



TRUE WORSHIPERS: THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN AND THE SINNER WOMAN

WEEK 12
05.20.18

FOCUS VERSE

John 4:23

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 15:22–28

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Luke 7:37–38, 44–48

37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

.....

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven



FOCUS THOUGHT

God desires true worship.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Idol Worship

In June 2002, one of the most influential and successful prime-time television programs ever produced—American Idol—was introduced in the United States. Over the next fifteen seasons this program took the television and music industry by storm. America clamored after its new stars and bought their music at a record pace.

Popular music has been one of the major avenues through which the generations have influenced society. However, the power and influence of music is difficult to fully comprehend.

Many have tried to explain it by searching extra-biblical sources that seem to confirm Satan's role in the origin of music's impact. And perhaps much of what scholars have

said is true. Unfortunately, we do not have a complete understanding of it all.

God created music and therefore it is a gift He has given to us. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). Unfortunately, some people have taken this wonderful gift and have used it to edify themselves and to promote lifestyles that are against the purpose and plan of God.

Surely there has never been a more appropriately named television show than American Idol. So many have chosen to worship music and its artists, making idols of them, rather than using music to worship God who created the music. God is looking for true worshipers and desires to find pure hearts set on honoring Him above all else.

OUTLINE

- I. BOTH WOMEN CAME TO JESUS WITHOUT INVITATION**
 - A. The Syrophenician Woman
 - B. The Sinner Woman
- II. BOTH WOMEN HAD NEEDS**
 - A. The Syrophenician Woman Needed Deliverance for Her Daughter
 - B. The Sinner Woman Needed Forgiveness
- III. BOTH WOMEN WERE INITIALLY IGNORED**
 - A. The Syrophenician Woman
 - B. The Sinner Woman
- IV. BOTH WOMEN GOT JESUS' ATTENTION AS THEY WORSHIPED**
 - A. The Syrophenician Woman
 - B. The Sinner Woman
- V. BOTH WOMEN RECEIVED WHAT THEY NEEDED**
 - A. Jesus Healed the Syrophenician's Daughter
 - B. Jesus Forgave the Sinner Woman of Her Sins

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Humans are worshipers. All over the world, people worship various deities, leaders, heroes, and even venerated objects. In Western culture, however, perhaps the greatest subject of worship is the self.

Our culture tells us that only the human self can determine truth and morality. It has become popular for people to identify themselves as "spiritual, but not religious," indicating that their spirituality is intended to serve themselves and not the requirements of another deity. As long as their spirituality helps them feel good, assuages their conscience, or provides a sense of identity, they will adopt practices and beliefs that work for them.

In contrast, Jesus Christ proclaimed that "true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23), indicating there is a right way to worship. True worship is not to ourselves but to the God who created us, with whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This worship is structured by the practice and pattern of the Bible, resulting in an entire life completely oriented to giving glory to God and following His commands.

While the world may accuse true worshipers of being dogmatic or religious, true worshipers have discovered that lasting joy, peace, and the provisions of God come when we submit our lives to Him and His Word. In this lesson, we will trace the stories of two women in the Gospels who demonstrated true worship of Jesus Christ as we consider our own worship and areas of our lives that may not be fully submitted to God. May we experience a renewal of worship to our great God!

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. BOTH WOMEN CAME TO JESUS WITHOUT INVITATION

A. The Syrophenician Woman

Imagine a daughter who became sick with a disease no doctor could diagnose. Her mother took her to doctor after doctor, hospital after hospital, and no one could provide a cure. Desperation and despair would no doubt set in, perhaps with the hope that a miracle might come through divine intervention.

This was the dilemma faced by a woman Jesus encountered while traveling to the region of Tyre and Sidon, located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Jesus was leaving Galilee to provide these pagan cities another invitation to God's kingdom. He entered a house intending to remain incognito but was soon discovered by a woman desperate for her daughter to be delivered from demon possession. This woman was not a Jew but a Greek from Syrian Phoenicia (See Mark 7:26.) Matthew identified her with the archaic designation of "a woman from Canaan" (Matthew 15:22).

This unnamed woman began to cry out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil" (Matthew 15:22; Mark 7:25). She was desperate for her daughter to be healed and she knew Jesus had the power to deliver her daughter. Most important, she identified Him as Lord, indicating she recognized His divine power and authority. Consequently, she was determined to get the Lord's attention, crying out to Him, making a scene to the point that the disciples became annoyed and desired Jesus to send her away.

True worship begins with an understanding

that we need Jesus more than anything else. We need Him more than medical treatment, a good job, strong family relationships, and even more than life itself. True worship begins with desperation for Jesus to complete in our lives what we could never complete on our own.

B. The Sinner Woman

A woman with a sinful history who was publicly known in her town learned that Jesus had been invited to dinner at the home of Simon, a Pharisee. While Jesus was reclining at the table, she entered Simon's home with an alabaster jar of perfume. Alabaster was a soft stone often used to make perfume containers, and Mark's Gospel tells us this jar of perfume was worth three hundred days' wages. The woman came to Jesus and stood behind Him at His feet, weeping, wetting His feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and pouring perfume on them.

Once again, a woman found Jesus in a private home with others and intentionally sought His attention. Both women exhibited desperation to see Jesus no matter the public humiliation they might endure. While the Syrophenician woman entered a home making a dramatic scene, crying out to Jesus and later falling at His feet, this sinner woman entered the Pharisee's house quietly, and the gospels do not record her ever saying a word. She simply desired to find Jesus and to worship Him.

If we are to come to Jesus in worship, we must be willing to seek Him earnestly and humble ourselves before Him. Our worship comes from recognition that He is truly Lord, and our existence and identity is dependent on His mercy, His forgiveness, and His love. Jesus told a parable of a widow who pestered an unjust judge until he finally gave her the justice she desired (Luke 18:1-8). Jesus told this parable to instruct believers always to pray and never give up on their prayers (Luke 18:1). In the same manner, our prayers to God should reflect our complete reliance on Him for all our needs.

II. BOTH WOMEN HAD NEEDS

A. The Syrophenician Woman Needed Deliverance for Her Daughter

It has been said that "words are not enough

to express the unconditional love that exists between a mother and a daughter.” While this expression is not universal in reality, it conveys the unique bond of love and care that often characterizes a mother’s love for her girl. In the Old Testament Book of Ruth, this unique bond was exemplified by two women, Naomi and Ruth, who did not share a biological relationship as mother and daughter but developed one as mother and daughter-in-law. During difficult life circumstances, Ruth told her mother-in-law, “For whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). This beautiful illustration demonstrates how the mother-daughter bond is not limited to biology, but relationships through love and friendship can also grow and be strengthened.

In the same manner, the Syrophenician woman demonstrated the strength of her unconditional love for her daughter. Mark’s gospel indicates her daughter was young and struggled with demon possession. While many modern scholars believe the descriptions of demon possession in the New Testament typically indicate neurological disorders or mental illness, it is helpful to remember that the Bible was written in a specific culture and setting two thousand years ago. Unexplained negative behavior or symptoms were often understood as demonic in nature.

All this Syrophenician woman knew was that her daughter’s symptoms were outside of her control, causing her daughter torment and pain, and there seemed to be no known cure. Perhaps the woman had previously tried Canaanite rituals, even sacrificing to idols in hope of a cure for her daughter.

When Jesus came to town, His fame as a healer and one who casts out demons no doubt preceded Him. The woman’s daughter needed a healer, and the mother personally interceded with Jesus to petition for her daughter’s healing.

True worshipers intercede for the needs of others. Paul told Timothy: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men” (I Timothy 2:1). Whether biological family, friends that are like family, or the family of God, a life of worship is characterized by lifting others up before Him. Pentecostals often describe

this call to intercession as a “burden,” indicating that their sensitivity to the Holy Ghost and the needs of others draws them to their knees in intercessory prayer.

B. The Sinner Woman Needed Forgiveness

Guilt and shame felt by an individual whose indiscretions are publicly known is a challenging weight to bear. Guilt is often associated with remorse for sin, thinking, *I did something bad*, and shame as internalized feelings that *I am bad*.

No doubt we have all felt guilty for sins we have committed throughout our lives. However, for some individuals, the weight of sin and guilt results in shame carried daily. That shame may even be public, especially if it resulted in legal proceedings or in family or relational problems. In churches, it is not uncommon for out-of-wedlock pregnancies and adultery in a marriage to bring shame upon men and women as the consequences of sexual relations before marriage (fornication) or outside of marriage (adultery) become publicly known to the membership. For others, sins that result in crimes broadcast in the media can bring shame upon individuals, families, and even churches.

Regarding the sinner woman in the lesson text, we are not specifically told what her sins were but only that they were many. Church tradition has often assumed the sinner woman’s transgressions were prostitution. Regardless of the nature of her many sins, the most important point is that everyone at the dinner in Simon’s home knew the nature of her sins, and they ascribed shame to her because of them.

When Simon saw the woman wash Jesus’ feet with her tears, he immediately thought ill of both Jesus and the woman: “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39). Since everyone else in the room knew the sins of the woman, Simon thought to himself that Jesus should know the shame of this woman, especially because He was considered a prophet. As the story continued, Jesus revealed that He did know her many sins. Most important, the woman herself was aware of her guilt and shame, and she reflected her repentance in her worship of Jesus.

Jesus declared, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:34–36, NKJV). The sinner woman knew that only Jesus could bring her deliverance from the stain of sin and all the guilt and shame that had resulted from her actions. True worshipers accept Jesus’ invitation to experience true freedom from the slavery of sin, recognizing that all “have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

III. BOTH WOMEN WERE INITIALLY IGNORED

A. The Syrophenician Woman

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges in the Christian life is how to respond to the God’s silence. Our prayers go up without an indication of an answer, a confirmation from another believer, or a change in circumstances. Our petition before God has not been approved, judging by a lack of resolution to the request, but it has not necessarily been turned down. Instead we perceive that the Lord is silent. This perception often leads to questions: Is God ignoring me? Is there sin in my life preventing a miracle? Do I lack sufficient faith for God to respond? Is God even real?

Jesus’ response to the Syrophenician woman provides some clarity for believers. Jesus did not acknowledge the Syrophenician woman until she began to worship Him. The woman fell at Jesus’ feet, crying out to Him, and the Scripture says that “he answered her not a word” (Matthew 15:23). This prompted His disciples to compel Jesus to send her away. Instead, He told the woman, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). Jesus seemed to be testing the woman’s faith by saying it was not in the will of God at that time. Jesus’ explanation to the woman was that His present mission was to save Israelites, testing her with use of derogatory language common for Jews speaking of Canaanites (referring to them as dogs).

True worshipers learn the value of praying “thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” as contained within the

Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:10). Remembering to pray for God’s will and the advancement of His kingdom recognizes His sovereignty in our lives and our world. God is not a genie in a bottle who carries out our wishes at our beck and call.

While not receiving an answer to prayer may be discouraging, it can be helpful to recognize that perhaps the answer to prayer being sought is not in the will of God at this time. In practical terms, many perceive that God may answer prayer with yes, no, or wait. While we wait, we keep worshiping, keep praying, keep interceding, keep watching for God to demonstrate His glory to us as we continue to trust Him.

B. The Sinner Woman

Incredibly, while the sinner woman stood behind Jesus at His feet weeping, wetting his feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, kissing them, and pouring perfume on them, Jesus neither spoke nor reacted to the woman. Jesus was aware of the sinner woman’s actions but did not acknowledge her until He read Simon’s thoughts regarding her. While the sinner woman worshiped Jesus, He used her example of worship to minister to Simon.

Jesus told Simon a parable about two men in debt to a lender, with one owing five hundred day’s wages and another owing fifty. Since both men were unable to pay, the lender forgave their debts. Jesus then asked Simon which of the men would love the lender more. Simon responded, “I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most” (Luke 7:43). Jesus then explained to Simon how the woman’s worship had exceeded the hospitality Simon had offered Him as a guest in his house and how her love for Jesus resulted in her forgiveness.

True worshipers create opportunities to reach others through the example of their lives. Here the sinner woman’s worship created an opportunity for Jesus to minister to Simon about the relationship of love and forgiveness as well as Jesus’ authority to forgive sins. In a world looking for reality or truth, nothing reaches people better than our examples. Do our lives demonstrate authentic worship to God? Can we forgive as Jesus forgives? Love as he loves? May our worship to God inspire others to worship.

IV. BOTH WOMEN GOT JESUS' ATTENTION AS THEY WORSHIPPED

A. The Syrophenician Woman

The persistent worship of the Syrophenician woman resulted in attracting Jesus' attention. The Scriptures indicate Jesus had ignored her cries for some time, as the disciples complained that "she cries out after us" (Matthew 15:23). Once Jesus acknowledged her worship and cries for help by rebuffing her, she amplified her efforts by kneeling in front of Jesus and crying, "Lord, help me" (Matthew 15:25). The woman refused to leave without receiving a miracle for her daughter. This persistence is reminiscent of Jacob's wrestling with God for an entire night, refusing to give up until he received a blessing. (See Genesis 32:22–32.) While it appeared that Jesus did not want to give the Syrophenician woman His attention, she earned it through her relentless worship.

The Bible contains many examples of worship attracting God's attention to intervene in challenging situations and to perform miracles. From the battle of Jericho to Paul and Silas in prison, divine worship often resulted in divine intervention. Today, with people exhibiting shorter attention spans influenced by our media-driven culture, remaining in a state of worship for any length of time seems impossible. How many more of our needs could be met if we would linger in worship?

B. The Sinner Woman

While Jesus seemed to ignore the sinner woman by not speaking to her or reacting to her acts of worship, He revealed that she had His attention the entire time. He told Simon the Pharisee: "Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment" (Luke 7:44–46).

The contrast Jesus provided Simon was unmistakable: this sinner woman worshiped Jesus from the depths of her soul, caring for His feet using tears and perfume worth almost

a year's wages, and Simon withheld his worship. Simon missed an opportunity to worship the Lord while a sinner woman, whose sin was likely known to everyone in attendance, gave Jesus her all. Worshiping God is a choice we have on a daily basis. It may seem at times that God does not notice our acts of worship, but we can be assured our prayers, songs, reflections of His holiness, and acts of service do not go unnoticed. Let us make the most of every opportunity to give God our all.

V. BOTH WOMEN RECEIVED WHAT THEY NEEDED

A. Jesus Healed the Syrophenician's Daughter

When Jesus challenged the Syrophenician woman by saying, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs," she boldly replied, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Matthew 15:27). Jesus essentially told the woman she was unworthy of a miracle based on her Gentile status, and she used His metaphor to challenge Him for her miracle. Jesus was clearly astonished by the boldness of her faith, and He told her, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matthew 15:28). And the Scripture states that her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Thanks to the work of Jesus Christ at Calvary, every man, woman, and child may receive His miraculous intervention in their lives, including the gift of His Spirit. There are no distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, as those barriers were broken through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Paul stated, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28–29). Today we have the ability to approach Jesus Christ boldly in faith, trusting Him for our needs.

B. Jesus Forgave the Sinner Woman of Her Sins

There is no record of the sinner woman ever speaking a word, yet her acts of worship and care for Jesus resulted in her walking out of Simon the Pharisee's house cleansed from

her sins. Jesus provided the reason for her forgiveness: “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little” (Luke 7:47). This woman demonstrated her repentance in her actions, humbly washing Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and pouring perfume on them. She loved the God she knew who could remove her guilt and shame, allowing her to be free of her past. It is not uncommon for us as believers to feel we have messed up too much or that God could never forgive the things we have done. Perhaps instead of questioning the sincerity of our repentance or the measure of our faith, we should check the nature of our love for God. When we say we are unworthy of forgiveness, are we really loving God, or are we, in a misguided way, placing our love of self above our love for Him? Could it be that loving much is the basis of accepting and receiving God’s forgiveness? The sinner woman, whose sins were extensive and known by many, received what she needed by demonstrating her love for Jesus in true worship.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

How do we define true worship? How can we know God has accepted our worship? The first tragedy after the fall of Adam and Eve was Cain’s murdering his brother Abel. Cain was angry because God did not accept his sacrifice, or worship, while Abel’s worship was “a more excellent sacrifice” (Hebrews 11:4). Both men

made an effort, taking action to worship God, but only one man’s worship was accepted.

From the beginning, there has always been a standard for true worship. Earlier in Matthew 15, Jesus alluded to this when challenging the Pharisees by quoting the prophet Isaiah: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8).

Central to true worship is a heart that loves God and desires to please Him more than neighbors, family members, and self. The Syrophenician woman and the sinner woman both demonstrated that Jesus Christ was more important to them than what other people were thinking, what the disciples were saying, and even more important than what Jesus himself was thinking or saying. They truly loved the Lord their God with all their hearts, souls, and minds (Matthew 22:37), and God met their needs.

As we consider the nature of our worship, let us consider our heart for God. Do we love Him above all else? As we recall our personal testimonies, have we shed tears in worship at Jesus’ feet, experiencing His forgiveness for our lifetime of sins? It is easy to allow our hearts to grow so cold and distant from God that our worship becomes merely honoring Him with our lips. Our worship at church becomes mundane, our devotions become scarce, and the centrality of the Lord in our lives drops in priority. May the Lord remind us of all He has done for us because He loves us: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). ■

REFLECTIONS

- What are some areas of your life that have not been submitted to God? Are there sins you are not turning away from? Are there finances you are withholding in tithes and offerings? How might you make changes in your worship to allow Jesus Christ to be the priority in your life?
- Have you ever come to God boldly with a desperate prayer request? What was bold about your faith? What actions did you take, and what was the outcome?
- Can you think of a time when you interceded for the need of someone in your social network or church? How did your intercession impact your worship to God?
- How might reflecting on your testimony, or on what God has accomplished for you in the past, help you rekindle worship that has grown stagnant?
- How might you re-engage your heart in your worship, starting at church today or this Sunday? How might you be more “present” with God and the church in singing, praying, receiving the preached word, and responding to the altar call?