



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
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<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: Keeping the Faith When Jesus Says, "No!"

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Jesus looks for ways to help us, and rewards persistent, humble faith.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 15:10-28

Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 15 verses 10 to 28.

Starting at verse 10:

Summoning the crowd, He told them, "Listen and understand:

It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

Then the disciples came up and told Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard this statement?"

He replied, "Every plant that My heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted.

Leave them alone! They are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit."

Then Peter replied to Him, "Explain this parable to us."

"Are even you still lacking in understanding?" He asked.

"Don't you realize that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated?"

But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a man.

For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies.

These are the things that defile a man, but eating with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”

When Jesus left there, He withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon.

Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came and kept crying out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is cruelly tormented by a demon.”

Yet He did not say a word to her. So His disciples approached Him and urged Him, “Send her away because she cries out after us.”

He replied, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But she came, knelt before Him, and said, “Lord, help me!”

He answered, “It isn’t right to take the children’s bread and throw it to their dogs.”

“Yes, Lord,” she said, “yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table!”

Then Jesus replied to her, “Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want.” And from that moment her daughter was cured.

-- May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!

-- I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

-- I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

When do we need band-aids? When we have been hurt, right?. A band-aid covers the injury and keeps wound clean so it will not become infected. We have a band-aid we could use on an arm. We have one that would fit over the tip of a finger. We have a round one that would go on a small wound. And, we have a large, square band-aid that could be used on a scraped knee.

What kind of a band-aid would we use when someone says something that hurts you? There isn't anything that would cover that kind of hurt is there? That is the type of hurt that doesn't show.

Jesus talks about that very thing in the Bible. He says, "**That which enters into the mouth doesn't defile the man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man**" (in Matthew 15:11 of our scripture text today). The word defile means dirty or unclean. Jesus cautions us to be aware of what we say. Words are powerful and can hurt. Words that are not true can damage a reputation. That kind of injury cannot be covered over with a band-aid. Let's remember to keep our words clean and true.

Some scripture is easy, but some is not. Today's Gospel lesson is not easy. It's the story of a mother whose child is "tormented by a demon"—and who asks Jesus for help—and Jesus says, "No." That is not the kind of response that we expect from Jesus—but I believe that the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to include this story for a reason, so we need see what it might have to say to us.

In this story, Jesus goes to the region of Tyre and Sidon, north of Galilee—the farthest north that Jesus ever travels. One Biblical commentator notes that the words Tyre and Sidon are code for "paganland." When Jesus goes to Tyre and Sidon, he is no longer in Jewish territory. There aren't many synagogues in Tyre and Sidon.

When this mother comes to ask help for her daughter, Matthew tells us that she was a Canaanite woman. The Canaanites had been enemies of the Israelites. The fact that she was a Canaanite woman would be a real turnoff to the first readers of this Gospel. How could a Canaanite expect anything from Jesus? Her people had fought and killed Israelites. She worshiped the wrong god—or perhaps no god at all. If you kneel before pagan idols on the Sabbath, don't ask Jesus for help now!

That was certainly the disciples' take on it. Matthew tells us that this woman came shouting at Jesus—screaming at Jesus. The noise got on the disciples' nerves. They told Jesus, "Send her away; for she cries after us" (in verse 23 of our scripture text today). We can understand that, can't we! We hate it when people shout at us. We say, "Sit down and talk to me in a civil tone." We shout, "Don't shout!"

But the disciples failed to notice what this woman was saying. YES, she is shouting! YES, she is annoying! But listen to her words. She says, "Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David!" (in verse 22 of our scripture text today). In the original greek language it is *Kyrie, eleison*—Lord, have mercy.

Perhaps you recognize those words. These are words that Christians use in worship yet today. *Kyrie, eleison*—Lord, have mercy. *Christos, eleison*—Christ have mercy. *Kyrie, eleison*—Lord, have mercy. If you listen to classical music, you have heard those words set to music. Beautiful words set to haunting music!

Kyrie, eleison! Lord, have mercy! Those words express our deepest longing—a longing for mercy—a longing for God to love us in spite of ourselves—a longing for God to help us, even when we don't deserve it—a plea that God will not demand a strict accounting—a plea that we might be treated as sons and daughter rather than as hired help. Lord, please don't send us away if we make a mistake. Don't throw us out. Don't give up on us. Love us until we can do better! *Kyrie, eleison!* Lord, have mercy!

Some of us, of course, believe that we need no mercy—but in fact such people need mercy more than anyone. Those of us who believe that we need no mercy tend to show no mercy. We call ourselves righteous, but others call us self-righteous. Rigid, they say. Humorless! Not much fun! Jesus didn't have much use for such self-righteous people. If you think that you need no mercy, I can assure you that you, above all people, need a great deal of mercy.

Kyrie, eleison! Lord, have mercy! This Canaanite woman isn't praying that Jesus will forgive her sins. She is praying that Jesus will heal her daughter. The way that she says it is interesting. "Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David! My daughter is severely demonized!".

You would think that she would say, "Have mercy on my daughter," but she says, "Have mercy on ME!" The daughter is tormented, but the mother is tormented too. The torment that the mother feels is—well, you mothers know—her torment is terrible. "Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David! My daughter is severely demonized!" The mother is praying, of course, that Jesus will heal her daughter so that both mother and daughter might be released from their torment. *Kyrie, eleison!* Lord, have mercy!

But Jesus says nothing. Nothing! Matthew says, "But he answered her not a word".

And then the disciples say, "Run her off, Jesus. We can't stand her screaming!"

We expect Jesus to put the disciples in their place and to help this woman. Instead, he tells the disciples, "I wasn't sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel"—meaning, "I was sent only to help the Jews." How disappointing!

And then the woman kneels before Jesus and says, "Lord, help me". Kneels—as in worship—and pleads, "Lord, help me."

Now come the words that shock us—words that we cannot imagine Jesus saying—words that no preacher wants to explain—words that move us beyond shock to rage. Jesus says, "It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs".

Oh, no, Jesus, please don't say that! We love you, Jesus, and we don't want to believe that you could say such a thing! Please backspace and wipe out those words! Start over! Try again! You can do better! Please, Jesus!

But the words stand! There they are in the Bible. "It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Jesus not only refuses to help this tormented woman and her tormented daughter, but he also insults them—compares them to dogs. It's almost more than we can bear. If this truly represents who Jesus is, we might have to re-evaluate our faith. How can we worship someone who would look at this woman on her knees and say, "It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"?

I cannot make this an easy story, but I would like to draw your attention to three things:

First of all, the Gospel of Matthew is the most Jewish of the Gospels. The author wrote it for a church that had been primarily Jewish, but was becoming more and more Gentile. He had a concern for giving the Jews a Jewish Messiah—a Messiah who would put the Jews first. That comes across in this story, where Matthew has Jesus equate Jews to children and Gentiles to dogs. Jews first—that was the message.

Matthew didn't exclude Gentiles from God's plan—indeed, it is Matthew who records the Great Commission—"Go unto all nations"—at the end of this Gospel. But concern for Gentiles, in this Gospel—is reflected, for the most part, after Jesus' resurrection—not before. The story of this woman and her daughter comes earlier, at a time when Jesus is devoting himself to the Jews.

Second, the word that Jesus uses for dogs is a word for family pets. His language is not as harsh as it sounds at first. Jesus is saying that, in any family, children come first. Pets have their place, too, but children come first. It is a way of telling this woman that he has a responsibility now to Jews. Gentiles will get their chance—but not yet.

Third—and this is really important—is to notice how this story turns out. Jesus, on many occasions, gets into verbal jousting with some heavy hitters—scribes, Pharisees, rabbis. I cannot think of a single instance in which Jesus ever lost such a battle—except this one. Time after time, the brightest and the best come after Jesus with their toughest questions, testing Jesus, trying to trip him up—and time after time he sends them away with their tails between their legs.

That's the way that it always works—always—except for this time. This is the only time that anyone gets the best of Jesus. When Jesus says, "It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs," this Canaanite woman gets a gleam in her eye. She says, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table". And she has him! She has Jesus! She has bested him in an argument—the only time it ever happens—the only time that anyone beats Jesus.

And I think that Jesus was delighted to be beaten. Just notice how he responds. "Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire" (v. 28). Don't you hear the joy in those words—the exuberance! "Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire." Jesus loves it! Now he can help this woman! Matthew tells us, "And her daughter was healed from that hour!". Right away! Immediately!

I think that Jesus was just looking for an opening—an opportunity to reconcile his responsibility to the Jews and his love for this Gentile woman. He was looking for some way to help, and this woman gave it to him. "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." There it is—and Jesus is delighted! And this woman's daughter is healed right then. Instantly!

Jesus is looking for a way to help us too. We cannot claim to deserve his help. We have all sinned—we are all guilty (Romans 3:23). Jesus knows that we don't deserve his help—but he wants to help us anyway. That was what the cross was all about. Jesus went to the cross in our place. He wanted to help us!

And he still does! Today Jesus wants to help us—even though we don't deserve it! And this Canaanite woman—this pagan woman—shows us how to give Jesus an opening. In the midst of her terrible trouble—her daughter's torment—Jesus' apparent lack of concern—in the midst of all that, her faith in Jesus never wavered.

- "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David," she cried.
- "Lord, help me!" she begged.
- And then, when Jesus told her that the children had to come before the dogs, she said, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." She kept her faith even when the moment seemed darkest. She kept coming back to Jesus—asking—pleading—expecting Jesus to help.

I would like to tell you that, if you ask persistently in faith, that Jesus will always do for you what he did for this woman—answer your prayer exactly as you asked it. I cannot promise that. God doesn't always give us everything we want—any more than we parents give our child everything the child wants. God is not yet willing to turn over the steering wheel of the universe to any one of us—much less to all of us.

But I believe that Jesus loves us and wants to help us. He is just looking for a way—for an opening. Nothing delights Jesus more than to encounter faith in the midst of adversity—faith that keeps coming after taking a hard punch—because that's real faith. Everyone believes when things are going well. Only the most faithful believe when things are going badly. Jesus loves to encounter faith, because faith creates a way—and opening—a channel through which he can grant us his blessings.

I wish that everything would always go well for you, but it won't. Life has its ups, but it also has its downs. When life turns down for you, come to Jesus in faith—expectantly. Ask him for his blessing. And then stand back! See what Jesus will do.

-- That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

-- Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! -- For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

-- Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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