

Good morning, we're continuing our series in the gospel of Matthew and today we come to chapter 15 where Jesus is approached for help by a Canaanite woman.

This woman comes to Jesus and asks for help and Jesus seems cold, distant and even insulting towards her. He doesn't seem to respond in the way that perhaps, we think he should. And it's all a little disturbing.

You see the reality is that God **can** sometimes, dare I say it, confuse, disappoint and even frustrate us when he doesn't do what we think he should.

So Has God ever disappointed you?,
Has he ever seemed silent when you were looking for words?
Has he ever sat on his hands when you think he should be doing something?
Has he ever felt remote when you expected him to be close?

That's the key challenge of this passage

How do we approach God when the heavens seem silent,
That's what I want is to focus on:
how do we **approach** God when God isn't doing what we think he should!

So it would help me if you would you turn with me to Matthew Chapter 15 where we meet this Canaanite Woman who shows us how to connect with God even when (at first) it seems like a complete waste of time.

This woman shows us 3 things...
she understands her need for Jesus
she understands her place before him; and
she understands her value to him

If we want to connect with God,
if we want to develop a living relationship with Jesus
then this passage shows us that we need to understand:
our need – and that's not always easy
our place – and this IS controversial; and
our value – and that is crucial.

Our need, our place and our value – those are the navigation points for us this morning. So we begin on p982, Matthew Chapter 15 and we'll get straight into it.

1. This woman approached Jesus, understanding her Need - and that wouldn't have been easy for her.

v21 reads... "Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon and a Canaanite woman came to him"

In fact the parallel passage in Mark tells us, that Jesus had already entered a house not wanting anyone to know he was there, and a woman came to him.

Jesus has been spending all his time ministering in Israel
And so many people wanted to meet him,
so many people wanted a piece of him,
so many people wanted to see/talk/touch him
show him where it hurts, talk to him about their problems, and beg him for help that the strain was overwhelming.

So Jesus, exhausted, leaves Israel and enters **Gentile territory** to recover. No sooner had he got there than someone starts asking him for help.

David likened it to you or me being so exhausted from work that we take a break with our family and go to Butlins only to have the most annoying woman next door keep plaguing us with requests for help.

A Canaanite woman came to him

She hears about Jesus, she seeks him out (and Mark tells us with astonishing boldness) she goes into this private home and starts to beg.

Now she is a Canaanite Woman and she would have known that she had none of the moral or social or cultural credentials to approach a Jewish Rabbi.

She was a Gentile not Jew,

a Pagan not a worshipper of God,

She was a Woman not a Man,

a stranger not a friend,

And therefore she had no right to come to Jesus

Yet she gate-crashes this house and starts to beg.

She cries out *v22 "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

The tense here, in v22, is present continuous,

It means she **KEEPS** crying out, she doesn't stop - and Jesus says nothing

So she cries out again - and Jesus

v23 doesn't even say a word.

So she begs and begs and begs and begs.

Has anything like this ever happened to you?,

Perhaps someone asks you for money on the street or

someone stops you to answer a survey and for whatever reason you decide not to, but they start harassing you publically,

If it was me - I'd feel embarrassed and irritated and indignant all at once.

v23 Jesus' disciples came to Jesus and urged him,

"Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

They are embarrassed but she isn't !

She is not ashamed about barging in

She doesn't care what people think about her,

She isn't even put off when Jesus seems to ignore her

She just isn't going to stop.

Now why is she so bold?

Well the reason is found in

v22 "My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."

Now what that means doesn't matter for the moment.

What we know is that here is a parent whose child is in trouble.

There are "cowards", there are "heroes",

and then there are "parents whose children are in trouble! ☺"

There are "introvert", there are "extroverts"

and then there are "Parents whose children are in Trouble".

It seems to me that no matter what our temperament is like -

When our children are in trouble it makes Lions of us all.

If our child is going over a cliff then we will break every "rule of etiquette and custom" in the book to catch them.

That's what is going on here.

This is a desperate mother breaking-in on Jesus
it's not surprising that she ignores the stares,
or begins to plead without stopping

1. She knows her need
2. She believes Jesus can meet that need; and
3. She isn't going to take "no" for an answer

Contrast that to today.

We live in a culture today where many people know they have needs and yet they don't recognise that the answer to those needs is found in Jesus.

We know we have needs:

We need happiness (because life can be such a desperate slog sometimes)

We need purpose (because we want to know "what life is all about")

We need security (especially when facing tragedy)

We need love

We need to belong, to have hope, to be at peace

We all have needs

it's just that so many people wouldn't even dream of turning to Jesus for the answers.

And yet Jesus says

"Come to me, all who are thirsty and I will satisfy you",

"Come to me, all who are burdened and I will give you rest",

"Come to me all who are lost because I am the way"

We all have needs and God says: they are met in knowing Jesus.

That is the promise of God to you this morning.

You have needs they are met in Jesus.

This woman knew that, and

She wasn't going to let anything prevent her from connecting with him.

What would have happened?

if she gave up when the door was closed in her face, or

if she walked away when he didn't respond, or

If she got embarrassed by the unfriendly stares?

→ She would never have found what she was looking for.

If you want to find God,

If you want to find life

If you want to find transforming love

if you want to know why you were made, what your purpose is and what eternity holds for you
the first question is "how much" – "how much do you want to find it".

Because if it just a passing interest, a mere piece of intellectual curiosity, something to satisfy some theoretical questions

then you'll likely never find it.

You have to want it!

You have to want it

not to be put off by a church full of strangers,
with odd singing and confusing sermons!

You have to want it
enough to put up with the odd stares from your friends
when you say “I believe in God”

You have to want it, to really want it
WHY?

Because it is worth more than all the gold in the world
Because it is more precious than your career, your house, your home, your friends, your life
And unless you see it that way you’ll never appreciate what you’ve got.
What is in front of your very nose!

Unless you realise that God really is that important –
you will never allow him to make any impact in your life.

Unless you really want God – you will never make him God!

If you can take it or leave it – If you can take God or leave God
then you will probably never bother to really find him
and if you do you will never really make him God anyway

If, in reality, you see God as simply “a nice to have” in your life –
you’ll never really **know** him or **find** him
Because God can be many things “but optional” or “a nice to have”
is not one of them because he is God!

God says “if you seek, you will find, when you search for me with all your heart”.
If you want to find God, if you want to connect with Jesus then you need to know your need.

Firstly, this woman did - and it was a start
2. Secondly, (controversially) she ALSO knew her place!
Because after ignoring her in v23, Jesus says in
v24 "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

At which point rather than backing off and giving up
Matthew tells us she comes even closer, and kneels before him, and simply says:
v25 "Lord, help me!"

And Jesus replies
v26 "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."
Now listen, this has every possibility of being seen as an insult.

*We live in a society that generally loves dogs –
The British are famous for their love of pets.
My Sasha is beautiful! ...*

*We even make jokes about them.
“A dog with three legs walks into a Wild West bar and says,
“I’m looking for the man who shot my Paw”.*
We love our dogs.

But that wasn’t true in Jesus’ time.
Dogs in Jesus’ time were wild scavengers, dirty and “unclean”.
And therefore to call someone a dog would have been a terrible insult.

Look up all the references “to dog” in the Bible and it is always used negatively.

So 'dog' is not good. ☺

So is this an insult?

Well it could have been taken that way.
But look more carefully,
and *listen* more carefully,
and you'll see what is really going on here:

Firstly, Jesus uses a very unusual word for "dog",
the Bible doesn't ever use this word – if you to find it in contemporary literature...
It is the word for "puppy",
"Puppy" the sort of life-long friend of little children
Now don't mistake me, this woman could easily have taken offence,
- but Jesus is being deliberately **ambiguous**.

Secondly, In Mark 7 - Jesus doesn't say "no" to the woman – He says "first".
"First let me feed the children"
He doesn't shut the door, he leaves it ajar
And this is really important to see.

He is saying "hang on" you need to understand something here.
There is an order here - my ministry is not firstly to you.

We already know that Jesus never ministered outside Israel.
He didn't go to Greece or Rome or Babylon.
And the reason is because
He was fulfilling all of God's Promises to Israel
He was fulfilling their Priestly tradition, their Temple sacrifices and their Prophecies

Jesus' mission was crucially focussed on Israel
and to fail in his mission,
to be side-tracked,
would be catastrophic not only for Israel but also for the entire world.

So is this a brush off?
No - the door is open, there is a chink of light,
he says "first", uses the imagery of "puppy"
Will this woman see it?
You bet she does!

And she comes back with one of the most profound answers in all scripture.
She says "BUT, the puppies eat too?!!",
"the puppies eat from the same table too, you know".
"And all I need is a crumb".

She says "I get you, I'm not supposed to be at this table",
I understand: "You don't owe me anything. I accept it".
I have "no rights to your love, I AM nothing to you by right!"
But all I need is a crumb!

Isn't this amazing?!
She doesn't get her back up,
She doesn't mount her high horse,
She doesn't take the hump,
She doesn't say "Who are you to call me a dog!?".

She says

- “Jesus, there is more than enough food on this table to feed the entire world, and I would like a crumb”
- “there is more than enough grace in your heart for the whole world, and I’d just like a tiny piece of it”
- “I know who I am before you”.

We live in a world where the phrase “know your place” is likely to upset more than just a few we are used to **equality.**

we are told by the media, “we can, because we’re worth it”

we are quick to complain “when it isn’t fair”

we are used to demanding our “rights”.

Yet if we take this approach to God it destroys any hope we have of finding him.

This woman *could have* taken offence,

she *could have* been quick to argue,

she could have been quick to misjudge Jesus’ words.

If she had, she would never have found what she needed.

But she doesn’t, she accepts her place and in so doing she finds everything she wants and more.

We cannot stand before God demanding our rights,

pointing to **our** perfect moral record,

believing that HE owes us something.

We can’t come to Jesus thinking we’re doing him any favours by coming to him, believing in him, or following him...

Because He owes us nothing.

And isn’t *that* controversial?

Many people will say “well, if that’s what he’s like then leave me out”.

But hang on,

let’s just grab a piece of reality here

If God IS God then in comparison

we are but dust,

we are inconsequentially small

on a cosmic scale we are invisible,

we **are** dogs (in fact we are less than dogs we **are** microbes)

But Jesus says we are puppies

loved members of God’s house, life-long companions, and even more and even better!

Children of God

Do you see?

The door is ajar!

Firstly, we need to know our need

Secondly, we need to humble our hearts and say

“Jesus, there is enough Grace on this table to feed the entire world, and I would like a crumb”

Do you see, do you get it?...

She approached Jesus knowing her need,

She knew her place

3. Finally, she knew her value before him – and this is amazingly special.

v28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."

You see not only does this woman **not** take offense

She **also** realises that Jesus is **not** treating her like a door-mat either

She could have taken offense because of her pride

OR ,

She could also have become **discouraged** because she felt unworthy

... she does neither!

She could have said:

“how dare you”

She could have said

“You’re right, I don’t deserve anything”,

“I am sorry to have bothered you”,

“It was crazy of me to think that you would have had time for me”.

“I can see you’re busy”

“I am not the sort of person you should be concerned about”

She did **neither**...

You see, to think “that we are so awful that God couldn’t possibly be bothered about us”

is just as **self-absorbed** and just as **self-centred** as thinking

“God you owe me, and I can do you a favour by following you”.

It could have gone either way:

She could have got on her high horse and said “how dare you speak to me like that” - OR

She could have “gone to the bottom of the garden to eat worms”

But what she does, is she asks for God’s grace and she doesn’t take “no” for an answer! That’s great!

John Newton, a caring Pastor wrote a letter to man who was overwhelmed with a sense of worthlessness, He said “You keep saying that you cannot see how a Holy God could ever accept such an awful person as yourself.

By doing so you not only express a low opinion of yourself which is right,

but you also express a low opinion of the person, work and promises of Jesus which is wrong.

You complain about sin,

but when I look at your complaints they are full of unbelief in God’s grace and full of impatience with yourself.

*My friend, God’s grace is vaster than you imagine, and it is **perverse** to be more impatient with yourself than God is.*

It is just as much a rejection of the love of God to refuse to seek him because we feel **unworthy**

as to refuse to seek him because we think he owes us a favour!

This woman says

“I am not coming to you on the basis of my goodness, I am coming to you on the basis of yours”

“I am not coming to you on the basis of what I can do for myself – but on the basis of what you can do for me”,

“I am not coming to you because I think I am valuable, but because you think I am valuable”!

And just a little bit of your grace is all I need!

And Jesus says v28 “wonderful answer!”, “Incredible answer”,

“for such an answer, for such an insight, for such an attitude - all the blessing you want is yours”

This woman has a lot to teach us.

Are you willing to search for God with all your heart?

The unpopular truth is that: if we will not search this way then we will not find God.

Are you willing to keep searching even if it doesn’t seem that he wants to answer?

Are you willing to humble yourself and say I know I don't deserve your grace but I am going to ask and ask and ask anyway?

Are you willing to believe that the promises of God apply to you – that even though you by no means deserve his love yet he has given it to you freely, abundantly, generously?

This woman has a lot to teach us

Jesus is the first answer to all our needs;

if you looking for happiness you'll find it in Jesus

for meaning, for a reason, for value – all in Jesus

There are a 101 distractions in finding Jesus → pursue him

But pursue him humbly, lay yourself down before him

And as you do, you'll release how precious you are to him

Because he never let the 101 things that this world threw at him distract him from you

he never let the mocking, or the insults, or the cold stares, or the cruel nails or the hard cross put him off finding you

he never flinched from laying himself down, humbling himself, counting himself as nothing in order to show you your value.

Jesus asks you to do nothing that he has not already, utterly, done for you.

So that if you will copy him he will meet all your needs!