

**Sermon for August 16, 2014**  
**Matthew**

I have a confession to make—this is my favorite Bible story! I even wrote it down in Sam's Bible along with some other verses that are important to me. Let me set the stage for you and show you why this story is my favorite.

Jesus has left Israel and has gone into the territory of Canaan. The Israelites and Canaanites have a long history of being enemies since Noah put a curse on them. Canaan was also the land that God promised to Abraham's descendants. Joshua and the Israelite army killed the inhabitants as they took control of the land for themselves. At the time of the story Canaan is controlled by the Phoenicians—a people who don't worship the God of Israel.

There is no love lost between the two groups. Why would this woman even consider coming to Jesus? He doesn't represent the gods that she worships and he does represent the ones who have terrorized her people over the years. But somehow she has heard about Jesus and his healing miracles and she puts her daughter's well being above her own discomfort. She comes to see him and begs for her daughter's healing.

A woman traveling alone is scandalous enough, but this woman has the nerve to actually talk to men that are not related to her! And even though she prostrates herself before Jesus and calls him by his proper names—Lord and Son of David; she's not welcomed by either the disciples or Jesus. Picture this scene—on one side you have the woman crying out Kyrie eleison—Lord have mercy and on the other side you have the disciples shouting apolyson—get rid of her with Jesus keeping silent.

At first it seems like Jesus doesn't even notice her and then he seems to side with the disciples and tells her that his first duty is to the tribes of Israel, but she keeps at it begging for mercy for her sick daughter. You know how we all have things we want to ask God when we get to heaven; well what Jesus says next to this woman is one of the first things I want to ask—why did you call her a dog? He tells her that it's not right to take the food from the children and give it to the dogs!

I can imagine the disciples thinking to themselves that Jesus was well on the way to making this woman leave, but she persists. Not only does she persist, but she goes toe to toe with Jesus! She accepts the fact that she's not worthy, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table!

She reminds me of another person who had the nerve to challenge God—Abraham. Remember in Genesis when God tells Abraham the Sodom will be destroyed. Abraham talks God into promising that Sodom won't be destroyed if there can be found 10 righteous persons there. Abraham reminds God that forgiveness and not destruction is at the heart of God. Here this woman reminds Jesus that it isn't just the Israelites who need saving, but the whole world.

I love this story because this Canaanite woman gets it! She knows just who Jesus is and what his purpose is here on earth even before the disciples get it. I love this story because she reminds Jesus that the God who sent him here loves the whole world—all of creation—and that there is to be no longer insiders and outsiders.

I love this story because she reminds Jesus that the God who sent him is a God of abundance—there is plenty for all! Remember the story of a couple weeks ago where Jesus feeds the five thousand with only five loaves and two fish and yet there were twelve baskets of crumbs left over! A crumb of grace is still more than enough.

I love this story because it reminds us of just how desperately God loves each and every one of us and just how far God will go to bring us back into relationship with God. God is willing to break down all of the barriers that we've created that separate us from God and each other.

But I think that I love this story most of all because of that woman's persistence when I hear the words, "This cup is the new covenant shed in my blood for all people for the forgiveness of sins," you and I are included in that all.