

²¹ When Jesus left there, he withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon. ²² Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came and kept crying out,^[a] “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely tormented by a demon.”

²³ Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples approached him and urged him, “Send her away because she’s crying out after us.”

²⁴ He replied, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

²⁵ But she came, knelt before him, and said, “Lord, help me!”

²⁶ He answered, “It isn’t right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she said, “yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus replied to her, “Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want.” And from that moment^[b] her daughter was healed.

Does God Want Everybody?

In our nation we believe that you can be all you can be. Our founding fathers stated that all are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, which among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Everyone is entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We are all equal but we are all different. That means we are not all equally gifted. None of you have same talents and abilities as the person sitting next to you. It’s because of this truth that the Military does not want just anybody who comes walking through their door. There are height and weight requirements, physical requirements, as well as education requirements. There are certain standards for those who may or may not serve as a soldier in our country.

So what about in God’s army? Does God really want everyone? Certainly God would only want mountains of piety, solid people that can be imitated and emulated. The best of the best and that’s how we often look at the characters in scripture. They’re different with different gifts and abilities but upon closer examination, they’re far from perfect. God would have every reason to reject these recruits but he doesn’t. So Does God Really Want Everyone?

The Pharisees for example exemplified obedience to the law. They did it all right. The disciples on the other hand can’t even seem to wash their hands before a meal. Earlier in chapter 15 the Pharisees question their standards, “Why do your disciples break tradition? Why don’t your disciples wash their hands before they eat?” They are looking for a fight because Jesus was constantly telling them, “You aren’t good enough.” Jesus didn’t immediately enlist them, telling them what wonderful soldiers they would make. Jesus is not impressed with them. He went after fishermen. If Jesus wants everybody as a soldier why wouldn’t he enlist the super-saints, the Pharisees? If they don’t meet up with the Jesus standards who can?

There is an obvious need to equip and prepare them in their journey with Jesus. It sure seems as if they are not yet fit for service in any branch of God’s kingdom. So they head off to boot camp, to Tyre and Sidon, 50 miles outside of Jewish territory. This is quite possibly the furthest away Jesus journeys from the nation of Israel. He crossed the lines into “their” territory.

Just then someone steps toward Jesus who no self-respecting Jew would acknowledge: a woman, let alone a Canaanite woman came to him. And already she has two strikes against her. First she is a woman and second she is a Canaanite. No Rabbi would ever be caught talking to a woman in public. Not only was she despised as a woman but she was a Canaanite: the ancient and idolatrous enemy of God’s people. She was part of the people Israel was

sent to dispossess and destroy as they entered the Promised Land. Certainly if anyone was unfit for service in God's army, it was her.

Before we get to strike three pay attention to these words, especially if you have a daughter. How would you react? She cries out repeatedly, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession." Jesus didn't say a single thing. But she follows them around repeatedly crying out, "Kyrie Eleison... Kyrie Eleison ... Kyrie Eleison." Strike three – She's annoying. The disciples continue with their repeated refrain, "Apolyson (at the 5,000) ... Apolyson (send her away)." Give her what she wants and get rid of her. Jesus does not give her what she wants instead it seems as if he turns up his nose and answers his disciples, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." I'm not for everybody. I'm not here for her. Jesus sounds like a Pharisee and this after his discussion with his disciples of what makes a person clean or unclean earlier in chapter 15.

Unfazed, she jumps in front of Jesus and falls before him blocking his path desperately sobbing, "Lord, help me." She reduces her request to one word, "Help." And Jesus steps over her finally speaking to her, "It's not right for me to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." I'm not here for you, dog. I'm not here for your little dog either. This is strong, racially loaded language. Jesus used a phrase she would have understood far too well. Ignoring and neglecting her is one thing but then to insult her with such language only adds to it. Are you comfortable with this?

Are you confused by any of this? "Today we learn that Jesus can be a jerk, that rudeness is clearly acceptable when people are not like me. That Jesus isn't for everybody." Those of you who have daughters, how would you react? Do you try to defend Jesus and say, "He called her a little dog, so that's like saying she's a cute puppy and somehow different from a big dog? No that's just foolish. Or do you allow Jesus to teach? Jesus does not want us to be comfortable with his actions. He does not want us to be comfortable holding the same values as the Pharisees because this is where their theology leads.

How often haven't we just thought, "Send them away!"? They aren't as good as us: the murderers, homosexuals, violent offenders, undocumented workers, communists, democrats, conservative, and those with different political views. We too act like snobby Pharisees and uneducated disciples when we say things like, "God helps those who help themselves. Send them away." When such filth is spewed from ones mouth our little Pharisee speaks, "You're pedigree does not match my standards. You are a mutt. You are an unfit soldier too fat, too stupid, and far too 'unclean' by our standards for God's kingdom."

There are times when we are just like Jesus' disciples and their Pharisaical thought when we believe we understand the standards of God. We say we are justified by faith, saved by faith, without any effort on our own. You and I confess every Sunday, "We are poor, miserable sinners." But when a poor miserable sinner walks in these doors we are somehow better sinners. They need to clean up their act. They need to keep their children quiet and disciplined like I did. When another sinner calls us on our sin we become defensive and self-justifying, "How dare you call me a sinner!" How dare you tell me I need to be in church every week! When God treats us like the sinners, "How dare you ignore my prayers! How dare you turn your face from me? How dare he close his hand of blessing? I'm his child. I'm entitled to his grace. I'm a good person. I've been a lifelong Lutheran. I'm not a dog like the rest. I'm clean.

Jesus is trying to show his disciples that God's standards are different than theirs. Jesus was trying to remove this thought of "clean" vs "unclean." This thought that you are somehow better than those out there because you've "cleaned up" your act. In a sense Jesus says with his actions, "You think Gentiles are dogs and you want me to treat them as such! Pay attention because this is where your standards lead. Are you comfortable with this?" What Jesus does with this woman may seem harsh but he is team teaching with her, and not only that but refining her faith and building her up, setting her up as an example for generations.

It is that important to realize what makes one worthy. The children sitting at God's table were throwing away their bread. They had the whole loaf sitting there before them: The law, the prophets, the temple, the promises (Romans 9:4). But in their stubborn pride they were throwing it all away assuming, "We've met the standards. God owes us." They were throwing away God's grace in favor of their whitewashed works. So, Jesus left them and traveled to a distant land, to people who were not sitting at God's table, who did not have the law, the prophets, or the promises. This woman was not privileged. She was not from a fine pedigree. She was a foreigner. She had a devil-plagued daughter. What she did have were crumbs. At some point in her life a crumb had fallen at her feet. She called Jesus, "Lord." Only a disciple ever called Jesus, "Lord." She even uses a lesser known Messianic title, "Son of David." She held on to those crumbs as her only hope for salvation.

What did the disciples learn from this woman? Humility, mercy, persistence in prayer, faith, as she continues holding on to God no matter what the circumstances. No matter how badly her God appears to treat her, she confesses one word, "Mercy," because she knows God owes her nothing. She comes as a beggar in search of crumbs. She accepts the title of a "dog." Yes, Lord, I am a dog, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table. She is not contradicting Jesus. She is not trying to outwit Jesus in a game of words. She is agreeing to the point, knowing that she is unworthy of such grace and mercy but she still holds on to the grace and mercy of God. She waits for the little crumbs. She's aced this test. She's met God's standards and still stands as an example of faith for all of us. Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Matthew has taken us from the little faith of the great disciple Peter to the great faith of the little outcast Canaanite woman in an unclean place. We see our Savior who does not restrict his love based on gender, race, nationality, political, social standing, or even past sin. Christ came for sinners, all of them, and there are plenty of leftovers. Do you think they got the lesson?

How about us? God has taken us through boot camp so we can see his standards. It doesn't matter who you are, how bad life has been, or what you've done. God wants you. There is room for the enemies of God's people even little dogs. Your pedigree doesn't matter. What the world thinks of you doesn't matter. It's about God's standards and what he thinks of you. He looks down at the dogs and he sees his Son who gave up his life to bring them the gospel.

When he sees spoiled brats throwing their food away, those who feel entitled to God's grace, he sent his son. He says forgiven. There is forgiveness for neglecting God's Word and for taking your place at God's table for granted. Like this Canaanite woman we are not of fine pedigree. We are all foreigners in the Kingdom of God. We wait for the crumbs to fall. God owes us nothing. But God gives us everything as unworthy guests he invites us to his table to receive forgiveness. You meet his standards because of Christ. And that means we can share his mercy with others. We love as he first loved us. We share the crumbs that have come into our life.

You are all equal but you are all different. You may not meet the military requirements but you still meet God's standards. You are all equally poor miserable sinners but all are equally given God's grace and mercy. Reach out to those unfit to be a soldier in God's kingdom, throw some crumbs in their direction and remember your place as unworthy guests at his table. Amen.