

# The Syrophenician Woman

**Introduction.** Jesus had taken His disciples across the northern border of Israel into the coast of Tyre and Sidon. From what is recorded, this is the only time Jesus went outside the borders of Palestine, except when He was carried into Egypt as an infant.

Jesus probably wanted to rest a while and teach His disciples privately (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). Also, the hostility of the Jews was becoming more intense. Prior to this, Jesus had told the Pharisees that they voided the word of God with their traditions. They were greatly offended by His words and He may have wanted to leave for a while for the time of His death was not yet near.

It was during this time that a certain woman makes a plea to Jesus and, as a result, receives a great blessing. The Bible has much to say about faith and there are some very good reasons to admire this woman, and great lessons to apply to our faith.

## ***I. We Admire Her Respect For The Lord***

- A. This Syrophenician woman, no doubt, had heard of the mighty works of Jesus and she was determined to obtain help from Him. Demon possession in that day was a terrible affliction, to say the least (Mark 9:14-29).
- B. Showing her respect, she plead for mercy, addressing Jesus as “Lord, thou Son of David” (Matthew 15:22), and she knelt before Him (Matthew 15:25).
  1. The Greek word for “kneel” means literally “to prostrate oneself in homage,” and is often translated “worship” in the New Testament.
  2. Mark’s account, using different words, says, “She came and fell at His feet” (Mark 7:25).

## ***II. We Admire Her Faith***

- A. The Canaanite woman started with at least three strikes against her.
  1. She was Greek or a Gentile (Mark 7:26). She was not a part of God’s covenant people.
  2. She was a Syrophenician (Mark 7:26). This meant she was a Syrian from the region of Phoenicia. In the latter days of ancient Israel, before the Babylonian captivity, the people in the region of Tyre and Sidon became bitter enemies of Israel.
  3. She was a woman of Canaan (Matthew 15:22).
    - a) When the people of Israel conquered the land of Canaan, God commanded them to utterly destroy the Canaanites.
    - b) The Israelites disobeyed, and eventually the pagan influences they tolerated were their downfall.
    - c) By Jesus’ day, the Jews had learned their lesson and had no contact at all with the Canaanites.
- B. When she came to Jesus, she was thrown three more strikes.
  1. At first, Jesus ignored her (Matthew 15:23).
    - a) Here was the gracious helper and healer, renown for His compassion and power, not answering her at all.
    - b) He did this, not to keep her away, but to test her faith and thereby draw her closer to Him (cp. Matthew 19:16-22).

2. Second, the disciples were irritated by her persistence and wanted Jesus to send her away: “Send her away; for she crieth after us” (Matthew 15:23).
  - a) There was more mercy in Jesus’ refusal than in their request. They were seeking relief from personal embarrassment and discomfort; He was testing her faith in order to save her soul, as well as heal her daughter.
  - b) Jesus tells them that He was sent to Israel. He said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). What a heart-rending scene this must have been for her!
3. In the third strike, Jesus tells her, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs” (Matthew 15:26).
  - a) The “children” refers to the Jews (Matthew 8:12), and the “little dogs” represent the Gentiles.
  - b) Again, Jesus was testing her. The Jews considered the Gentiles no better than dogs, and He is seeing how she would react to these prejudices.
- C. Jesus placed one obstacle after another in front of her, but she promptly, in spite of these barriers, surmounted them all with a great statement of faith: “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.”
  1. She was keeping her place. She wanted, not the first portion (the children’s portion), but a leftover portion (the crumbs which fall from the master’s table).
  2. She demonstrated a complete absence of the pride, self-reliance, and self-righteousness that characterized most Jews. She was willing to settle for the crumbs because that would be enough to meet her needs.
  3. What is discouraging to some is not discouraging to the strong. Great faith does not give up; it is not weakened by obstacles or setbacks. Be numbered with the strong, and do not be discouraged when living for Christ causes heartaches (Ephesians 6:10).
  4. After the irreverent treatment of the Lord by the scribes and Pharisees — who called Him a drunkard, a companion of sinners, and demon-possessed — it must have been refreshing for Jesus to hear this Gentile woman come to Him with such respect and submission.

### ***III. We Rejoice As She Receives Her Request***

- A. She who had heard only the words of contempt now hears words of gracious commendation: “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.”
  1. This is another of the “long distance” healings of Jesus (Mark 7:29-30; cp. John 4:43-54).
  2. This was representative of His enormous power, and proved Him to be the Son of God.
- B. She was the second Gentile to obtain a blessing because of “great faith” (cp. Matthew 8:5-10; Luke 7:9).
  1. The woman’s faith was not greater than the faith of many Jews at the time but it was great because it was based on so little light. She turned her back on her idols and placed her faith in the Son of David.
  2. The prophets declared that the Messiah would bless, not only the Jewish nation, but all nations of the earth (Matthew 12:18-21; John 10:16; Romans 15:9-12).

#### ***IV. Lessons To Be Learned From This Miracle***

##### **A. Respect for the Lord.**

1. He is the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the King of Kings, and Lord of lords (Isaiah 9:6; Revelation 19:16).
2. Therefore, everyone should have awesome respect for God and His word (Deuteronomy 5:29; Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7; 13:13).

##### **B. Humility.**

1. Humility is the personal quality of being free from arrogance and pride and having an accurate estimate of one's worth.
2. Take the lower seat and be content to be abased (Proverbs 27:2; Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14).

##### **C. Persistence.**

1. Consider again the obstacles the woman faced: the silence of Jesus, the rejection of the disciples, and the negativity of Jesus.
2. But none of this discouraged her or caused her to leave (cp. Luke 13:24; 16:16). God yields to the power of faith and prayer (Luke 18:1; James 1:5-7).

##### **D. Faith tested is a richer faith.**

1. Jesus could at once have given her what she wanted but He pushed her.
2. She left with a fuller and richer faith in the end (Job 13:15; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

##### **E. Blessings flow bountifully from the Lord.**

1. The blessings of the gospel are for both Jew and Gentile (Romans 1:16).
2. There is a fountain open for all (Zechariah 13:1; John 4:14).

**Conclusion.** In Jeremiah 29:13, God declares, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Seek the Lord in faith, humility, wholeheartedness, and with complete obedience (Matthew 7:7). When we do this, blessings will flow from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).