

Connect360: From Desperation to Faith

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- *Lesson 10 in the BaptistWay Press Connect360 unit “Miracles: The Transforming Power of Jesus” focuses on Matthew 15:21-28*

A Canaanite woman finally heard what she had been waiting to hear. Jesus commended her “great faith” and healed her daughter. But by the time we get to the end of this narrative, the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter is not what leaves an impression on us; it almost seems peripheral. When we get to the end of this account, there’s the nagging question: What was that all about?

This query is not insignificant. Discerning Jesus’ motive in this narrative is essential for applying the text. To begin with, either Jesus’ real intention was to refuse the woman’s request, as his words suggest or give her what she wanted all along. The most likely interpretation is that Jesus intended from the start to grant her request.

Jesus had instructed his disciples earlier to only “go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6). However, in Matthew 8, when another Gentile asked Jesus to heal his servant, Jesus agreed to do so. Toward the end of that encounter, Jesus described the Gentile as having “great faith” (See Matt. 8:5-13). Interestingly, the only people identified as having “great faith” in Matthew’s Gospel are a Roman Centurion and a Canaanite woman, both Gentiles.

An object lesson

If Jesus planned on granting the Canaanite woman's request all along, why the initial silence and rejection? Though we can't give a definitive answer to this enigma, it likely has more to do with the disciples than with the Canaanite. While Jesus described the woman as having "great faith," not even 20 verses later, the disciples are described as having "little faith" (16:8). And that's not the only time. Indeed, on five occasions the disciples are described as having "little faith" (Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; and 17:20).

It's possible that the woman of great faith was an unwitting participant in an object lesson for Jesus' disciples who had little faith. It's almost as if Jesus were trying to communicate something like: "See this pagan woman, guys? This is what it looks like to have great faith." Great faith is humble but persistent. It's also significant that in both Matthew and Mark, this narrative comes immediately after Jesus' teaching about what defiles a person.

God couldn't possibly work in that person's life. Have you ever thought something like that? Today's lesson reminds us anyone can exercise great faith. It is when we become familiar with the things of God that we are in danger of becoming comfortable and entitled. We should demand nothing from God. We are always in need of his gracious mercy. When we approach God, we must do so knowing we don't deserve anything.

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