

Jesus' Trip to Tyre and Sidon
Matthew 15:21-28
August 16, 2020

Every summer I have been taking a few weeks off for vacation and traveled either abroad or around the US with my family. After my kids grew up and moved away, Paula and I continued to travel. Every year, it has been a wonderful, refreshing and informative experience. But this year, because of the Covid-19, Paula and I have decided to stay home.

Speaking of a vacation, there is a story about four couples, who were close friends. One year, they got together to plan a vacation that would benefit all four families. They decided to equally chip in to rent a vacation home, a cabin, for two months. The idea was for each couple to take a turn and use the vacation home for two weeks. Because they were close friends and all their kids pretty much grew-up together, they decided to keep the kids at the vacation home for the entire two months. Each couple would enjoy the cabin and watch the kids for two weeks. The kids loved the idea and everyone agreed to do that. There were thirteen kids.

After the two months, one of the couples shared with a friend about how they spent their vacation. The friend was very surprised by what he heard. He commented, “Two weeks in a cabin with thirteen kids? Was that really a vacation?”

“No,” they said. “Those two weeks were absolutely horrible but the real vacation was the six weeks at home *without* the kids.”

To me, a vacation is being away from the regular duties and normal routine. As I was reading today’s passage, I wondered if Jesus was on his vacation when he had a trip to Tyre and Sidon.

The Bible says, “Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.” According to Matthew 14:34, Jesus was at Gennesaret.

So, we can assume that Jesus traveled from Gennesaret to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Gennesaret was on the west side of Sea of Galilee. From Gennesaret to Tyre was about 35 miles and to Sidon was about 50 miles one way.

According to the Gospel of Mark the story of this Canaanite (Syrophenician) woman took place in Tyre.¹ Mark’s version says, “From there

¹ Mark 7:24

(Jesus) ... went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice.”²

Based on Mark’s account, we can assume that Jesus walked about 35 miles to Tyre. We are not sure why he went there. Like Mark says, perhaps Jesus did not want anyone to know he was there, perhaps because he was on vacation.

Was it really a vacation? Was he there to rest from his regular duties and normal routine? What else did he do there? We will never know; we are not told. We don’t know how long he stayed there but according to the Gospels, after healing the Canaanite woman’s daughter, Jesus went to Sidon and possibly passed the north side of the Sea of Galilee to Decapolis, which is on the East side of the Sea of Galilee. Based on his itinerary, we can assume that Jesus walked about 100 miles, possibly more for this round trip. Until he reached Decapolis there is nothing recorded about what Jesus did other than healing this Canaanite woman’s daughter.

So, it is possible that Jesus made this long trip just to minister to this troubled mother. Or possibly he was on vacation and he happened to help this woman while he was on vacation. Again, we will never know for sure. Maybe it is not important. But interesting thing about this story is that this woman was not just any woman; but she was a Canaanite, a Gentile.

In Jesus’ day, no respectable Jew would speak with a woman outside his own family, and definitely not a Gentile woman. Canaanites were traditionally considered enemies of the Israelites.³ Is this the reason why Jesus ignored her when she cried out for help? Jesus ignored her, not just once or twice but long enough for the disciples to be annoyed. They came to him and said, “Lord, send her away, please. She will not stop.” “Lord, she is just a Canaanite. You are not going to answer her anyway. So, please send her away.”

But Jesus answered her. He answered her saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of ... Israel.” Knowing that he answered her, she came forward and knelt before him and said, “Lord, please, help me!”

Jesus replied her saying, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” I am sure she was stunned. I am sure everyone was stunned by his response. But she didn’t give up. “Yes, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the

² Mark 7:24.

³ David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary*, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-15/>.

crumbs that fall from their master's table." "Would you be kind to let me have the crumbs? Just the crumbs, Lord. With your power and authority, the crumbs would be more than enough to heal my daughter." That is a great faith.

Why was Jesus so harsh toward this woman? Was Jesus really annoyed by her? Was he disturbed because his vacation was disrupted? Or was he giving this woman a test? A test of her faith that she really believed Jesus could heal her daughter? Isn't it interesting that after being so harsh toward her, Jesus praises this woman for her great faith?

I don't know about you, but I suspect that Jesus wanted his disciples to see what great faith looks like no matter who has it, whether a Jew or a Gentile, whether a male or female has it. He wanted them to see the faith in a desperate and helpless time. He wanted them to see how faith is demonstrated. The faith that never gives up. The faith that passes all ethnic and cultural boundaries. The faith that never doubts. The faith that relies on only one person, the living God. Perhaps it was not a vacation; rather it was a field trip for a great object lesson.

This story teaches us some important lessons about faith. First, faith requires persistence. This woman was determined. She was not going to be stopped by anyone. Even when she was repeatedly ignored, she did not give up. Even when the disciples gave her dirty looks, she was not intimidated. She was too desperate to be hindered. She was ignored for a while even by the Master himself but she was determined to make her voice heard. That is faith.

Too many people give up too quickly, don't you think? Persistence is often the dividing force for those who succeed in life. No one succeeds without persistence. This is true in every profession. And this is true for spiritual journey as well.

Second, faith makes your desires known. Notice, she spoke up. She made her request known, even when the disciples tried to silence her. Sometimes you have to do that. You have to make your voice heard. As you know, Martin Luther King Jr. made his voice heard through his great speeches and peaceful movement. There was no violence, just the voice, the powerful voice. That is a sign of faith.

Jesus once told a parable of woman who would not give up. "In a certain town," he said, "there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about people. There was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused but she kept coming back. Finally, the judge said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or

care about people, if I don't do justice for her, she will wear me out.' Then Jesus said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says, and will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:2-8)

Why did she come to the judge day and night and bother him? Because she knew he was the only one who could satisfy her longing for justice. Having THAT conviction is faith, and having that conviction is the source of persistence.

But Jesus' warning is shivering. He said, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith? Will he find persistent faith? Will he find faith that recognizes who has the power and authority to satisfy one's hopes and desires?

Jesus wanted his disciples to know what faith really was. I believe that is the reason why he took such a long trip to Tyre and Sidon, and such faith is not a sole possession of the Israelites. It is found, or must be found, in all people including the people the Israelites considered enemies.

Jesus equated faith with persistence and making one's voice known. If I can add one more, knowing WHO has the authority and power to satisfy our longing is faith. The Canaanite woman wasn't worried about being polite. She wasn't worried what others thought of her. Only one thing mattered, her daughter's healing. And she made that known persistently until she annoyed everyone.

Motivational speaker Les Brown once put it like this: "If you want a thing bad enough to go out and fight for it, to work day and night for it, to give up your time, your peace, and your sleep for it . . . if all that you dream and scheme is about it, and life seems useless and worthless without it . . . if you gladly sweat for it and fret for it and plan for it and lose all your terror of the opposition for it . . . if neither cold, poverty, famine, nor sickness, nor pain of body and brain, can keep you away from the thing that you want . . . if dogged and grim, you beseech and beset it, with the help of God, you WILL get it!"⁴

May such persistence, such resilience, be our faith!

⁴ Cited in Billy Cox, *You Gotta Get In The Game* (Dallas: CornerStone Leadership Institute, 2005. 2nd edition.)