

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician Woman

SERIES: Jesus and Women

SCRIPTURES: Matthew 15:21-28

SPEAKER: Shaun Kipe & Darlyss Kipe

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**Credit to Ken Bailey & John Ortberg for insights/stories related to this sermon.*

SHAUN: Well good morning, it's so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you in this room and many gathered on-line, at home, tuning to the live stream.

Today is an extremely special day. Today is Mother's Day. And it's an extra-special Mother's Day for me. I am honored this morning, to have my mom, Darlyss, teaching with me. My mom is one of the kindest, most gentle, most forgiving, gracious and merciful people you will ever meet. And so mom, since I've just announced publicly how forgiving and merciful you are...I thought I'd just like to begin this morning by starting off making a few confessions going back to my childhood. You remember how the toilet seat was always left up? You remember how the dirty dishes never ended up in the sink? You remember how the empty milk container kept showing up back in fridge? And you remember the big dent that mysteriously appeared on the front fender of your van? Well I just wanted to confess publicly about those things this morning.

MOM: Well, thank you Shaun for your honest confessions this morning. And that actually reminds me of one my favorite passages in Bible in [Deuteronomy 21](#) - **¹⁸ If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his mother...¹⁹ his mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. ²¹ Then all the men of his town are to stone him... You must purge the evil from among you.**

SHAUN: Haha...very funny. On second thought, I blame all those things on my younger brother Nick.

Last week we started this series called Jesus and women. One of the more outstanding features of the Gospel stories is the way in which Jesus included women in his band of followers.

So we're taking a few weeks to look at several encounters Jesus had with women and what they have to teach us about following Jesus.

MOM: This morning we're going to be looking at the story of

I. Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician Woman.

If you have a Bible turn with us to [Matthew 15:21-28](#).

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

²² A Canaanite woman came to Jesus, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

Now pause here for just a moment as we set the stage for the significance of this encounter. In this culture and at this time, this woman had two strikes against her.

First of all, she was a woman and Jesus was a man. Remember the quote that Shaun shared last week:

the Sages have said: He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Law and at the last will inherit Gehenna (M. Aboth, 1.5, Danby 446). (Ken Bailey)

This woman should not be talking to Jesus. Many of you know that our family lived in Zambia for 12 years. We lived on the campus of a high school, Choma Secondary School. Culturally, in situations where the man did not love his wife like Christ, women were the 'pack animals'. Carrying the heavier load while the man walked along with just his walking stick (**WOMAN Carrying heavy items**). The man had all the authority to demand what he wanted in the relationship and the woman was just supposed to obey. As I said, we lived on the campus of a secondary (high) school. The female students told us that they were not allowed to say 'no' to the male teachers' sexual advances. Many times when a female

student became pregnant and was kicked out of school, the men were not implicated so did not have to deal with the consequences.

Secondly, we are told that she is from the region of Tyre/Sidon. Two Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast. In other words, she is a gentile foreigner.

The Jewish Historian Josephus writing around this time wrote that **“the people of Tyre are our bitterest enemies...”**

In other words, this woman would have been regarded by the disciples as a member of the most spiritually degraded people the disciples could think of.

SHAUN: A woman comes asking for help...

²³ Jesus did not answer a word.

He totally ignores the woman. Silence.

There is a certain reality about life in this verse, isn't there? **Silence in the face of suffering can be deafening.** A woman, in pain and distress comes to Jesus for help and healing and she receives only silence.

You have felt this pain before...A parent or a spouse walks out. The doctor says it is cancer. A child chooses a destructive path in life. A young man needlessly takes his own life.

And you cry out to God...and He does not answer a word. The silence is deafening. How do we respond? We'll come back to this.

So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

It always sort of made me chuckle, the disciples' response. They say, “she keeps crying out after us.” The “us” is a little grandiose. The woman hasn't said anything to the disciples. She was crying out to Jesus.

“We came up to Tyre and Sidon for a little R&R and now people won’t leave us alone. This woman is bothering us Jesus, so you send her away.”

The disciples have done this before. Remember when the little children come to Jesus? What did the disciples do then? They rebuked them. The disciples thought they were pretty clear on the kinds of people Jesus did and did not hang out with.

MOM: Perhaps more stunning, though, is Jesus' response. At first he appears to ignore the woman and then look at what he says in verse 24...

24 “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

In other words, I came for the Jews, not gentiles.

Now, why does Jesus say this? At other places he’s made clear he’s come for the whole world? What is going on in this story?

I will tell you that this story was never a favorite of mine because I always felt like Jesus was aloof and unkind to the woman so when Shaun said that on Mother’s Day he wanted us to preach from this passage I was a little hesitant.

This story is often viewed as a troubling embarrassment. A sincere foreign woman seeks help Jesus. At first he ignores her. He then appears to exhibit racism and insensitivity to her suffering as he insults her in public. (Bailey 217)

And if this bothers you...it should. That is actually the purpose of this story.

You see, according to scholar Ken Bailey, the key to understanding this story...is that this encounter is to be viewed as a **test scenario**. Jesus is giving a test to his Disciples **and** Jesus is testing the Canaanite woman at the same time.

Jesus did this regularly with his disciples. Walter Wink calls this kind of testing **“deliberately induced frustration.”** Rather than just giving his disciples information, Jesus places them into experiences that force them to learn and practice his teachings. Have you ever experienced deliberately induced frustration? Do you remember learning to

ride a bike. For the longest time you rode with training wheels, but to eventually learn you had to take those wheels off. And ride and fall and ride and fall.

Deliberately induced frustration is a powerful teaching tool for a Master Teacher. And that's exactly what is going on in this story.

SHAUN:

A. Jesus is testing his disciples.

Jesus is testing **the prejudice** in the hearts of his disciples. The disciples have been following Jesus for some time now. And the question is, are they catching on? Are they starting to understand and notice the inclusive nature of Jesus Kingdom for all people...for Jews, Gentiles, men, women, slave, free, rich, poor, etc.

Jesus wants to know if any of his disciples will stand up for a Canaanite woman in need.

The disciples fail their test miserably...they say, "*Send her away. She's bothering us.*"

I believe there is a powerful lesson for us as well. **Prejudices must be exposed.**

Prejudice simply means to pre-judge. It's the assumptions we make about others based on their Age, gender, race, religion, affiliation....and often we do this without realizing it.

That's what's going on for the disciples.

The disciples saw this woman through the eyes of their cultural prejudice...a gentile and a female...therefore send her away. And Jesus wants it exposed.

Think about it like this...imagine for a moment, a remote island (**PIC OF ISLAND IN COLOR**), where everyone is afflicted with an eye disease that affects the way they see the world...just say, the eye disease tints everything red (**PIC OF SAME ISLAND BUT TINTED RED**). Everyone living on that island would begin to assume that the world is tinted red. That's just the way it is. Their assumption may be so strong in fact, they would never even question or discuss the red tint. (Camp pg. 20)

Prejudice is like that red tint. It's how we see people without realizing how we see people. I'm not aware of the assumptions I am making.

So we're just gonna do a little thought experiment this morning. We're gonna put some words up on the screen, we want you to pause and think for a moment about what assumptions immediately come to your mind.

New York Yankees, Millennials, Wage Gap, Muslim, Republican/Democrat, BLM, LGBTQ

For each one of those words/images, I find myself and I think it's not just me, don't you...immediately begin to make assumptions about that group of people?

MOM:

The disciples' prejudice towards the "gentile woman", did not allow them to see her, as a mother, in desperate need of help, whose child was suffering greatly. Our prejudices do the same thing in our lives. We fail to see other people as human beings. Rather than seeing their suffering, we dehumanize, even demonize them.

Jesus is forcing his disciples to come face to face with the grotesque reality of their prejudice...he does this by **giving voice** to what is really going on in their hearts! Jesus states out loud the thoughts and feelings of his narrow-minded disciples and that's what makes us uncomfortable.

It's one thing to have contempt about someone quietly in your heart, behind their back, but it's another to have it spoken out loud. Imagine if what was truly going on in your heart, your prejudice, was spoken out loud.

We need to realize and own that one of the most challenging realities of choosing to walk with Jesus is that he will force us, you and me, to come face to face with our own prejudices.

We are part of a community of people, started by Jesus that leaves no room for prejudice. Our job as followers of Jesus does not include deciding who is and who isn't worthy of Jesus' love, and therefore, our love, acceptance, and caring. I would like to read you what I think is a very powerful declaration from our own BIC statement of faith related to racial prejudice...

Racism urges us to forget that all persons are created equal in God's image. It is a denial of our God-given personhood. It is contrary to the intent of God in creation and is contrary to the Kingdom of God that has come in the person of Jesus. We denounce individual, communal, corporate, and systemic beliefs or practices that foster, promote, or facilitate racial injustice and benefit some while burdening others simply due to the color of their skin or their race. In our congregations and communities, we want to be known as Jesus-followers who listen, learn, and love those who are most impacted by racism and often feel unheard, uncared for, and unloved.

What prejudices do you, do I, need to call out...what would Jesus give voice to in your life, in mine that would put us to shame?

SHAUN:

Second...

B. Jesus is testing the Canaanite Woman.

Ken Bailey says that her test is the test of perseverance. Remember she has cried out to Jesus for help and first got only silence and then insult. How will she respond? Let's see how the woman does...

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

Even through Jesus' silence and then his comment about coming only for Israel. She perseveres.

So Jesus goes one step further. Deep down, he is probably impressed with her level of courage so far. So he raises the level of the test...

²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Children being Israel and dogs being everyone else, like Canaanite women.

Now, you should know calling someone a dog in ancient Israel was not a term of endearment.

“The language Jesus uses is very strong. Dogs in the Middle Eastern traditional culture, Jewish and non-Jewish, are almost as despised as pigs.” (Bailey 224)

And again, I'll reiterate, if this bothers you, it should. That's part of Jesus teaching for his disciples. He's trying to help the disciples face the disgusting nature of their prejudice toward the woman. He gives voice to their prejudice once again. “Gentiles are like dogs.” It's also important to note that while Jesus is using some strong language, at the same time he softens the language a bit for the woman. In the ancient language there were two words for dog. Jesus uses the diminutive form of the word...meaning **“a little doggie....a doggette”**. Kind of like saying “puppy” rather than straight up calling here a **full fledged dog**.

Just see if I can help you picture the difference...John Ortberg says, picture it like this... Imagine, there's a little wimpy guy at a coffee shop and he leaves his little wimpy puppy outside. Say it's a miniature poodle. Then a huge heavily tattooed biker dude walks in. Eyes the guy at the bar and tells him. You might want to go out and check on that little excuse for a puppy you left outside cause I left my German Shepherd out there and I don't know that you'll have much puppy left. The little guy goes out, comes back in and says to the biker,

“I don't know how to tell you this, but my puppy just killed your dog.” “No way. How?” “He got stuck in his throat!” (Ortberg)

The point is Jesus uses the word dog, to give voice to the Disciples prejudice. But he softens it just a touch, by using “puppy/doggette”, for the woman.

MOM: And in this moment she has reached the most demanding stage of the test. Insulted by Jesus. Will she run away? She could. She could decide this is not worth the effort. Give up and walk away. Will she insult him back? “Who do you think you are?” Or is her love for her daughter so deep, is her trust in the compassion and power of Jesus so strong...

She replies, **“Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.”**

In fact, Bailey says that in her response, in the language she uses, it is like she is sparing with Jesus.

She picks up on the diminutive form of the word dog that Jesus has used and adds it to the word crumb...like she's saying **“Even doggettes eat the crumbettes that fall from the table.”**

She will take his punches and throw them right back. It's like she's saying to Jesus. “Is that the best you got?” She has a level of unmatched determination and perseverance. She is saying, *“I'm not going anywhere Jesus, because I know that you are Lord and master and that your compassion extends to all. And I bet you have a crumb for me. And even if it's only a crumb, I'll take it.”*

And at this Jesus turns to the woman...with this most shocking line...

28 Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

She has passed the test. It turns out, this broken Canaanite woman is the hero of faith and the disciples are the amateurs who should be watching and taking notes from her. The disciples, they failed the test. They had walked with Jesus all that time and still didn't get it...about the love and compassion Jesus came to share with the hurting world. But here in front of us is a woman of great faith, Jesus essentially says to his disciples, “Notice her. Learn from her. She is the teacher here.”

SHAUN:

What a phenomenal encounter. We just want to close by highlighting a few markers of...

II. Great Faith

1. Perseverance

Great faith is marked by perseverance. You are going through something and you don't see light at the end of the tunnel. And worst of all you pray, and cry out and God seems far away, distant. The silence is deafening. And you don't know if it will end.

C. S. Lewis the great Christian theologian did not marry until late in his life. And when he finally did find the love of his life it was a short-lived relationship. His wife died slowly and painfully of cancer shortly after they were married. And it prompted Lewis to write these words:

When you are happy, so happy you have no sense of needing God, so happy you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be— or so it feels— welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become.... What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?

Time and time again, as followers of Jesus we are challenged with the hard realities of life and we don't understand and we are faced with a choice, hang in there and come back again or give up and walk away.

And this Canaanite woman showed grit and toughness and determination in the face of the suffering of life.

Great faith is marked by perseverance. It hangs in there. It holds on when things get tough. When things don't make sense.

MOM:

2. Love

Second, great faith is marked by love.

There are few loves more powerful than a mother's love for her children.

Frederick Douglass (**PIC OF DOUGLASS**) was an abolitionist, social reformer, statesman, orator, and writer who lived in the 1800's. Frederick was the son of a black, slave woman and a wealthy, white slave owner. As was the practice at that time, Frederick was separated from his mother as an infant. Someone else cared for him and his mother was sent miles

away to work from sun-up to sundown in the fields. This is what Frederick Douglass said about his mother. "My mother was hired by a Mr. Stewart, who lived 12 miles from my home. She made her journey (on foot) every day.. She was a field hand - and a whipping is the penalty of not being in the field at sunrise. I don't recollect ever seeing my mother by the light of day. BUT she was with me in the night. At the end of her long day working in the fields she would walk 12 miles back to where I was. She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but long before I waked she was gone." His mother chose to walk 12 miles to work and home from work every day so that she could be with her son.

The woman in our story today is willing to go through humiliation and ridicule and shaming. She will do anything to save her child. If she had been asked to give her life for her daughter, I have no doubt she would have done it on the spot.

This woman gives us a glimpse of God's love for us.

God was willing to go through humiliation and ridicule and shaming. He would give his life if that's what it was going to take to save his children. To a cross if that's what it took. God would do anything to save his children.

God is looking for disciples marked by this kind of love.

SHAUN:

Finally, on this mother's day I think it would be worth encouraging all of us to

3. Surround ourselves with women of great faith.

I am one of the lucky ones who had a woman of great faith as my mother. Folks, I have been on staff at Five Forks church, as a Pastor since 2010 and I have preached a number of sermons (about 200) or so.

Prior to that I spent 4 years studying Bible at Messiah College, learning from some great academic minds related to theology and earned a diploma with a degree related to this all important book.

And most of you know I love to read about theology. Dallas Willard, CS Lewis, NT Wright, Philip Yancey...

But I will tell you in all sincerity there is probably no person in my life who has influenced me, in what it means to follow Jesus more than mom. If you want to know what unconditional love looks like, if you want to know what perseverance and humility and peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, forgiveness, mercy and grace...look like...it's my mom.

Just as Jesus did with his disciples on that day...we must surround ourselves, learn from women of great faith.