servant was sick.

And so, in evaluating this woman's understanding of Jesus' identity, first and foremost we must take into account the rare praise that Jesus Himself bestows upon her faith. Based upon the Savior's praise, I believe this woman has true saving faith in Jesus. And this fact ought to control

how we interpret her actions in the rest of this passage. In particular, if her faith is clear enough to be praised so by the Savior, surely it must have been clear enough for her to know what she was doing when she bowed down and worshiped Him.

There is another word here that also indicates this woman is offering Jesus divine worship. Look again in 15:22 and 15:25. In both places, she calls Jesus, “Lord.” The word translated “Lord” in English does not always denote deity. But in the NT, it usually does. Indeed, Lord is how the NT writers translated Yahweh, God’s personal name revealed in the OT. In the following centuries, Christians would choose rather to lose their lives than to call the Roman emperor, “Lord.”

And remember what this woman is asking Jesus to do for her daughter! Her faith implicitly understands that Jesus Himself has spiritual authority to overthrow all the powers of Satan’s kingdom of darkness, that which is so cruelly oppressing her daughter. Only the true God has such authority.

And this woman understands that. The very tenacity with which she pursues Jesus’ help speaks to her recognition of his surpassing divine glory. There is all sufficient power and grace in Jesus. But if Jesus does not save, we will not be saved. This foreign woman, a Canaanite, a former idolater, by the grace of God, she gets worship right! Not her people’s idols, but Jesus is Lord.

To whom, then, does the kingdom of heaven truly belong? This woman’s confession clearly answers: To Jesus, to Jesus belongs the kingdom and the power and the glory. For the Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. This Nazarene, this lowly Galilean, rejected by His nation, this Jesus is God’s anointed King, the Son of David, the Son of God, the Christ whom the Father will install in glory upon Zion, His holy mountain, to bring salvation to all His people and destruction upon all His enemies.

Salvation and the kingdom belong to Jesus, and to all who will join this woman in bowing

the knee to Him, turning from their sins, casting away all other hopes, and seeking Christ alone for mercy. The teachers of Israel are blind, but this woman, she has been given eyes to see! Her abject worship at Jesus' feet, her relentless pursuit of His mercy, all testify that Jesus is the Christ, God's only begotten Son, come into the world to save sinners. Glory be to His name. The clarity of this woman's faith.

Friends, is that who you understand Jesus to be? The King of kings and Lord of lords? The God-man who is our only hope of salvation?

What can turn a religious hypocrite, a prideful person who worships God in vain, into a new creation, someone who worships God in spirit and in truth? What can make you a new man, a new woman, a new child, so that you go home and begin to live differently, so differently that your parent, your spouse, your children, your roommate, they have to ask, what has happened to you? What has happened to junior? What has happened to Dad, to Mom, to brother or sister?

This story is in the Bible because Matthew wants you to see what this woman saw. For new life, the birth from above, comes through seeing the divine glory of Jesus revealed in this word; the glory of God in the face of His Son. So, pick up and read and look! Look at the glory of Jesus in this book; look and keep looking until you worship and know that He has made you new.

And for those who are already believers, what can strengthen you to finally overcome that besetting sin. Perhaps it is the lust of the eyes: your eyes that keep going where they don't belong. Or maybe it is your sharp tongue: in your pride and impatience you are prone to speak rashly with words that are like thrusts of a sword, tearing into those whom you say you love, instead of building them up with grace? What can truly change you on the inside, so that you are empowered to finally say no to a sin that has defeated you over and over again?

The apostle Paul, in 2 Cor 3:18, puts it this way: "we all, with unveiled face, beholding as

in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” This is how the Spirit renews us into Christ’s likeness. The rescuing and renewing grace of God comes through beholding the glory of His Son Jesus in this book. So, pick up and read and look!

### **III. The humble wisdom of faith: this woman comes to Jesus for mercy.**

So, first, the clarity of this woman’s faith. She understands the glory of who Jesus is and what He has come to do.

Second, observe the humble wisdom of this woman’s faith. Look in 15:22 again. “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon possessed” (15:22). Knowing who Jesus is – the clarity of her faith – the very first thing she says to Him is: Have mercy on me!

Friends, here is true wisdom! In the presence of Jesus’ holiness, this woman is conscious that she herself is in no position to declare her rights or demand His help. Humbly but boldly, this woman comes as she is and asks King Jesus for mercy. “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David” (15:22).

We cannot help but think of the publican’s cry: Lord, have mercy on me a sinner. Here too, I believe, this woman gives voice to her genuine saving faith in Christ. [16:15]

#### 3. Coming to Jesus for mercy vs. trusting in self

What a contrast between this woman’s humble faith and the prideful posture of the Pharisees, as Ben showed us last week.

The Pharisees had the right book, the Law of God. They were the teachers of Israel. And they were meticulous in their own performance of the external matters of the Law, the tithes and offerings, the demands for ritual purity and cleansing, the sacrifices. And yet they missed whole point!

For the book of the Law is designed to obliterate any possible confidence we might have in our own righteousness. The Law, Paul says, speaks “so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God” (Rom. 3:19). The Law is intended to drive every one of us to cast ourselves upon the Savior and His promise of grace.

But the Pharisees had such a low view of the Law (remember the Sermon on the Mount?) and such a high view of themselves that they found no place to come to Jesus for mercy. Their false, self-made religion had no room for the Son of God who came into the world to save sinners. Because at the bottom of all, they were still trusting in themselves rather than trusting in God’s mercy.

Listen to how Jesus elsewhere rebuked them: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life” (Jn. 5:39-40).

In contrast, enter this Canaanite woman. What has she heard of the Law and Prophets? Mere sound bites in translation, perhaps? She doesn’t have the fancy study Bible the Pharisees had, but unlike them, her simple faith she grasps the whole point of the Scriptures! For she comes to Jesus for life! She comes to Jesus and asks Him for mercy. Through the little that she had heard, God had blessed her with saving faith, the humility of wisdom that comes from above. Helpless, look to thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die. The humble wisdom of this woman’s faith.

How about you, friend. Is it possible that for some of you, your faith is still more like the Pharisees than this woman? Perhaps you have been to church for many years, maybe even since you were a child. And yet, all along, in all your religious activity, you have been subtly trusting in yourself, that you are somehow better than other people, and good enough for God. And so,



tragically, you have missed the real point of this book. You have never come to that place of truly humbling yourself before God. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!

Friend, if that is you, then do not delay! For today, the Bible says, is the day of salvation. Throw away your idols of self-reliance and pride! Trample on all your self-made religion! Be done with all the useless hand-washing that can never make you clean, all the ways we imagine that we can make ourselves acceptable to God and respected in the eyes of others. Come humbly! Come boldly to Jesus, and say, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

And for Christians, this same basic movement to Christ for mercy should be our daily experience. What do you need to confess to the Savior now? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1:9).

#### 4. Gospel summary

For the Bible teaches that there is none righteous, not even one. That all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And that the wages of sin is death. But the good news, the gospel declares that the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. For Jesus, as perfect God and perfect man, came into the world to save sinners. And as a man, Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience to His Father, to make up for all the many ways we all have fallen short.

And in His crowning act of obedience, Jesus offered up His blameless life on the cross as a sacrifice to God, as a substitute for sinners. On the cross, Jesus bore in His body the sins and punishment of His people. He suffered His Father’s holy wrath in their place, as if He were the guilty one, to satisfy God’s justice, once for all. For God so loved the world, the Bible says, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16)

Everyone who believes in Him receives mercy, receives the forgiveness of sins (Acts

10:43). If you have questions about what it could mean for you to come to Jesus and receive His mercy, please see any one of our pastors after service, and I know they would be more than happy to talk with you about that. Or ask the person who invited you here to church this morning.

#### **IV. The endurance of faith: This woman's faith in Jesus' mercy endures His apparent rejection.**

The woman, she understands who Jesus is, He is God Himself come to save. The clarity of her faith. And with no confidence in self, she plainly asks Jesus for mercy. The humble wisdom of her faith. Now, there is one last thing I want to deal with in the rest of this passage: the endurance of this woman's faith.

##### **5. Jesus severely tests this woman's genuine faith and her faith passes the test.**

For this woman, she seemingly gets it all right. She understands the main point of this book. She knows who Jesus is, and she comes to Him for mercy. What could go wrong? And yet, jarringly, Jesus appears to utterly reject her plea for help. Until the very end, this passage is full of uncomfortable tension, because it appears as if Jesus is just going to leave this woman in her agony over her daughter. That He is not going to give this woman the mercy she seeks. Or so it seems, until the twist at the very end.

Not until the conclusion, in 15:28, do we learn that what appeared to be rejection was in fact Jesus severely testing this woman's remarkable faith. And her faith passes the test. In the end, Jesus praises her, and gives her the very mercy she seeks. Look in 15:28, "Then Jesus said to her, 'O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed at once" (15:28).

##### **6. Jesus' hardness toward this woman upholds the holiness of His Father and her need for**

redemption, and thereby tests and reveals her remarkable faith.

Now, Jesus is the Son of God. He knew it was His Father's plan from the beginning to show this Canaanite woman mercy. So, what is He doing, why He is being so hard toward her, before He grants her request? [24:15] The short answer to that question is that the hardness, the coldness that feels like rejection but is not in fact rejection, this sore testing makes this woman's faith, and the glory of Jesus, shine. For remember what we said at the beginning, this woman's faith is really a window into the glory of Jesus, the one in whom she trusts and is not put to shame.

We will see how in this testing, Jesus is upholding the glory of His Father as revealed in the old covenant.

But Jesus is not merely honoring the holiness of God, His Father. At the same time, Jesus is honoring this woman, He is honoring her faith. For Jesus knows what is in her, the true faith she has. For as we have seen in this passage, this woman understands who Jesus is, she really gets it! She has faith in Jesus like no one in Israel! And so, as a shame to unbelieving Israel, but an honor to this woman, Jesus pushes her faith hard, perhaps harder than anyone else in the gospel.

Some of you may deeply identify with how this woman must have been feeling. Your faith is being pushed hard, perhaps harder than ever before. Hang on, dear child of God.

For at the end of this woman's testing, after her faith has endured the apparent rejection, comes the glory of real acceptance. In the end, Jesus will praise her and give her the very mercy she seeks. But first, the testing, the hardness. [25:30]

7. Observe the hardness of Jesus toward this woman and the endurance of her faith.

In 15:22, this woman cries out for mercy. How does Jesus respond to this mother's cry? Look in 15:23. "But He did not answer her a word" (15:23a). She cries out but He doesn't answer. There is only silence. He appears to simply ignore her plea.

Yet, she continues to cry out to Jesus. Eventually, the disciples can't take it anymore. In 15:23, they come to Jesus and implore Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us" (15:23). Literally this reads, "she is shouting behind us" (15:23). The language indicates the woman is physically to the rear of Jesus and His disciples.

So, this is the picture. This woman is pleading for mercy, but Jesus doesn't even turn around to look at her. He just continues on His way. She sees only His back and not His face.

And when the disciples ask Jesus to "send her away" (15:23), Jesus replies, not to the woman, but to His disciples. I read from 15:24, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). This desperate woman hears Jesus saying, I was not sent to you. The good news I was sent to preach to the house of Israel, I do not preach it to you. In other words, I have no good word to speak to you. She knew He was the Savior, but now she hears Him saying, I was not sent to bring this salvation to you.

Yet this woman is not offended, still she does not lose heart. The blessed endurance of her faith! Still, she draws near to Jesus to plead for mercy. For look in 15:25. The text says she comes and bows down *before* Jesus. Now she is no longer behind Jesus and His disciples. Overtaking them, she falls down before Jesus and utters that visceral plea, "Lord, help me!" (15:25).

Finally, for the first time, Jesus speaks directly to this woman. I read in 15:26, "And He answered and said, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs'" (15:26). His words are harder than the silence.

For the "children" of whom Jesus speaks in 15:26 refers to the whole house of Israel, to all who are in special relationship with God through His covenant with Abraham. And the dogs are everyone else, everyone outside that covenant. The Gentile nations.

By identifying this woman and her daughter with the dogs, Jesus is communicating, you are not of the family, you do not belong to the household. The kingdom of heaven does not belong to you. There is no place for you at the table, you have no right to the bread.

The bread indicates the full grace of salvation God had promised to Abraham by way of covenant. For God had uniquely revealed His promise of salvation to the sons of Abraham. Salvation is from the Jews.

And so, to be a dog, that is, to be outside of Israel, was to be outside of that covenant, was to be outside of God's grace. As Paul reminds the Gentile believers at Ephesus, formerly you "were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

Observe then, how everything in Jesus' demeanor towards this woman images rejection and condemnation. But He is not picking on this woman. He is not being cruel. For the hardness He is imaging to her is but a flicker of the flame of judgment and rejection and condemnation that all of us deserve, Jew and Gentile alike, because of our sin, and the sin of our first forefather. For all of us have been born into the wrong family, the wrong people; the people of Adam! We all enter this world separated from God because of our forefather Adam's sin. And so, all of us, Jew and Gentile alike, must repent and believe in Jesus, the true Son, and so be born again into God's family. Only then do we become a true child.

For the children of whom Jesus speaks in 15:26, the sons of Israel, they were also the lost sheep of verse 15:24, the Jewish nation, those to whom Jesus had been sent by His Father to first proclaim the rescue of grace. For mere external membership in the old covenant, circumcision in the flesh, was not salvation itself, but a mere shadow, a picture of true salvation and sonship in the kingdom through faith. The gospel now makes plain that it is only through faith in Jesus that

anyone is adopted into God's forever family for eternal salvation.

Though this woman was not there to hear it, in chapter 8 Jesus blessed the faith of another Gentile, the centurion whose servant was sick. And he spoke a warning of judgment against Israel, against those who were regarded as children under the terms of the old covenant, but who would not receive Jesus their true King and Savior. I read from Matthew 8:11, "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

And so, Jesus' cold demeanor toward this woman is faithfully reflecting what the Law was intended to teach both Jew and Gentile alike. The holiness of God. The absolute impossibility of sinners like us to draw near to God and enjoy family fellowship with Him at His table apart from His appointed means of redemption. Jesus' hardness is a mere glint of the sword, a glimpse of the utter destruction that must fall on anyone who would approach God unclean, still in their sins, apart from the work of God's appointed Mediator, apart from faith in the redemption that Jesus would ultimately accomplish. [33:00]

For the blood of bulls and goats slaughtered daily at the temple in Jerusalem did not take away the sins of anyone. But it pointed to the One who would. And the holiness of God demanded that such covenantal signs be continued, until that true and better sacrifice was made and proclaimed. A new covenant had been promised, but Jesus still had to go to the cross and be resurrected.

So, in all His hardness toward this woman, Jesus is upholding the holiness of God. And in all His hardness, He is testing her faith. This is the test! How does this woman respond to the holiness of God and her need for redemption, that which Jesus is faithfully imaging to her?

In 15:27, we find her two-word response: “Yes, Lord.” When Jesus identifies her as a dog, outside of the covenant, still filthy and condemned in her sins, she doesn’t protest, she says, “Yes, Lord.” Without qualification, she agrees with everything His evaluation implies about her condition before God. Even her subsequent statement in 15:28, in the original language it is clear she is not challenging or amending anything Jesus said. Her entire response is one of humble submission to Jesus’ word.

Would you examine yourself with me for a minute. How does your heart respond when some hard word of truth charges you with sin? When God’s true word in this book exposes your unclean thoughts, shameful things that proceed from your heart? Or when the true words of a friend bring to your attention some repeated problem in your life. How does your heart respond? Do you vigorously launch into a defense of yourself, to minimize your sin? Perhaps not out loud, but in the hidden places of your heart? Or do you counterattack the other person, as the Pharisees tried to do to Jesus, when His hard words of truth laid open the filthiness of their inner lives?

Friends, do you see how Jesus cleans this woman through faith? By speaking hard words of truth to her. This is how Jesus cleans His people, by speaking to us His word, even difficult words such as He spoke to this woman here. For His words are Spirit and they are life. This is how hearts are truly cleansed. Not through more hand-washing, but through hearing the Savior’s words with faith! Your heart can truly be made clean by listening to Jesus’ words, even His most difficult sayings, and responding with all your heart, “Yes, Lord.”

This woman’s broken-hearted response to Jesus’ humiliating evaluation of her condition before God, apart from His cleansing grace, is how true saving faith always responds to the charges God’s word brings against each of us: “Yes, Lord.” “Guilty as charged!”

And yet she does not despair! The remarkable endurance of this woman’s faith. In the face

of these hard words of truth, the humble faith God has given this woman in the Redeemer does not fail. In hope against hope, she continues to cast herself upon Jesus and look for His mercy. Look at the rest of 15:27, “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master’s table” (15:27).

In other words, she is saying, “Yes, Lord, I am everything that you say I am. I come to you as one who is unclean, unworthy, condemned. By nature, I am not of the children, but a mere dog in your sight. By rights, I have no place at your table, no invitation to eat of the bread. Yes, Lord, this is all true, but even so, if you would just let a crumb of your grace fall to a dog like me, that will be enough for us, we will be satisfied!”

Such is her plea. Despite the trial of apparent rejection, God has given her unwavering faith in the mercy of Jesus. She believes that there is sufficient mercy in Jesus for even the farthest and foulest sinner, even for the dogs! And she is so right!

“Then Jesus said to her, ‘O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed at once” (15:28). [39:00]

8. There is sufficient grace in Jesus for even for the farthest and foulest sinners.

This morning, there may be someone here who especially needs to learn from the faith of this woman. Someone who feels cast off from God for their sins. Too filthy, too wicked, too far gone for His mercy to reach. Friends, this woman’s faith, and Jesus’ acceptance of her, teaches us that the blood of Jesus’ cross can make the foulest clean. Through the blood of Jesus, those who are farthest off from God, even His vilest enemies - the pagan Canaanite, the pretentious Pharisee - can all be brought near and made new. For Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And to you today, He says, “the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (Jn. 6:37b). Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3).



Because this woman approaches Jesus apart from the old covenant, and the old covenant was still in force, Jesus images rejection to her, to uphold the holiness of His Father and His covenant with Israel. The rejection that all of us must meet if we attempt to draw near to God apart from His appointed means of grace, apart from the merit of the promised Redeemer and His sacrifice.

But, because this woman comes to Jesus for mercy, with true gospel faith, faith that endures to proclaim the very essence of wisdom the whole old covenant itself was meant to teach, Jesus ultimately receives her with high praise:

*For thus says the high and exalted One  
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,  
“I dwell on a high and holy place,  
And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit  
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly  
And to revive the heart of the contrite. (Is. 57:15)*

To whom, then, does the kingdom of heaven truly belong? To those who have been humbled by listening to Jesus’ word. Humbled not into despair, but into godly sorrow and true wisdom, so that, like this woman, you come to Jesus for mercy and life!

9. Our Savior’s glorious endurance of true rejection by His Father on the cross for our sake was the true test of faith and sustains our faith in His mercy through all the trials of life.

For some of you this morning, you do have genuine faith in Jesus, just like this woman did. You love Him, you believe in His promises, the hope of His mercy and steadfast love. And yet, some hard thing has come into your life. Some dark cloud has settled over your circumstances. Maybe it is a problem at work. Or the prolonged lack of work. Maybe it is a major setback with

your health. Maybe it is in the pain and rejection of broken relationships. And you are crying out to God for mercy. And it feels like He is not answering. In your head, you know God's promises of mercy written in this word. But right here, it feels like He has forsaken you. You long for His embrace, but it feels like His grace, though it be true for others, it seems not to be coming true for you, not now.

How are we as believers in Jesus to face these trials with enduring faith in God's goodness and love? For that, we have great advantages over this blessed sister in the faith.

For friends, the gospel reveals that the true testing of faith was not the feeling of apparent rejection she or you or I must endure. The true testing, the true trial of faith was what our Savior endured for us on the cross. On the cross, for you and me and all who will believe, Jesus submitted Himself to be made sin on our behalf. To be made the dog. To be counted the Canaanite. To bear our guilt, our shame, our punishment. On the cross, for you and for me, Jesus heard His Father say, not with words but with holy wrath bearing down upon His soul, You are not My Son, you are not of the family, to you the kingdom of heaven does not belong. And so, on the cross, Jesus saw only the Father's back and not His face. It was Jesus who cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" And His Father did not answer. In that hour, the Father had no good word to speak to His beloved Son. Until it was finished. Until the holy Son of God had committed His spirit into His Father's hands, still trusting, still loving, still honoring the holiness of His Father, upholding and fulfilling for His people every last jot and tittle of that awesome Law and covenant.

That day, the Father had no good word to speak to His Son on the cross, so that today, there could be a gospel to preach to you.

You see, on the cross, to ransom sinners from death, it was necessary for the sinless Son of God, in His true humanity, not just to feel forsaken, but truly to be forsaken by His Father, for

us! For all He came to save! So that you and I and all who trust in Jesus, may have absolute assurance that we never will be forsaken, no matter how life on earth may seem to go.

And so, suffering saint, no matter how deep your valley may be, beloved, know that Jesus is right there, with you. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen. Jesus paid the full price so that He could go with you all the way.

And the Father, He simply cannot forsake you, because that is what He once did to His Son on the cross, in your place! God didn't spare His Son because in love He had decided to spare you! That is good news. So that, now, through faith, you could know that your life is hidden with Christ in God.

So, weary brothers and sisters, do not listen to what your circumstances seem to be saying! Look instead to this word! Look instead to your Savior! Behold your Savior and His cross, and wonder, and worship! Behold your Jesus Christ, once for sinners slain, risen on the third day, now ascended to His Father's right hand, so that He could bring many sons to glory. Hear Him, in this blessed meal we are about to celebrate, say to you: "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household" (Eph. 2:19).

To whom does the kingdom of heaven truly belong? The kingdom belongs to this Jesus, the true Son, King and Savior, the Son of David, the very Son of God, who poured out His life as a ransom for many. And by the gift of God's grace, the kingdom belongs to all, who with this Canaanite woman, in the light of God's holiness, submit to being called out in their sin as dogs. To those who cast away their idols, their self-confidence, their hand-washing, and run to Jesus for life. The kingdom belongs to those whose faith in the Redeemer's love endures through every trial, until they see His face.

When I was at the immigration office in VN, I told you my appeal for a longer extension

of stay seemed to be falling on deaf ears. But the story didn't end there. Because there was another way for me to legally stay in VN, unknown to me at the time. A new and better way, according to a different set of laws that I did not know about. And when they kindly told me about this, in the midst of a global, it seemed almost too good to be true!

Much less could this Canaanite woman have known, she could not have imagined the glorious privileges God promises under a new covenant, to all who believe. The new covenant soon to be inaugurated in Jesus' blood.

In the light of the finished work of Jesus, the true and better sacrifice, now the Father commands the gospel of His Son be proclaimed to all the nations, without distinction. Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed (Rom. 10:11). In Christ our risen Savior, there is now no more Jew or Gentile. All who turn from their sins and trust in Jesus are counted as God's true children and remain in His house forever. All who repent and believe in Jesus are invited to His table and may eat of the bread.

For the bread of the children of which Jesus speaks here is ultimately the Lord Jesus Himself. On the cross, Jesus gave all of Himself, for all who will believe. And so, beloved, in the gospel, there are no crumbs of grace offered to those would come to the Savior for mercy, but only all of Christ, and all of His kingdom. Let us pray.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What is remarkable about this woman's faith in Jesus?
2. Why does Jesus appear to be so hard to this woman, to whose faith in the end He gives special praise (15:28)? How does this apparent contradiction help you to think about your own trials of faith in this life, as you likewise endure and wait for your Savior's reward?
3. Describe some of the glorious new covenant privileges that were not yet proclaimed to this woman but are now fully proclaimed in the gospel.
4. Read again Jesus' rebuke to the Pharisees in John 5:39-40. To whom does He say all the Scriptures testify? And what is the point? How should what Jesus says in John 5:39-40 affect the way you read your Bible? How should this affect the way you use the Bible to help others (family, friends, believers and unbelievers, etc.)?
5. What comfort and assurance do the sufferings of Jesus on the cross provide to us as sufferings saints today, on the way to glory?
6. How can meditating on the cross of God's Son help us to better endure the "light and momentary" afflictions we as believers must endure in this life as God's children? What lies must we reject? What gospel truths must we cling to?