

# Osaka International Church

May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009 by Daniel Ellrick

Scripture: Matthew 15:21-31

+ Children's Message *"Thank you, Mom!"*

Isaiah 66:13a, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you;"

Title: A Mother's Faith (Mother's Day)

Key Verse Matthew 15:28

## I. Introduction

Good morning and Happy Mother's Day! It is often said that, "Behind every good man stands a good woman." In many cases that woman is mother. Good mothers are wise, strong and gentle. And being a good mother is one of the most difficult jobs in the world. Businessmen and bricklayers leave work at quitting time, take days off, and occasionally even find time for a vacation. But motherhood takes 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. So, today, we are celebrating motherhood and giving thanks to God for our mothers.



This morning we are going to get a glimpse in the Scriptures of a very special mother, a woman who is wise, but humble, and also strong, yet gentle. She is a mother who loves her child and a woman of great faith. Let's read Matthew 15:21-31.

## II. Matthew 15:21-31 (NIV).

[21] Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. [22] A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." [23] Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." [24] He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." [25] The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. [26] He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." [27] "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." [28] Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. [29] Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. [30] Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. [31] The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

## III. Teaching

As this passage tells us, this is a time when Jesus was doing many amazing miracles. Huge crowds were coming to Jesus to hear Him teach and to seek His help. And, in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and in demonstration of His power and love, Jesus was healing the sick and lame, opening the eyes and ears of the blind and deaf, and giving voice to those who could not speak. Hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of people were receiving miraculous healings. But the stories of most of these people were not recorded. The gospel writers tell us details about only a relatively small number of the miracles.

By placing the story of this woman directly before the statement that great crowds were coming to Jesus and receiving miracles, I think Matthew raises the question of why the story of this particular woman is recorded in detail. There must be some things for us to learn here, things which are revealed in this story in special ways. Interestingly, it is a controversial story, a story some people dislike. Today, we struggle with this story because Jesus words seem harsh. But Matthew's first readers, who were mostly Jewish, probably struggled with this story because to them, given the identity of the woman, Jesus is too nice to her.



Matthew tells us that Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon, a region north of Israel, in what is

now Lebanon. There the Lord met a Canaanite woman -a woman descended from the ancient enemies of Israel. The fact that Jesus eventually grants the woman's request shows Jesus' love for those who had been the enemies of Israel. And is a demonstration of how Jesus teaches us to love everyone, including our enemies. But many of the Jews of Jesus' time were not ready to love their ancient enemies, the Canaanites, just as they were not ready to love the Roman soldiers who occupied their land.

This passage also comes directly after Jesus' teaching about cleanness and uncleanness. And, one implication of Jesus' teaching about the clean and unclean, was that every person, Jew or Gentile, whose heart was open to God was clean in God's eyes. Yet, the common teaching of the Pharisees of that time was that all gentiles were unclean. So, for the Jewish people that Matthew's Gospel was originally written for, this story is controversial and difficult to accept because Jesus accepts and ministers to a woman who was considered to be unclean and who was a descendent of an ancient enemy.

But for modern readers, the story is difficult because Jesus seems to treat the woman harshly at first. At first, Jesus ignores her cry for mercy, and next He rebukes her. Yet, in the end He gives her what she is asking for and praises her faith. So, what is going on here? Well, Matthew does not tell us directly, but I think this story is an example of how Jesus tested His disciples to see if they were learning the lessons of love and grace that He had been teaching.

Jesus is Lord and God, and He is also a skilled teacher. And teachers test their students to see how they are doing at learning their lessons. As far as we know, Jesus never gave written tests, but He did give real life tests, using the situations that came up during His ministry as opportunities to test the disciples. Of course, Jesus already knew the hearts of His disciples, but often the disciples did not know their own hearts.

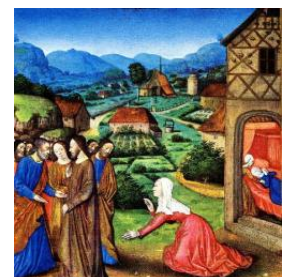
Sometimes we can misjudge our own understanding. For this reason, I always encourage missionaries to take the standard Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). When you are studying Japanese, depending on your personality, you may get discouraged or over confident. Optimistic students think they are doing better than they really are. Pessimistic students get depressed and feel like giving up, even when they are actually doing quite well. But a test tells you the reality of how you are doing.



The disciples probably had the same difficulty in knowing whether or not they were really learning the lessons Jesus taught. We have the same problem. It is easy for us to believe that we have learned how to love our neighbor when everything is going smoothly. But when a test comes, like when our neighbor gets a new pet dog that barks all night, we find out whether we have really learned how to love them or not.

John 6:5-6 gives us an example of how Jesus tested His disciples. This is from the story of the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. **John 6:5-6 "When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" [6] He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do."** Jesus already knew what He was going to do, but He used the situation to test Philip and the other disciples who were there. Sadly, the disciples often failed the tests Jesus gave them. But there is hope, because through the process of training and testing, the disciples eventually learned to walk in Jesus' ways. And we can do the same.

Let's take a closer look at today's passage. **Matthew 15:22, "A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.'"** Her cry is remarkable because her faith is revealed even in her first words. She calls Jesus "Lord" and "Son of David", recognizing Him as the Messiah, and she is confident that He has the power to help. She is humble and filled with faith. I think that Jesus had already decided to help her even before she came to Him. It is probably for this very purpose that Jesus made the trip to that northern region. But Jesus uses the opportunity to test His disciples and to allow the woman to demonstrate her faith.



Jean Colombe (The Canaanite Woman 1489) painted the scene like

this. The woman is crying out for the Lord to have mercy for her daughter. What will be the disciples' reaction? Will they also pray for the Lord to have mercy? Will they comfort the woman in her sorrow? What will they do? **Matthew 15:23, "Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.""**

What do you think? Have the disciples learned the lessons of love and mercy that Jesus has been teaching? Not yet, but perhaps if Jesus gives them a second chance the disciples will do better. **Matthew 15:24-25, "He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said."** The disciples know that Jesus was sent first to preach the Good News to Israel and only afterwards to the Gentile nations. But they also know that Jesus has provided healing and comfort for many gentiles already. The woman is there, kneeling before Jesus. Will the disciples urge mercy? The Lord Jesus then voices some of the common thinking of the Pharisees of the day: that the Messiah is only for the Jewish people, and that the gentiles are unclean, like dogs. Perhaps this will soften the hearts of the disciples. **Matthew 15:26, "He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.""**

I imagine that there was a moment of silence while the woman decided how to respond. During this moment, perhaps Jesus is looking at the faces of the disciples to see their reaction. Do they understand that her pure heart and faith have made her acceptable to God? The disciples were being tested, and as far as we know, they seem to have failed the test on this occasion. But the woman, who is perhaps also being tested, speaks with faith and humility. Jesus immediately praises her answer and grants her heart's desire. **Matthew 15:27-28, "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour."**

This woman had great faith. Her eyes recognized good and evil; she saw that her daughter's troubles were caused by an evil spirit. She saw that Jesus is Lord and Messiah. Jesus' temporary silence and even His seemingly harsh words only revealed her faith more clearly, just as the quality of gold is revealed by fire. The faith of this Canaanite woman surely shamed the faith of the disciples. She saw so much that seems to have been hidden from them. Testing and trial only served to make her faith shine more brilliantly.



The Canaanite woman was a woman of faith. She was also a devoted mother who loved her daughter and was willing to humble herself in order to get the help her daughter needed. And although the Scriptures do not tell us, I think that under the influence of this mother, surely her daughter grew up to be a woman of faith also. Mothers have a huge influence on their children. Mothers spend their days caring for their children and teaching them. Even tiny babies know their mother's voice and listen for it. Children learn by their mother's example what is important in life.

#### IV. Conclusion

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he recognized that Timothy's faith was received from his mother and grandmother. **2 Timothy 1:5 "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."** The faith of the grandmother was passed on to the mother, and then to the grandson. This does not happen by accident; it happens when a high priority is placed on raising a child to know the Lord.

In today's passage the Canaanite woman interceded with Jesus to get help for her daughter. The woman cried out from her heart, "Lord, help me!" She had great faith, and the Lord answered her cry. I am sure that when she returned home that she told her daughter of how the miracle had been received, teaching her to trust in Jesus for all things. She is an inspiration to us. May we also learn to have humble hearts and persistent faith. I pray that all mothers of faith would lovingly pass their faith on to their sons and daughters.



V. Let's pray