

Who Successfully Challenged Jesus?

Matthew 15:25: (NASB) *But she came and began to bow down before him, saying, Lord, help me!*



To “challenge” Jesus and succeed is not something you hear about every day, so let’s clarify what we are talking about. Jesus was a speaker of God’s word and a doer of God’s will. Inevitably, challenging this would be a futile effort. When we say “challenge,” we mean not following an expected pattern. There were a few instances in the ministry of Jesus where someone did not exactly follow Jesus’ set patterns of healing and they were blessed anyway. We will investigate an unnamed woman of the Bible. The Syrophoenician woman spoken of in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 was such a person. This unnamed Gentile woman did not accept a seeming denial from Jesus when she asked for her

daughter to be healed. Jesus complied with her insistence and she was blessed. What was her secret and what can we learn?

We want to review the recorded event that occurred *before* Jesus dealt with the Syrophoenician woman to establish a timeline.

THE CHALLENGE

Matthew 15:1-14: (NASB) *¹Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ²Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.*

THE ANSWER

This challenge is an attempt to prove Jesus wrong. FYI, this is not a good idea:

³And he answered and said to them, Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴For God said honor your father and mother and he who speaks evil <2551> of father or mother is to be put to death. ⁵But you say, Whoever says to his father or mother, Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God, ⁶he is not to honor his father or his mother. And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: ⁸This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. ⁹but in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.

Honor your father and mother - from the Ten Commandments - Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16.

*He who **speaks evil <2551>** of father or mother is to be put to death - from Exodus 21:17 and Leviticus 20:9.*

Speaks evil: Strong's #2551 *kakologeo*; to speak evil of, revile, abuse

This word is stronger than just complaining about parents; it means to speak evil to the point of cursing; disrespect to the point of abuse.



The Pharisees were teaching the Jews that they could put their money in the Temple treasury rather than using it to take care of their parents. This was essentially a legal loophole - put the money in the treasury and it would be “used for God,” freeing the Jews of having to take care of elderly parents. Jesus is disgusted - here they are asking him about his disciples not washing their hands, but they themselves are causing the people to break the Law by encouraging them to put their money in the Temple, thereby disrespecting their parents. The bottom line of this answer is: *Do not be hypocritical as you pick on the perceived flaws of others.*

FAIL

WHY did the challenge fail?

The Pharisees were not about humbly serving God – they served themselves.

THEIR ISSUES:

- **LIP SERVICE**
- **DISCONNECTED HEARTS**
- **VAIN WORSHIP**
- **INVALIDATION OF THE WORD OF GOD**

THE RESULT

The religious leaders are offended. Jesus continues to call it as he sees it:

¹⁰After Jesus called the crowd to him, he said to them, Hear and understand. ¹¹It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man. ¹²Then the disciples came and said to him, Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement? ¹³But he answered and said, every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.

Jesus is being straightforward. If someone challenges him in an inappropriate way, they get put in their place because Jesus will not compromise on the will or the way of God. Jesus is telling his disciples in this answer that the Pharisees are *blind guides of the blind* and things are going to change. The very next recorded event pre-shadows this change: Israel will be rejected by God because they rejected their Messiah.

To see our main account, we are going to combine the gospel accounts of Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30 to provide the richest details of this short event. (Matthew is shown in green and Mark in black.)

Matthew 15/Mark 7: (NASB) *Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. And when he had entered a house, he wanted no one to know about it; and yet he could not escape notice.*



What was Jesus doing, going into Gentile territory?

He was likely seeking solitude with his disciples. This was the third time recorded in the book of Mark that Jesus withdrew from Galilee after an intense day of healing (Mark 4:35, Mark 6:31). He was getting away from the stress of all he was called upon to do. He was not in this region to heal, but to rest. However, his fame had reached beyond the borders of Galilee (Mark 3:8).



Where were Tyre and Sidon?

They were in modern-day Lebanon. They were port cities on the Mediterranean Sea north of Israel, known for their trade, wealth and materialistic culture. There had been a lot of trouble between the Jews and the Canaanites of the region in the past, both militarily and morally because they served as a constant dangerous and idolatrous influence for the Jews. The hometown of the infamous Jezebel was Sidon according to 1 Kings 16:31-32.



We are soon going to meet the Syrophenician woman. What does "Syrophenician" mean and who were the Phoenicians?

Tyre and Sidon were part of an area called the Phoenician states. Phoenicia was part of the Roman province of Syria. "Syrophenician" would distinguish this woman as coming from Syria rather than from Lybo Phoenicia which was in northern Africa, otherwise known as Carthage. Phoenicians were an ancient Semitic people related to the biblical Canaanites. Different English Bible translations use the term *Canaanite* interchangeably with the ancient Greek term, *Phoenicians*.

For an example of this usage:

Isaiah 23:11: (NASB) *He has stretched His hand out over the sea, He has made the kingdoms tremble; the LORD has given a command concerning **Canaan** to demolish its strongholds.*

Isaiah 23:11: (NIV) *The LORD has stretched out his hand over the sea and made its kingdoms tremble. He has given an order concerning **Phoenicia** that her fortresses be destroyed.*

Other translations of this verse use *the merchant one* because these people were known for being skilled seamen who maintained an extensive trade network up and down the Mediterranean coast.



Incidentally, the best-known legacy of the Phoenicians is their creation of the world's oldest verified alphabet, which they transmitted across the Mediterranean world throughout their trade network. So, as the saying goes, remember how easy it was to learn your A B C's? Thank the Phoenicians!

It is obvious that challenging Jesus like the Pharisees often did on matters of the Law of God is a futile endeavor. Think before challenging!

**Now that we have some context,
how did this Syrophoenician woman actually challenge Jesus?**

The details preceding the encounter we are about to examine are important and bear repeating. Jesus was looking for some solitude. He retreated to Gentile territory and went into a house as quietly as he could. The problem? When you are Jesus, people want to be near you!

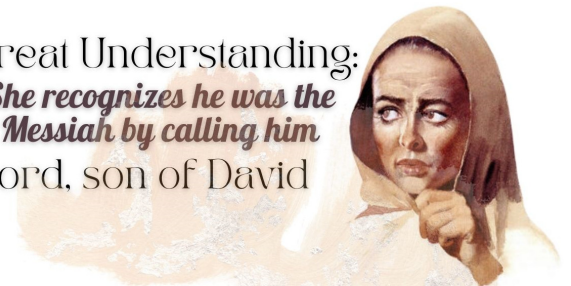
Here is the foundation for THE CHALLENGE:

Matthew 15/Mark 7: (NASB) *Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician descent ...a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David; my daughter is severely demon-possessed. And she repeatedly asked him to cast the demon out of her daughter.*

Let us start with the first three crucial elements of this woman's "challenge", (remember she is a Gentile, not a Jew):



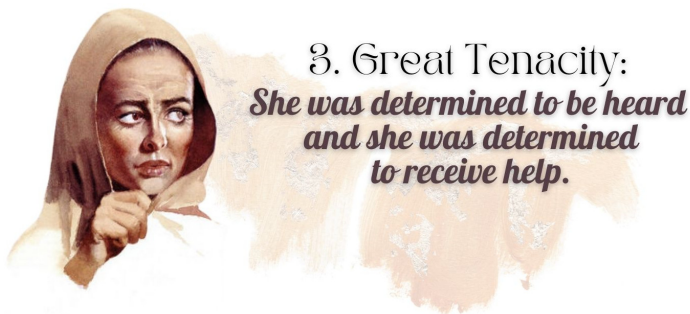
2. Great Understanding:
*She recognizes he was the
Messiah by calling him
Lord, son of David*



Many Jews called Jesus by this title. It was an obvious reference to his Messiahship:

Luke 1:32: (NASB) *He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David;*

By using the term *son of David*, she understands who Jesus actually is. This is a powerful statement of her faith and understanding.



She has both need and understanding. She knows this is an opportunity she must grasp, so she approaches Jesus.

How would Jesus answer?

Matthew 15/Mark 7: (NASB) *But he did not answer her with even a word. And his disciples came up and urged him, saying, Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us!*



With all the shouting, the whole neighborhood would know Jesus was here! The disciples were annoyed. Jesus needed rest; he did not want to be recognized and overwhelmed by crowds wanting to be healed. He just wanted to quietly withdraw for a time. This shouting woman would draw unwanted attention.

Jesus did not answer her or even seem interested! Was this rude?

The disciples asked Jesus to send her away because of her tenacity and shouting at them. It is likely that they were attending the door, vetting who could come into the house. She seemed out of control.

Jesus took his time not to answer her right away, and is following the dictates of God's spirit within him. The Bible tells us repeatedly that he only did what his Father told him to do. He was not being rude; he was looking for the right approach to create the most benefit.

The word for *shouting* is used dramatically many times in the New Testament:

Matthew 8:29: (KJV) *And, behold, they **cried out <2896>**, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?*

These are demons crying out.

Matthew 9:27: (KJV) *And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, **crying <2896>**, and saying, thou son of David, have mercy on us.*

Cried out/Crying: Strong's #2896 *krazō*; properly, to "croak" (as a raven) or scream, i.e. (generally) to call aloud (shriek, exclaim, intreat):—cry (out)

Both cases show a great intensity. This word has a broad application.

- In Matthew 8:29 there is panic - the demons are afraid Jesus is going to ruin their machinations before the day of their judgment.
- In Matthew 9:27 there is desperation - the two blind men have no hope except for Jesus to help them.

The shouting is not about being just a little aggravated; there is a deep desperation and a lot of emotion involved in the use of this word. The woman we are discussing is pouring her heart out with her need.

Jesus finally answers:

Matthew 15/Mark 7: (NASB) *But he answered and said, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But she came and began to bow down before him, saying, Lord, help me!*

Jesus answers with an important truth - he was sent only to Israel as their Messiah. Once he said those words, it revealed a fourth crucial element of this woman's "challenge."



4. Great Humility:
*She bowed in reverence before him
 and again pleaded.*
 Jesus would again answer.



She saw Jesus as her only possible source of help.



Understanding the roles and differences of praise and worship

To worship means to bow down, to prostrate oneself in great reverence. This is the same worship the wise men had for Jesus in Matthew 2:2.

But she came and began to bow down before him - One of the definitions of *bow down* means “to fawn over” or “crouch down in front of someone.” She had great humility. She was yelling before with great intensity, then Jesus gives her an answer and she is no longer shouting. She prostrates herself immediately and says, *Lord help me!* There is desperation and deep, true humility. She bows deeply in reverence and continues to reason with him. He answers again.

As we look at his response, let us consider that Jesus could read the heart and often used this ability to draw out the person’s character:

Matthew 15/Mark 7: (NASB) *Yet he answered and said, Let the children be satisfied first. It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.*

At first glance, this may seem harsh, but is it? It comes across as harsh to many especially when viewed through the lens of today’s society. The following is an internet blog comment on this conversation. It is difficult to read this when we really understand the purpose of Jesus - to carry out the plan of God:

(Source: <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/did-the-syrophoenician-woman-teach-jesus-to-be-jesus/>) Jesus changed his mind - his bigoted views were challenged and he realized he needed to let go of his inherited cultural biases.

Jesus uttered an ethnic slur. To dismiss a desperate woman with a seriously sick child...Jesus holds all the power in this exchange. The woman doesn’t approach with arrogance or a sense of entitlement associated with wealth or privilege. Rather she comes to him in the most human way possible, desperate and pleading for her daughter. And he responds by dehumanizing her with ethnic prejudice, if not bigotry. In our modern terms, we know that power plus prejudice equals racism.

Rather than being part of the solution to ethnic prejudice, Jesus seems to be very much part of the problem. When confronted with the Gentile pagan in this story, he explains that his message and ministry are for Israelites only, a comment of ethnic exclusion and prejudice that calls to mind a similar refrain from a more modern time - “whites only” - that reverberated throughout the South not too long ago.

This, I think, is the great lesson of the Syrophoenician woman. It teaches us the dynamics of power and prejudice, of how even the best of humanity...can get caught up in systems of oppression, in a culture of supremacy. Like many of us today, Jesus would have been reared into a prejudiced worldview.



So don't tell me you aren't prejudiced or don't exercise your position of power through the lens of your prejudice. Even Jesus did that.

(Jonathan's response) This sounds like it comes from an atheistic perspective even though the source claims Christianity!

(Rick's response) To look at Jesus through those eyes tells me they have no sense of who Jesus was and is - no sense of the wisdom, character, grace, love or the sacrifice - he came to *die* for this woman! The idea that Jesus was "caught up in" this idea of cultural supremacy or "systems of oppression" is disgusting. This blog is written from scriptural ignorance. It is a blatant misrepresentation of our *perfect* Lord. It is sad that people might believe such an untruth. This person is writing from a 21st century little tiny box of perspective; that is all they are seeing. They are not understanding the history, language or cultural differences. Yes, Jesus dealt within the prejudices of the day, but time and time again he corrected those ideas! It is so easy to painfully miss the point of the words of Jesus.

What DID Jesus mean?

Was he purposefully condescending or were his words meant to encourage?

There always comes a point in every biblical discussion where we need to pause and consider if we are talking about Scriptures in their precise biblical context or if we are using them to *feed our own perspective*. Accepting the truth regarding our perspective can help us perceive the truth of the Bible! This is where the problem lies with the blog author's interpretation of what was happening. Their perspective is seeded in 21st century rhetoric, thinking and ideology that has *nothing* to do with the reality of Jesus' time.

To call someone a "dog" meant to give them a very pointed and harsh label. In the ancient Jewish culture, dogs were unclean animals. They roamed wild on the streets. They were undesirable scavengers, considered dangerous and often carried diseases. It certainly was not a nice thing to label anyone!

Why was this label used? Calling someone a *dog* in the New Testament was meant to warn of and acknowledge the brazen, unclean and dangerous characteristics of a wild dog. **Please see the Bonus Material for more on this topic.**

The Apostle Paul calls false teachers *dogs*:

Philippians 3:2: (NASB) *Beware of the **dogs** <2965>, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;*

Dogs: Strong's #2965 *kuon*; a primary word; a dog ["hound"] (literally or figuratively)

Greek-English Lexicon: 1) a dog 2) metaphorically a man of impure mind, an impudent (brazen, disrespectful, insolent) man

Did Jesus use a racial slur here? *Dog* was a metaphor for the characteristics of an impure, brazen or disrespectful mind. It was a warning against a characteristic rather than racial bias.

We cannot apply this from a 21st century slant. We must move beyond this restricted perspective of our time to see the reality of the time of Jesus. This



was a warning against those misguiding the brotherhood who were not teaching the gospel. This was not demeaning the humanity of another individual; it was pointing out the evil characteristics of those false teachers.

Was Jesus calling this Syrophoenician woman a *dog*? Was he labeling her as brazen, dangerous and unclean? No, not even remotely close! We know this because Jesus used a different word - this specific Greek word for *dog* ONLY appears in the Matthew and Mark accounts of this event:

Dogs: Strong's #2952, *kunarion*; a puppy
Thayer's Definition: a little dog

This word has the thought of a cared-for family pet rather than a harsh term for a wild dog. Jesus used the metaphor of children and pets living in the same household. Both are cared for, but the children are the priority of the parents. This was a metaphor the woman would have understood far more clearly than his own disciples!



Here Jesus is talking to a Gentile woman from a culture who allowed dogs in their homes as pets. The apostles would not have understood it as clearly because for the Jews, unclean animals under the Law - such as dogs - would not have been allowed in the house. Dogs were not pets to the ancient Jews. In ancient Jewish culture, dogs were wild - an animal that roamed outside, out of control, a scavenger that carried diseases. Here, Jesus is talking to a woman who would have understood having puppies in the house that waited beneath the table for crumbs to fall. He is not being biased or racist - he is being compassionate and explaining to her an important concept.

Matthew 15/Mark 7 (repeated) (NASB): *Yet he answered and said, Let the children be satisfied first. It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs <2952>.*

There was no dog food back then - puppies ate what the people ate!

Let the children be satisfied first - this implies there is a "second" or a "next." They were first but not exclusive. This would have given her hope and an opening to keep the conversation going.

To better understand biblical accounts, we have to ask questions like: Who is talking? To whom are they talking? What is the context of the conversation? What are their life experiences? Are they under Jewish Law or not? By answering such questions, we see an extremely compassionate Jesus and an amazing woman.



Jesus is teaching her that the children (the Jewish nation) must be "fed" first while she and her daughter (Gentiles) would be "fed" later.





The message of Jesus during his earthly ministry was to primarily go to the Jewish nation:

Matthew 10:5-6: (NASB) ⁵*These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying, Do not go on a road to Gentiles, and do not enter a city of Samaritans; ⁶but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

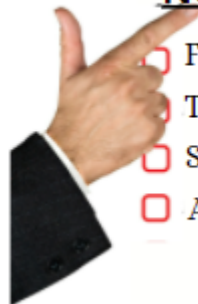
The Jews were God's chosen people and Jesus was sent to serve them first. They were supposed to be following God's Law, and therefore were those God would deal with first. The followers of Jesus were bound by this limitation of only going to fellow Jews. This might seem racist in our time, but it is not. Anyone wishing to be part of God's chosen people could become a Jew, a "proselyte." But most people were not interested, as Jewish life was too restrictive for them. Most Gentiles looked down on the Jews. Far from being high and mighty, the Jews were outcasts.

Jesus was not limited to serving only the Jews, though he knew he was to go to the Jewish nation first. He knew the Gentile world would eventually be called to follow him. He knew the prophecies and stepped over this exclusive line several times in his ministry to illustrate this.

After his earthly ministry and once he had been raised as a spirit being, his instructions to his followers changed:

Acts 1:8: (NASB) *but you will receive power when the holy spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth.*

Notice the order:



- ☐ First to Jerusalem
- ☐ Then out to all Judea (Israel)
- ☐ Spreading out to Samaria (Gentile nation)
- ☐ And finally to the remotest part of the earth!

Jesus was showing kindness and respect by even talking to this woman and explaining the way the gospel was unfolding. He WAS interested in her and engaging in conversation, drawing her out.

Back to the account:

Matthew 15/Mark 7: (NASB) *But she answered and said to him, Yes, Lord, but even the **dogs <2952>** under the table feed on the children's crumbs.*

This woman is quick and is clever enough to find a place for herself and her daughter in this allegory of Jesus. Jesus gave her that opening and she took it. Here is where we see the compassion of Jesus - there is no racism or bigotry. He raises her up to a higher level of understanding.

Here is a fifth crucial element of this woman's "challenge" to Jesus:



5. Great and Respectful Attentiveness:

She immediately understood what Jesus said and respectfully responded with the desire for mere crumbs.

She was not trying to play the role of the *children* in his example. She understood he was sent to the Jews. She would not overstep the boundaries that Jesus had set. She simply asked for mercy within those boundaries.

This is such a blessed conversation. Jesus is telling her what she needs to understand. She was not insulted; she was motivated! Jesus showed her the way and she was taking her opportunity, walking the way Jesus would have her to walk. This becomes an *inspiring* conversation.

Jesus HAD drawn her out! Her humble character was now plainly observable in the midst of her crisis.

Everything is now on the table.

How would Jesus respond and what can we learn as a result?

Only Jesus could have taken a situation with so many seemingly wrong elements and bring it to a blessing. He is in a foreign territory, confronted by an hysterical Gentile mother about a crisis situation with her daughter at some other location.

Jesus calmly did everything according to the will of God. He taught her with respect; he elevated her thinking and understanding. This woman had humility and a sense of who Jesus was - she knew he could heal her daughter. He used those qualities in her to draw her out so he could bless her.

Jesus calmly creates perspective so he can act:

Matthew 15/Mark 7: (NASB) *Then Jesus said to her, O woman, your faith is great; Because of this answer, go; the demon has gone out of your daughter. And her daughter was healed at once. And after going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

She did not ask Jesus to come to her home to make sure that his miracle "worked." She simply went home to her daughter with faith that her daughter was healed.

As we look at this account and the masterful handling of the experience by Jesus, we realize that the Syrophoenician woman did not challenge Jesus; he actually was challenging her. *Jesus knew her heart and knew she needed godly perspective before she could appropriately receive mercy.* Remember, the gospel went to the Jews first when Jesus walked the earth. They were already in line for God's mercy through Jesus as God's chosen people.



All of the non-Jewish individuals Jesus helped or healed displayed a deep faith so that he could bless them. Once this unnamed woman demonstrated that godly perspective - once she answered Jesus' challenge - she was blessed! She was blessed not just by the miracle of her daughter being healed, but also in her faith that it had been accomplished from afar.

The Syrophoenician woman's "challenge" to Jesus was finding her appropriate place. It was done in a desperate circumstance with knowledge, tenacity, humility and attentiveness. She is an inspiration!

Do we plead with Jesus in the same way? What was the beautiful pattern she used in order to connect with Jesus? We should approach Jesus in the way this Gentile woman did. They were never at odds with each other. He understood who she was, how beautiful her heart was and he drew her out to receive the blessing. His love for her was obvious. We see in this event the unfolding before us of things to come as Jesus blessed someone outside of Israel.

Let us go through the pattern the Syrophoenician woman used to approach Jesus with her problem:

1. Great Need:

Her daughter was in severe distress.

What about our needs in our distressful times?

Matthew 11:28-29: (NASB) ²⁸Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

She brought her great need before Jesus with great intensity. When we have great need, we should bring it before him with great intensity because he has promised us rest.

2. Great Understanding:

She recognizes he was the Messiah by calling him Lord, son of David

How do we fortify ourselves during times of peace?

2 Timothy 2:15: (NASB) *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*

As Christians, our understanding has to come through our study of the word of God. We need to understand what it is, why it is and how it is so we can apply it appropriately. This account is an example of how dramatically the word of God can be misrepresented if we do not look at the context, words and culture of the time.

This woman was learning about the plan of God for the future, which is what we want to learn as well with our own study. We bring our great need before the Lord, and then we fortify it with our development through study. She acknowledged him as Messiah; our acknowledgment of him gives us forgiveness of sins.

3. Great Tenacity:

She was determined to be heard and she was determined to receive help.

Do we have that same determination to be blessed?

Philippians 3:13-14: (NASB) ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul, despite having done all the wonderful things he did in his work, still said he had work to do! He wrote the letter to the Philippians late



in his life, yet he says he would not stop, slow down or be distracted. He would just keep going forward.

This should also be our approach to our Father and Jesus when we have problems. We have the need and the understanding through study. Now we need the tenacity to tell our Father we want to do His will. Sometimes the answer to our issues may be “no.” This response may be to help us grow and mature. Jesus challenged the Syrophenician woman to help her grow into a deeper understanding. That tenacity is what got her there.

4. Great Humility:
*She bowed in reverence before him
and again pleaded.*

Do we hold onto our anxiety while we try to resolve all our problems by ourselves?

1 Peter 5:6-7: (NASB) ⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

We need to imitate this woman’s humility. Bowing before him, she says *Lord, help me!* She understood that Jesus had the power to help her. We carry our anxieties around and need to learn - to the best of our natural abilities - to cast those anxieties on God. This can be a lifelong trial and effort on our part, but we cannot stand in His way as He cares for us. She had the great humility of being able to trust God through Jesus to take care of her and her daughter. We must emulate her humility and work at casting our cares upon He who wishes to take our burdens from us.

5. Great and Respectful Attentiveness:

*She immediately understood what Jesus
said and respectfully responded
with the desire for mere crumbs.*

She would not overstep the boundaries Jesus had set; she did not ask to be one of the “children.” She simply asked for mercy within those boundaries. She was one of the least important people to implore Jesus. She was a foreigner, a Greek Gentile, poor and a woman. But she was brave, persistent and faithful which earned her the blessing.

Do we show this great and respectful attentiveness to hear God’s guidelines for us and to find our place within them?

2 Timothy 2:3-6: (NASB) ³Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. ⁵Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

She heard the boundaries and found her place within them. We need the same great and respectful attentiveness. Paul tells Timothy here *to suffer hardship with me*, work side-by-side with me. We will serve as soldiers in the Lord’s service, working together without becoming involved in everyday distractions.

Think back to the Pharisees we referred to at the beginning. They set out to proudly challenge and defeat Jesus. We now see why this event with the Syrophenician woman was the next recorded event in the life of Jesus.

Let’s compare the challenge offered by each:



- 👉 It displays the contrast between the **social position** the Pharisees wanted to preserve, and the intense **personal need** exhibited by the Syrophoenician woman.
- 👉 It lays bare the sin of **usurping** power against the humility of **understanding** its boundaries.
- 👉 It accentuates the evil of **tempting** (Pharisees) against the positive power of **tenacity** (the Syrophoenician woman).
- 👉 It shows us the stark difference between **walking as one who feigns having authority** and **worshipping the one who actually has it**.
- 👉 It reveals the difference between **arrogance** and **attentiveness**.
- 👉 It contrasts the hypocritical and **scheming words** of the Pharisees, with the Syrophoenician woman's simple, powerful and **profound faith**.

When Jesus interacted with Gentiles, they needed to show extraordinary faith to receive the blessing. When we look back on this woman's distress and anxiety - yelling for attention because she was so desperate - we see she showed an immature expression of faith in the beginning. Her faith needed to be drawn to a more mature level. When the disciples begged Jesus to tell her to leave since she would not stop yelling at them, Jesus calmly conversed with her and step-by-step brings her to a point where she understands her place in the hierarchy of God's plan at that time period. In understanding this, she embraces it without a moment's hesitation! This brings her up to an amazing example of faith.

When we look at this account of healing and of grace, love and mercy, we see a desperate woman who knew Jesus could take care of her daughter. We see Jesus giving her hope that he *would* heal her daughter, but before that could happen, she needed to understand some things and put herself into a position where her faith was obvious to herself. She had to know and accept where she fit in God's plan.

The blessing Jesus provided her was a picture of how he will bless the world of mankind in the kingdom when all will receive healing. They will have the faith, will be given the understanding, will tenaciously hold onto their part in God's plan and will have the humility to accept that arrangement. Then blessings will flow!

***So, who successfully challenged Jesus?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***



Join us next week for our podcast on June 28, 2021
Ep. 1184: Is Christianity Being Cancelled?

Bonus Material and Study Questions

The most difficult thing is the decision to act. The rest is merely tenacity. — Amelia Earhart

The combined accounts: Matthew 15:21-28 (in green)
and Mark 7:24-30 (in black)

Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. And when he had entered a house, he wanted no one to know about it; and yet he could not escape notice. But after hearing about him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician descent. A Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David; my daughter is severely demon-possessed. And she repeatedly asked him to cast the demon out of her daughter. But he did not answer her with even a word. And his disciples came up and urged him, saying, Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us! But he answered and said, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But she came and began to bow down before him, saying, Lord, help me! Yet he answered and said, Let the children be satisfied first. It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. But she answered and said to him, Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs. Then Jesus said to her, O woman, your faith is great; Because of this answer, go; the demon has gone out of your daughter. And her daughter was healed at once. And after going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

The individual accounts:

Matthew 15:21-28: (NASB) ²¹Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David; my daughter is severely demon-possessed. ²³But he did not answer her with even a word. And his disciples came up and urged him, saying, Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us! ²⁴But he answered and said, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ²⁵But she came and began to bow down before him, saying, Lord, help me! ²⁶Yet he answered and said, It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. ²⁷And she said, Yes, Lord; but please help, for even the dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. ²⁸Then Jesus said to her, O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you desire. And her daughter was healed at once.

Mark 7:24-30: (NASB) ²⁴Now Jesus got up and went from there to the region of Tyre. And when he had entered a house, he wanted no one to know about it; and yet he could not escape notice. ²⁵But after hearing about him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician descent. ²⁷And he was saying to her, Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. ²⁸But she answered and said to him, Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs. ²⁹And he said to her, Because of this answer, go; the demon has gone out of your daughter. ³⁰And after going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.



More on the word for *dog*. Notice how the (metaphorical) uses really fit into the definition of brazen and insolent.

Dog: Strongs #2965 *kuon*; a primary word; a dog ["hound"] (literally or figuratively)

Greek-English Lexicon: 1) a dog 2) metaph. a man of impure mind, an impudent man

All uses in the New Testament:

Matthew 7:6: (KJV) *Give not that which is holy unto the **dogs** <2965>, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

Luke 16:21: (KJV) *And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the **dogs** <2965> came and licked his sores.*

Philippians 3:2: (KJV) *Beware of **dogs** <2965>, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.*

2 Peter 2:22: (KJV) *But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the **dog** <2965> is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

Revelation 22:15: (KJV) *For without are **dogs** <2965>, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.*

Some more detail on what worshipping means:

Worship: Strongs #4352 *proskuneo*; (meaning to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand); to fawn or crouch to, i.e. (literally or figuratively) prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore)

Greek-English Lexicon: 1) to kiss the hand to (towards) one, in token of reverence; 2) among the Orientals, esp. the Persians, to fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence; 3) in the New Testament by kneeling or prostration to do homage (to one) or make obeisance, whether in order to express respect or to make supplication; 3a) used of homage shown to men and beings of superior rank; 3a1) to the Jewish high priests; 3a2) to God; 3a3) to Christ; 3a4) to heavenly beings; 3a5) to demons

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Ep. 1183: Who Successfully Challenged Jesus?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1183-syrophoenician>

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SHOW NOTES

1. Who challenged Jesus before he interacted with the Syrophoenician woman? Why did the challenge fail and what was the result? (See Matthew 15:1-14)
2. Who were the Phoenicians? What was the context surrounding Jesus' meeting with the Syrophoenician woman? (See Isaiah 23:11, Matthew 15:21, Mark 7:24)
3. What was the foundation for the woman's challenge? How did she address Jesus? Why is this important? (See Matthew 15:22, Mark 7:25-26, Luke 1:32)
4. How did Jesus initially respond to the woman's pleas? Why did he respond in this manner? (See Matthew 8:29, 9:27, 15:23-26, Mark 7:27)
5. What does the Greek word translated as "dog" in Jesus' response mean? What does this teach about the meaning behind his words? (See Matthew 15:26, Mark 7:27)
6. What was the purpose of Jesus' earthly ministry? How did his mission change after his death and resurrection? What was his response to the handful of non-Jewish people he interacted with during his earthly ministry? What was needed for a Gentile to be helped by Jesus? (See Matthew 10:5-6, Matthew 8:8-12, 28-34, Luke 17:12-19, John 4:5-42, Acts 1:8)
7. When Jesus said he had been sent only to the house of Israel, what was the woman's response? What does this show about her character? (See Matthew 15:27, Mark 7:28)
8. What was the result of the Syphoenician woman's challenge? How does her response show her deep faith in Jesus? (See Matthew 15:28, Mark 7:29-30)
9. How can we apply the example set by the Syrophoenician woman to our experiences with severe distress? (See Matthew 11:28-29, Philippians 3:13-14, 2 Timothy 2:3-6, 15, 1 Peter 5:6-7)