

Matthew 15.21-31 | the kind of faith saves

Intro | The faith of a Pharisee

Any faith dependent upon the earthly work of men is an eternal death sentence. Religion and irreligion are two sides of the same sinful coin—two different ways to deny the one true savior. The irreligious deny Jesus through sinful living, making saviors out of creation. The religious deny Jesus through moral living, making saviors out of themselves.

Both are equally destructive, but the **faith of religion** is more dangerous. That is because it is a faith that **looks** clean on the outside, but is dirty on the inside. It is a faith that **sounds** obedient on the outside, but is rebellious on the inside. It is a faith that **smells** alive on the outside, but is dead on the inside. One is a faith that **feels** like worship on the outside, but is idolatrous on the inside. It is a faith that **tastes** good on the outside, but is bitter and unsatisfying on the inside.

This is the faith of the Pharisees. During his sermon on the mount, Jesus said, **“¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5.19).** In their pursuit of this “greatness”, the Pharisees became devoted to the law. They devoted themselves to being CLEANER than everyone—and they succeeded on the outside! These men have the **right lineage**. These men have the **right knowledge**. These men have the **right morality**. If anyone has it right, surely, it must be this law-loving envoy sent from Jerusalem. But Jesus reveals that their pursuit of purity is in fact making them even dirtier. But what these don’t have is an awareness of the depth of their brokenness, dirtiness, and rebellion. They do not see their NEED for Salvation and, therefore, they miss the true WAY of salvation.

Matthew the narratives of chapter 15 serve to tell one larger story. Set together, these two narratives provide several important contrasts between Israel and the church, between the law and the gospel, between **the faith of a Pharisee and the faith of a Pagan**.

The Lord not afraid to get dirty

²¹ And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out...” After dealing with the Pharisees, Jesus makes a point to head north into what can only be described as “Paganland”. He travels north, deep into gentile territory, to district of Tyre and Sidon. In Matthew 11, Jesus used these two cities as examples of historically evil and unrepentant places. Upon his arrival, Jesus is confronted with a Canaanite woman. The Canaanites are the people who inhabited the Promised Land when the Israelites crossed the Jordan in the book of Joshua. They were the cursed descendants of Ham (Gen. 10.6), the youngest son of Noah, who had sinned against his father during a strange episode following the flood (Gen. 9.18-26). Ham had four sons, two of which were named Canaan and Egypt—the greatest of Israel’s enemies.

The Israelites, prior to entering the Promised Land, were commanded utterly to destroy the descendants of Canaan and then possess it. Many of the survivors had been driven northward into Phoenicia during the Israelite conquest, were the most morally despised of Israel’s enemies.. The Canaanite culture and religion were deeply contaminated with idolatry and sin. In the book of Judges, the people of Israel face the consequences of having failed to heed God’s commands to expunge sin from the land. Through their history, the nation of Israel fought their fleshly attraction to this sexually immoral and opulent pagan

culture. The Bible records their zeal for human sacrifice, religious prostitution, and other pagan “hanky panky” (Lev. 18.24-25; Deut. 18.12).

In Mark’s gospel, the woman that approaches is described as a gentile **Syro-phoenician**. **Matthew wants to make the point that she is Canaanite—related to the worst of God’s enemies, the dirtiest of dirty.** If salvation comes from doing, as the Pharisees seem to think, this is the place where everyone is doing the wrong thing. The contrast could not be more stark: **Jesus withdraws from the Jewish world, the world of faith, the world of clean, and goes into the Pagan world, the world of idolatry, the world of dirty.** And there, in the most unlikely, unreligious, and spiritually unsanitary of places, He finds faith.

The cry of a faithful pagan

A Canaanite, an unclean gentile, a supposed enemy of Jews, and a hurting mom cries: **‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’** This woman has a completely different disposition than the religious Pharisees who came before the Lord. They came to him in pride, fully aware of everyone else’s need to be clean; she comes before the Lord humble, fully aware that she is dirty and in need. Unlike the Pharisees who ask questions, this **pagan asks for mercy**. She identifies Jesus with two titles LORD & SON OF DAVID. Jesus is more than a magician, more than a good teacher, more than a miracle-worker—He is master and King. **The question at the heart of Matthew’s gospel is the question we must all answer: WHO IS JESUS.** The religious teachers, who had all the right answers about God, got the most important one wrong. The Jesus supposed enemies ask him to conquer demons, and His supposed people call Him demon-possessed. It is a blind man and a Canaanite who are the first to confess Jesus’ true identity as Messiah. **Faith has everything to do with who you think Jesus is and nothing to do with who you think you are.**

The silence of a faithful Savior

Nothing will compel a man or a woman to cry out to Jesus more than the suffering of a child—you feel helpless. This women’s child is demon possessed. She has a problem that she cannot fix, one that cannot be resolved by the gods of her people or the powers of this world. **Faith begins when you come to the realization that your biggest problem can only be fixed by Jesus. Unlike the Pharisees who have a problem WITH Jesus, she has a problem FOR Jesus.** And rather uncharacteristically, Jesus remains silent when the woman asks for help. But this mom will not take “No” for an answer; she does not stop crying out. The disciples come to Jesus and BEG him saying: **“Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”** The easily irritated disciples do not sound much better than the Pharisees. But Jesus tells his disciples: **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** Jesus is unapologetic about the primary purpose of his mission. The Father sent Jesus as the promised seed to Adam and Eve, the promised second Moses, the descendent of King David, the savior of the Jews. Jesus is not simply being mean, he just have God-given priorities. **Israel is his priority in order that salvation may come to all. Israel was a priority not only for the sake of the Jewish nation, but also for the sake of the Gentile world.** What comes **THROUGH** Israel finds fulfillment **BEYOND** Israel...just not yet. We struggle with Jesus’ not yets.

But that is not enough for a faithful mom. ²⁵ **But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”** ²⁶ **And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”** Yes, Jesus called this woman a dog. There are two different kinds of “dogs”. In Matthew 7, Jesus said “not to give dogs what is holy.” In that sense, Jesus used dogs in a derogatory way to describe a bad, perverted, evil person. Here, the word for dog means household watchdogs. Though less than children, these dogs were fed, cared for and loved. The issue is simply this, the children get fed first. The woman does not despair

at Jesus' "no", she persists. . —but the dogs still get fed. ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She does not argue Jesus' point, on the contrary, she agrees with it. She agrees that children get fed first, but that the dogs get fed. **I may not be OF the house, but I am IN the house.** She does not dismiss the reality of her "dog-ness", she simply asks for a scrap of help. She doesn't need a feast...she is satisfied with a crumb of Jesus' grace.

The kind of faith that saves

Jesus is moved. He is not stirred by the WIT of her WORDS but by the FAITH in her words. ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly. Jesus calls her faith GREAT. The supposedly 'great' faith of the clean is contrasted with the truly great faith of the dirty. **Without doubt, the Pharisees have the kind of faith, it's just not the kind of faith that saves.**

FAITH ALONE saves when it is in CHRIST ALONE. Our words to Jesus reveal the disposition of our heart toward Jesus. Matthew 12.36 ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." The words that came out of her mouth were: **MERCY. LORD. MESSIAH. HELP.** Our words do not produce faith as much as they reveal our salvation or our condemnation. **Ever wonder what a WORD CLOUD of your conversations with Jesus would reveal about your faith?**

1. **Faith in Christ alone causes us to approach Christ as undeserving instead of entitled.** Does Jesus owe you for being good or do you owe him for being bad? **Entitled = You have faith in your goodness alone.**
2. **Faith in Christ alone causes us to view Jesus as Lord and King.** Is Jesus your helpful servant or your master? Is Jesus the servant whom you want to go with you, or is he the master who tells you where to go? **Servant = You have faith in your power alone.**
3. **Faith in Christ alone causes us to ask Jesus for the impossible.** Are you only asking Him for earthly things or you asking for those things that only God can do? **Practice = faith in your desires alone.**
4. **Faith in Christ alone causes us to respond to Jesus' silence with worship.** to Jesus' silence reveal about our faith? Despair or worship? Does his silence lead you into deeper worship or deeper despair? **Despair = You have faith in your plans alone.**
5. **Faith in Christ alone causes us to respond to Jesus' "no or not yet" with persistence.** How many times do you KNOCK? Do you pester God or feel like a pest? Even if you are not going to get the feast, do you ask for a crumb? **Give up = You have faith in your faith alone.**

Conclusion | Jesus goes on to heal

These questions are not about the quality of our faith; they are questions about the content of our faith. **Having the right words does not come from doing more for Jesus; it comes from believing more about Jesus.** In other words, great faith doesn't come from proving our own greatness, but from beholding His. **Great faith comes from beholding, then believing, then declaring, then trusting the greatness of Christ** Great faith sees Jesus as greater, greater than my sin, greater than my power, greater than my desires, greater than my plans, greater even than my own faith. **Faith alone saves when it is in Christ Alone.**