

Sermon: Generations of Hatred – THEN JESUS!

In this passage (Matt. 15:21-28) a Canaanite woman calls out to Jesus, the very strange thing is that she calls out using a Jewish title “Lord, Son of David”. How does she, a Canaanite, even know this title? Is she being facetious, mocking, sarcastic? The disciples want Jesus to silence her – to put her in her place.

She was a Canaanite dog, similar to the Samaritan dogs; these were deep-seated historic enemies of the Jewish people and enemies of the Jewish faith. Why would she use this proud Jewish title - was it because she would do anything for the sake of her daughter, even humble herself to the latest Jewish messiah?

The situation is another perfect *Jesus situation*. Here he is caught in the middle. The audience may well have included priests and Pharisees looking for opportunity to charge him and arrest Jesus. Jesus uses their familiar term of hatred for these people and calls her and her people *dogs*. The priests and Pharisees must have sniggered... “*Ha ha, so much for him and his message of love, of love for all, of love for the likes of Samaritans, Canaanites, Romans and filthy lepers. Got him!*”

Just then Jesus goes on to speak of her “*great faith*.” What! Is Jesus saying that even these dogs have greater faith than them? Is he turning this around so that priests and Pharisees who do not recognise him as “Son of David”, Messiah, or prophet, that they are being criticized for their blindness. Is Jesus saying that she and the likes of them see - while they do not?

And to make matters worse Jesus then heals the Canaanite woman’s daughter. Why would he heal the likes of her and *one of them*? Jesus states what they want to hear, that the Son of David when he comes, the Messiah and God’s prophets come to the people of Israel, that they are for God’s chosen people and not for these dogs. He states this and then breeches it immediately, crossing the border, breaking the barrier.

Jesus had made this situation. He is the one that has brought it to a climax in this situation. Like many politicians seeking to make a point about health care they visit hospitals to make an announcement, or if it’s education they go to a school to make the announcement. Jesus goes to the region of Tyre and Sidon - Canaanite territory - to make his point and what a point he makes.

Send her away, have nothing to do with her, don’t talk to her, give her no opportunity to talk to you and certainly don’t give her any healing for her daughter. Her daughter deserves all that she’s got. Besides that’s God’s curse on her daughter.

Grace beyond measure! Did she expect anything from Jesus? Probably not. She was very possibly mocking Jesus and all of them in this event. King David... “your great and wonderful *God anointed King* who like Joshua before him couldn’t rid the land of Canaanites... *we are still here!* Was she using the term ‘Son of David,’ to mock – was she laughing? “You and your Gods, kings, prophets, temple, and we are still here.”

Canaanites and Samaritans could always be counted upon to help any enemy of Israel when they were invading. They were the enemy within. They themselves would then loot the Temple.

What could she have expected of Jesus? Did she believe anything of the rumours she had heard? Anything is worth a go when desperate is it not?

In the middle of this situation Jesus reaches out to both parties, to the Canaanites by his grace in being there, not sending her away, talking with her and healing her daughter. Even those who do not deserve anything from God are being blessed. *“Jesus, you should be calling down judgment and condemnation from heaven upon her – teaching her and those like her a firm lesson.”*

On the contrary, to the undeserving, God offers grace, healing and blessing. On the other hand, to the Jews, the priests, Pharisees and Jesus own disciples, there is shock. You can't bless your enemy, and Jesus says again, *“love your enemies.”*

Before the eyes of the priests, Pharisees and his disciples, Jesus puts his teaching into practice. Only his disciples were willing to learn but even for them the lessons were so very hard. Did Jesus expect them to turn from thousands of years of hatred and enmity in a moment? And he tells them, *“You see her and her daughter in one way, God sees them in another... look deeper into her and her daughter's face and see who God sees”.*

Just as you can hate someone in an instant, so stop hating them in an instant. Allow Jesus' way to be your way. What would Jesus' conversation be like with his disciples after this event? For the priests and Pharisees they would realise yet again why they hated Jesus. He was a traitor to their faith and to their people; he had no regard for their historic traditions, and Moses' teaching was quite clear on law and justice and punishment.

The disciples were given a lesson today. They wouldn't have long to take it in because there would be another lesson this afternoon and tomorrow. Jesus teaches them: *“You have enemies, God does not.”*

*“It is you who hate forever, not God. Forgiveness is God's way. See God's grace in forgiving those who deserve no forgiveness.*

When Jesus was no longer with them the disciples still had lessons to learn. Peter struggled to move on outside his own religious framework to include Gentiles: non-Jews. He struggled to move from the Old Covenant to the New. He would keep hearing the words of Jesus... *“You have heard it said... but now I say unto you...”*

*“You want an eye for an eye: I do not”*

*“Don't call these people dogs, see no one in this way – you offend your own faith to speak of others in this way.*

*Love these people, serve them, and share in God's love of them.” But we thought God hated them!*

*“You hate some people, God does not.”*

The Canaanite woman found the grace and love of God in Jesus, what did the priests and Pharisees find in him? Today we watch and listen in amazement once again at the teaching of Jesus. If we are honest we fear this teaching *for him*, and also *for ourselves*. Jesus blesses the Canaanite woman and calls his disciples, *“Come on,”* he says, *“I want to show you something”.*