

The Canaanite Woman (The Cure for Uncleanness)

The Life of Jesus Vol.2 (True Religion) Part 18 (Revised)

Matthew 15:21-29 (Mk.7:24-30) 12-11-11

This even is one of the very rare times when Jesus recognizes human greatness. It's the story of one of the great heroes of the faith, presented in way to inspire great faith in us.

Summary: Jesus leaves the Holy land and goes to Unclean-land. An (unclean) Canaanite asks for help and He keeps throwing down obstacles to expose her great faith. When her faith is shown genuine, He praises her and grants her the "bread" she requests. Her faith was great because she assumed Jesus could help her without neglecting the Disciples (could cast out the demon with a thought). Jesus' mysterious comment about being sent only to Israel is the first hint that later develops to show a shift in the definition of Israel that would include Gentiles.

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Matthew 15:21-29 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." 23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." 25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. 26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." 27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. 29 Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down.

Mark 7:24-30 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre.

He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. 27 "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." 28 "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Introduction

The Cure for Uncleanness

How much money do you think you would make if you discovered an instant cure for cancer – any kind of cancer? Or for that matter – a cure for the common cold? People could just take a pill and their cold would be gone immediately. You would probably be one of the wealthiest people in the world. A cure for the common cold would be a great step forward in medicine. A cure for cancer would really be exciting – but how about this: What if there were a cure for the deadly, degenerative, systemic disease that Jesus showed us last week – the disease of spiritual uncleanness? If you were not here last time, Jesus was in a conversation with the Pharisees about the problem of uncleanness. Uncleanness is a huge problem because it makes a person disgusting in God's eyes, so God turns His face away and withdraws His presence from anyone who has a dirty heart. The Pharisees thought they had a cure for it with all their religious performance. But Jesus delivered the devastating news that their cures were all worthless, because they did not have any ability to deal with the source of the uncleanness, which is the human heart. You see, it is not the sinful things you do that makes you dirty before God. It is your heart. So trying to cure the problem of uncleanness through religious activity is like putting a band aid on someone who has lung cancer. If a person could get rich by discovering a cure for cancer, what about someone who discovers a cure for something far more deadly, and far more common – spiritual uncleanness? Several of you commented last week that you feel your heart is far from God. What is the cure for that? What is the solution to a heart that is unclean, and that is far from God? It will not make you rich because it is not for sale, but it is discoverable, and Jesus is going to show it to us this morning in Matthew 15.

The problem of v.24

But before we look at this text, I have to warn you right up front - verse 24 is a problem. In verse 21 Jesus leaves the Pharisees, leaves the borders of Israel altogether and goes up north into gentile territory. Then when He gets up to gentile land, He makes that statement in verse 24, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.**" Why travel outside of Israel to make the announcement that you are called only to Israel? Could it have been just a one-day retreat to get away from the crowds? No – this passage actually marks the beginning of a whole new segment of Jesus' ministry known as His Gentile ministry.

This map overlays a Colorado map on top of Israel. First He goes to Tyre, then even farther north to Sidon, then He crosses the mountains of Lebanon and then goes back down south, but to the eastern, gentile side of the Sea of Galilee in the Decapolis. So this is an extended tour outside of Israel. And on this tour, Jesus ends



up doing all the same things He was doing in Israel – healing the sick, casting out demons, and He even feeds a gentile multitude with a few loaves and fishes. And He kicks it all off by saying, **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."**

Can you see why I say verse 24 is a problem? It does not seem to fit at all with Jesus' actions. Nor does it seem to fit the immediate context. Some gentile woman comes asking for help, and...

23 ... So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away..." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." - and then He doesn't send her away!

When I read this, it seems like it would have made sense if they said, "Send this gentile woman away" and Jesus said, "No – I was sent not only for Jews but also gentiles," and then He ministered to her. Then His answer would make sense to me. Or – if they would have said, "Send this gentile woman way," and Jesus said, "Good idea. Seeing as I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, you're right – I shouldn't spend my time with a gentile. Let's pack up and go back to Israel." Either one of those I could easily make sense out of Jesus' answer. But what are we to make of what is actually there in the text? The answer to that question is also the key to finding the cure for an unclean heart that is far from God.

Jesus in Unclean-land

The first step in finding the answer is to read verse 21 through the eyes of the original readers. When they saw the statement, **Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon...**, to understand the impact of that just pencil in "Jesus withdrew from the Holy Land and entered Defilementland." And if the capital of Defilementland is Uncleanville, then Tyre would be Uncleanville. Back in Matthew 11:21-22, Jesus used Tyre and Sidon (along with Sodom and Gomorrah) as illustrations of the most godless, wicked, vile, filthy, unclean people there are). When you were talking to Jews of Jesus' day, and you wanted to make a strong point about someone who will suffer the hottest imaginable hell, you just said, "Tyre and Sidon." So Jesus leaves Israel, and takes His disciples into the land of uncleanness and filthiness. Now, when you go to a place like that, what would you expect to see?

22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him

A Canaanite! Now that is something you don't see every day. There was no such thing as Canaanites in Jesus' time. Think about it – when was the last time you actually saw a Canaanite show up on the pages of Scripture? The last Canaanite to appear in an account of Scripture is in the second chapter of 1 Chronicles. That is almost two thousand years before the time of Jesus. The Canaanites were from "Bible times" for the people of Jesus' time. Canaan was as far back in their past as Jesus is in our past. We look back two thousand years to the time of Jesus. They looked back that far to the time of the existence of the Canaanites.

In Mark's account he just says she was from Syrian Phoenicia. That was what the area was called in Jesus' time. But Matthew dusts off this old term from two thousand years before – why? It would be like today if you referred to someone as a Philistine. Obviously if someone said that, they would be trying to make a point. So what point is Matthew making by calling this woman a Canaanite? Who were the Canaanites? The Canaanites were the worst people in the Old Testament. They were the ones who corrupted Israel. They were the ones living in the Promised Land before God gave that land to Israel. And when Israel entered the land, God said to Israel: "Exterminate those people. Get rid of every last trace of them – lest you be contaminated." That included women, children, animals, possessions – everything had to be utterly destroyed lest the people of God become defiled. God does not often do that, but these people were like a cancer on the world and had to be excised.

But Israel failed to do so. The reason for all the problems Israel had with idolatry is that they failed to eliminate the Canaanites. And the result was Israel was defiled, God turned His face away, and they were destroyed by their enemies and carried off into captivity. So by calling her a Canaanite, Matthew is saying, “Here is a vestige of the defiling, contaminating influence that led to the destruction of Israel.”

And as for Tyre and Sidon - do you remember what famous person in the Old Testament was from Sidon? Jezebel. So Jesus ventures into Defilementland, goes right into Uncleanville, and who should walk up to them but Mrs. Unclean herself. Matthew might as well just call her Jezebel.

It should not be hard for us to see the connection with the previous section that we looked at last week. The Pharisees accuse Jesus of uncleanness, because He did not follow the cleansing rituals. And Jesus responds by giving them a lesson on what cleanness and uncleanness are all about. And by the time He is done speaking, they are exposed as being walking volcanoes of uncleanness, because uncleanness is not about religious activity, but about the heart. And then, Jesus turns around and immediately leaves Israel and goes into the heart of gentile uncleanness, and Jezebel herself walks up. I get the feeling Jesus is not done teaching about cleanness and uncleanness. He is setting us up to teach us something – no question about it. Let’s see what it is.

Skandalon’s

22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is horribly demonized."

This poor little girl is being tormented in horrible ways by a demon, and so her mother hears about Jesus, and comes asking for help. This woman knows exactly who Jesus is. And she addresses Him with very respectful and very Jewish terms. **Lord, Son of David** – that is an Old Testament, Jewish way of referring to the Jewish Messiah. The religious leaders in Israel think Jesus is unclean and satanic, and Jezebel from Uncleanville calls Him **Lord, Son of David**. And in humility she asks for mercy. What a contrast.

Skandalon #1 - Silence

23 Jesus did not answer a word.

The woman is shouting – begging Jesus for help – “Please, have mercy on me. This demon – this wicked, vicious, unclean spirit, is doing horrible things to my little girl. Please, drive it away...” Jesus is completely silent - no response. He totally ignores her. Jesus is normally so compassionate to a desperate woman in need – why the indifference here? What is He doing?

To understand what is going on here I think it will help to remind ourselves of a very important statement Jesus made in Luke 7:23.

Luke 7:23 Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.

The word translated “fall away” is the Greek word *skandalizo*, and it is an interesting word. A *skandalon* is an obstacle. So the verb *skandalizo* means to run into an obstacle, and to be turned away. If you are driving along and come across a big rock in the road, and it makes you turn around and go back – then you were *skandalizo*’d by that rock. But if you find a way to push ahead, and you get past the rock, then you were not *skandalizo*’d by that obstacle (*skandalon*) that is in the road. If you are repellable, your faith is not real.

So in Luke 7:23 Jesus said, “**Blessed is the man who is not skandalizo’d by me.**” All through Jesus’ ministry you see Him setting up *skandalons* in front of people to expose their faith or lack of faith. The woman at the well – she is ready to receive the water of life, but then Jesus says, “First go get your husband.” Was she turned away (*skandalizo’d*)? No, her faith was real. A rich young ruler comes wanting to follow Jesus and Jesus tells him, “Go sell everything you have and give to the poor.” What happened? He turned away. He was *skandalizo’d* by the obstacle Jesus put in front of him, and his faith was exposed as bogus faith. When Jesus told the parable of the soils, He said some people’s hearts are like rocky soil.

Matthew 13:21 since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he is quickly *skandalizo’d*.

In Matthew 24 Jesus tells about the horrible suffering of the Great Tribulation and He says:

Matthew 24:10 At that time many will be *skandalizo’d* from the faith

That is exactly what just happened with the crowd after the feeding of the five thousand, and then the Pharisees last week.

John 6:53 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you..."

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it? 61 ... Jesus said to them, "Does this *skandalizo* you? 63 ... there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe

Jesus makes His point in a hard, offensive way as a *skandalon*, to expose faith and unbelief.

Then right after that, in Matthew 15, he did the same thing with the Pharisees. He calls them hypocrites, tells them they are defiled at the core, and then says, “Oh, and by the way, I think I’ll just cancel the whole kosher food system of the Old Testament right now.”

12 Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended (*skandalizo’d*) when they heard this?"

To them Jesus was just a walking PR nightmare. How are you ever going to get your movement off the ground if you repel people all the time? But Jesus repelled them out of love, because there is nothing more cruel than letting someone whose faith is not genuine go on thinking he is saved.

The Woman’s Response

So, what Jesus does here is no different from what He has done over and over in the past. He throws out this big boulder in the road in front of this woman by ignoring her. How is she going to respond?

“And the woman, when she saw this, turned away just like the disciples had the day before and said, ‘Fine! I’ll find myself a god who cares!’”

No, she does not do that. She is not *skandalizo’d*. She just plows her way right past this boulder in the road. She is not like those people who ask for something from God and when He does not snap to it, they turn away. Her faith is not even phased by Jesus’ silence.

Skandalon #2: Send Her Away

Well, at this point the Disciples ask Jesus to send her away. They are tired of hearing her crying out after them, and so they say, “Jesus, just get rid of her already.” “And when the woman heard what the disciples said about her, she turned away and stomped off in a rage, saying, ‘the Church is nothing but a bunch of hypocrites. I hate organized religion!’” No, she does not do that either. She was not like so many people today who use the sins of the Church as an excuse for their own rebellion against God. This woman blows right past this obstacle as well.

It is at this point that Jesus makes the comment in verse 24 about only being sent to the lost sheep of Israel. He is not sent to gentiles, only Jews.

“And the woman answered, ‘I don’t have to put up with this kind of racism. I’m out of here.’” No, Her response was worship.

The Woman’s Response

25 The woman came and worshipped before him.

The word is *proskuneo* – face on the ground. She is not offended, not turned away, no anger, no despair, no pride – just humble worship.

Mark 7:26 She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

She is persisting.

Skandalon #3: Dogs Come Last

But Jesus is not finished testing her. He is going to throw down another obstacle in her path.

26 "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

“I can’t help you, because it would be wrong for me to neglect the children for the dogs.”

This is just getting painful. First He ignores her, then the disciples want her sent away, then He gives her some racial comment, and now He calls her a dog. What kind of evangelistic technique is this? Why does Jesus keep persisting with the obstacles?

Because the greater someone’s faith is, the greater the obstacles it takes to expose how great it is. If your faith is small, He might just put a little pebble in your path to show that you can make it past a pebble. But this woman’s faith is so great, He puts Mt. Everest in her way, so when she blows by it we can see how great her faith is.

The purpose of the dog illustration is not to insult her.¹ It is an illustration, not an insult. He is saying the Disciples are like children in a household. You should not be cruel to your pets, and you should feed them and provide all that they need, but it would be wrong if you neglected the children to feed the pets. The children must be the priority. So Jesus is saying, “Look, I’m here to minister to My Disciples right now. It would be wrong for me to leave them and go off to wherever you live to help your daughter.” It is not cruelty to animals if you feed your kids before you feed your pet dog. That is one of the privileges of being a child in the house.

The terms here about eating bread call to mind the feeding of the five thousand. That miracle promised provision for the children of Israel, and especially the Twelve. Jesus is not going to leave them to go help this gentile woman.

¹ The term “dog” is not as insulting as it might sound at first. Jesus is not referring to the vicious, wild street mongrels that are elsewhere used to insult gentiles. He uses the diminutive form (little dogs – or puppies). These dogs are in the house, which points not to wild dogs, but to pets. There are examples of dogs as house pets in the Mishna, and in classical Greek usage the diminutive form is used that way.

The Woman's Response

Verse 27 - "When the woman heard this, she turned away and said, 'Oh, well, I guess it's not God's will. I give up.'"

No. She plows right through this barrier too. But look how she does it:

27 "Yes, Lord," she said

Isn't that beautiful? Boy, if we could just learn to say that – if we could learn this one thing from this woman, we would be learning a lot. This is one of the greatest illustrations in the Bible on learning to come to the Lord on His terms. It does not matter what His terms are – those are the terms. Ours is not to argue or question. Ours is to just to say, "Yes, Lord."

One of the great tragedies of the modern church is that we have managed to send the message to the world that you can approach God on your own terms. People who believe that are in for a rude awakening.

Jesus lets this woman know she is the lowest priority. But she responds not with sorrow or anger, but with humble submission: "Yes, Lord."

She accepts His terms, and she is not going to argue with Him; but she is not going to give up either. This woman sees a hidden "yes" embedded in Jesus' "no." She sees a hole in Jesus' argument – a weak spot He purposely left there. It is a point of vulnerability in His argument that only a heart of faith would be able to spot. No one in the gospels has ever prevailed against Jesus in a debate, until now. This woman finds a way. She is going to offer a counter-argument, and Jesus is going to concede the point. When Jesus uses the analogy of children and pet dogs, His point is that the disciples are the priority, and it would be wrong to neglect them for something else. What if you were the woman – what could you say to that? Most people would assume there are only two possible answers she could give: Either you could disagree: "No, the disciples shouldn't be the priority. You should attend to me." 2) Or you could agree: "You're right - the disciples are the priority, I guess I'm out of luck." But this woman sees a third option.

The Woman Wins the Argument

27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Isn't that great? "You are not going to get rid of me with that analogy. The children at the table are a higher priority than me? Fine. Jews first? Fine. I'm the pet dog? Fine – no argument with any of that. But if the problem is that You don't want to neglect the disciples and come to my house – that's a non-problem. You can help me without neglecting the disciples at all." And she points out how using Jesus' own analogy. In the pet dog analogy, it is not necessary to neglect the children to feed the dog. Both can be done simultaneously without any extra effort. And anyone with young children and who has a dog in the house understands why. When my kids were little, any dog that was around when we were eating dinner was a very well-fed dog. There was a continual meal of food raining down onto the floor like manna from heaven. That is how it is with young children. That is why Mark calls them "the children's crumbs." It does not cost the children anything to let the dog eat the crumbs. If the dog does not eat them you just sweep them up and throw them away.

Do you see what she is saying? She is saying, "Yes, Lord, I agree that You should not neglect the Disciples to help me. But You wouldn't have to! I know who You are – Don't leave Your disciples – keep right on feeding them. Stay seated. Just say the word. Just think a thought, and I know it will be done."

Most people were like the guy in John 4 who begged Jesus to come and heal his son. They think Jesus has to come and be there on site. But this woman has great faith. She understands who Jesus is – He is God. He can heal her daughter simply by an act of His will.

So she does something none of the most brilliant minds in Israel could do – win an argument with Jesus. One old commentator suggests what may have taken place in this woman’s mind as she realized Jesus intentionally left that weakness in His argument.

“His own illustration has admitted her right to profit by the heedlessness of ‘the children.’ ... He had meant to be thus overcome. One loves to think of the first flush of hope in that trembling mother’s heavy heart as she discerned His intention and said within herself, ‘Oh, surely I am not mistaken; He does not really refuse at all; He wills that I should answer Him and prevail.’ One supposes that she looked up, half afraid to utter the great rejoinder, and took courage when she met His inviting gaze.” So she makes her counter-argument.

Jesus Commends Her Faith

And as soon as she does, everything changes.

28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman..."

Actually in the Greek it’s, “**Oh, woman...**” That is an expression of emotion. And the pronouns in the Greek become very personal. This marks the turning point in the story. Jesus’ tone changes completely. Up to now Jesus has seemed so distant and detached, and now He is so warm and tender. Jesus said, “**Oh, woman, you have great faith!**” This is one of the rare times Jesus ever recognizes human greatness.

Your will be done

Then He says, **Your request is granted.** Lit: “It will be done for you as you will.” She did not argue with God’s program. She accepted God’s will, and as a result God granted her will. By saying, “Yes, Lord” she was saying, “Your will be done,” to God. And so God responded by saying, “OK, *your* will can be done now as well.” That is how God responds to great faith.

The demon cast out

Mark 7:29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

She instantly got everything she wanted, and Jesus said it was because of this reply.

Matthew 15:28 ... her daughter was healed from that very hour.

The moment Jesus said this, that demon was gone. I like to think about this from the perspective of the demon. He is having a great day. Everything is fine. The mother is gone, no one is there to comfort the girl or restrain her from hurting herself. The demon has free reign. There was no sign of danger – no sign of anything wrong, and suddenly, out of the blue, without warning...blindsided! Just like that – never saw it coming.

I don’t know how it happened. I don’t know if the demon suddenly experienced some unbearable terror and had to leave, or if Jesus sent some huge angel to just drop kick that demon across the solar system..., or if one second the demon was carrying on just fine and the next second he found himself closed forever in the depths of the lake of fire where those two thousand demons begged Jesus not to send them.

Jesus thinks one thought, and this demon is gone. So much for the gods of the nations. Up against the mighty Christ, not even the fiercest, most powerful demon can withstand His wrath for even one split second.

A New Israel

So back to our problem verse. Why did Jesus make that remark about being sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, right before helping this woman, and then launching into His extended gentile ministry? As I poured over that question this week, and kept studying the context in wider and wider chunks, I started to see something. Beginning at this point in Matthew and extending all the way to the end of chapter 23, Jesus seems to drop one hint after another that there is a change that is about to take place in what constitutes the people of God. Who is the true Israel that will receive the Messiah as the food and drink of their lives? Jesus says, "I'm ONLY sent to Israel – not this woman because she is not part of the covenant people of God." Then a moment later what happens? The woman shows true, genuine, saving faith – the real thing that can plow past the obstacles and *skandaons* that Jesus throws down. And as soon as that faith becomes evident, He grants her request, and she gets to eat the crumbs from the table. The Pharisees call Jesus satanic, but this gentile woman calls Him Lord. Did you know, in the entire book of Mark, this is the only time anyone calls Jesus Lord? Jesus is sent only to Israel, the people of God, but when God's chosen race responds in unbelief, they are rejected. And when an outsider, unclean, gentile dog believes, she is accepted. Only called to Israel, yet He does that. What does that mean? Not sure – let's just leave it as a mystery in this passage.

Then we get to the next chapter and Jesus refers to the Jews as a wicked and adulterous generation who will not receive a sign (Mt.16:4).

Later in that chapter Jesus starts talking about the fact that the Jews are going to reject Him and kill Him (16:21-28). Then He says that again in chapter 17 (17:9-12), and calls them an unbelieving, perverse generation (17:17). Then in chapter 20 Jesus tells a parable about some workers who worked only the last hour of the day and received the same wage as those who worked all day (20:1-16). Latecomers will receive a full reward. Then in the next chapter Jesus performs a very unusual miracle - He kills a fig tree (21:18-22). He sees a fig tree that is not producing fruit, so He curses it, and it dies that same day. The fig tree is an Old Testament symbol for the nation of Israel, which God expected to produce fruit.

Then, later in that same chapter, Jesus tells the parable of the two sons (21:28-32), which also seems to have implications for what happens when the Jews reject Christ. Then immediately after that He tells the parable of the tenants (21:33-46).

Matthew 21:43 Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

Then in the next chapter He told the parable of the wedding banquet where some who had been invited are kicked out, and he says...

Matthew 22:14 For many are invited, but few are chosen.

Finally it all climaxes in chapter 23 with Jesus' blistering rebuke of the Pharisees, which ends this way:

Matthew 23:37-39 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'

You see the progression? All these passages about how the Jews would reject Jesus, and the kingdom would be taken from them and given to others. And the beginning of all that is our mysterious verse in chapter 15, where Jesus says, "I am sent only to Israel" and then immediately embraces a gentile woman who shows faith. He holds her at arm's length until she shows she has faith, and then immediately embraces her. It seems to me if we connect all those dots, Jesus is indicating a transition in the way we should understand what qualifies as true Israel. The arrival of the Messiah marks the time when the people of God changes from being an ethnic people to being a believing people. In the Old Testament, the people of God was anyone born with Jewish blood – saved or lost. But now the people of God are only believers – and all believers, Jew or gentile. And when Jesus said, "I am only sent to Israel" and immediately proceeded to minister to a believing gentile, I believe that was intended to be a mystery at first, that became clearer and clearer as time went on. And that mystery was this – there is going to be an "Israel" that is going to include gentiles.

"First" (means gentiles do come)

There is another clue that Jesus gave about all this that Mark mentions in his account. When the woman asks for help, Jesus says...

Mark 7:27 "First let the children eat all they want," he told her

Do you see it? It is the word "first." What does that imply? We can rejoice over that word "first," because the implication is that it goes first to the Jews, but then to the Gentiles. And by calling us the pet dogs, Jesus brings us in under the same roof as the children, enjoying the same bread. All this was hidden in the Old Testament, and Jesus gave some clues, more and more as time went on, and by the time we get into the epistles Paul makes it crystal clear:

Romans 9:6-8 not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, ... 8 it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

Abraham is the model of genuine saving faith, and so the true offspring of Abraham are believers.

Does that mean God is finished with ethnic Israel? Romans 11 says that even though they are enemies of the gospel right now, someday the whole nation of Israel will come to Christ and be saved. So we do not want to get too carried away and say that the Church has replaced ethnic Israel altogether. But what we can say is that believing gentiles have been grafted into the vine of God's people even while most ethnic Jews have been cut off because of unbelief. It is easy for us to take that for granted, but we need to remember what an amazing thing it is that we could have a share in the promises made to Israel.

Ephesians 2:11-13 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth ... 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Conclusion: The Cure of Uncleaness

So what is the cure for uncleaness? What did Jesus say?

28 Oh Woman, you have great faith!

Filthy Jezebel is brought into the household of God's people and is given the bread of life because of her faith. Do you want to be clean in His sight? Would you like the bread to be given to you? Imitate this woman's faith. How do you do that?

1. Great faith comes through hearing

Mark's account begins by saying this woman came because she heard about Jesus (Mark 7:25). That is where it starts – faith comes through hearing the message about Christ (Ro.10:17). That is how you get faith in the first place. Listen to the preaching of God's Word with an open, receptive, teachable ear.

2. Great faith is humble and reverent

Secondly, she approached Jesus with reverence and spoke to Him with humility and respect, coming to Him on His terms, not hers.

3. Great faith can't be scandalized

Third, she was unrepellable. She could not be scandalized. Make sure every obstacle that lands in front of you drives you toward Christ, not away from Him. Do not ever give up. Jesus describes this woman's faith as great; how did He describe Peter's faith back in chapter 14 (little)? This woman's faith was great; Peter's was little. Peter walked on water; this woman made a comment. What made her faith so great? What is the difference between little faith and great faith? You can do great things with little faith – Peter walked on water with it. But the problem with little faith is it can be distracted from Christ. Peter walked on water, but did not make it all the way to Jesus. Little faith will get you half way there, then you sink. Great faith cannot be deterred, cannot be repelled, cannot be distracted, because great faith understands there just simply is no other option.

4. Great faith expects God to behave as God

She understood that Jesus could heal with a mere act of His will. She did not think of Jesus as being limited by distance or time or circumstances or the magnitude of the trouble. Great faith has unlimited confidence in Jesus' power, and unlimited confidence in Jesus' kindness (even when it appears He is being harsh). And all of this is possible for all of us because the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of great faith.

Benediction: Romans 16:25-27 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him- 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.