

Reminiscere, A ✕ D 2009

Matthew 15:21-28 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." ²³ But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶ And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Can there be a more perfect prayer than that of this Canaanite woman? She asks for nothing for herself, but only intercedes for her daughter. She doesn't ask the Lord for a promotion at work, a lower interest rate on her mortgage, or even money to pay her bills. She doesn't consider her own problems, only the need of her daughter, who is afflicted by a demon. And how does she address the Lord? She knows that He is the promised Messiah, the long-awaited descendant of David. Her prayer isn't long-winded or self-aggrandizing. It's short, sweet, and to-the-point. And what does she ask for? Mercy.

2 With such a beautiful, selfless, faithful prayer, you might expect her to receive a favorable answer from Jesus. But how does He react to her prayer? Silence. Not a word. Having her petition ignored by the Lord, she may respond in one of three ways: despair, pride, or faith. Despair responds, lamenting, "God doesn't care about me." Pride huffs, "I deserve better than this. If this is how God treats me, I can take care of myself better than He can." But the woman responds neither with despair nor with pride. Instead, in faith, she persists. She continues until not even the disciples can bear her continual crying out.

3 How does the Lord respond to the intercession of His disciples? Does He grant their request to send the woman away, either with her request granted or denied? No, instead He answers them just loudly enough so that the woman can hear: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This woman is no Israelite; she's a Canaanite, one of the stereotypical enemies of God's people. Remember the Canaanites? God ordered the Israelites to kill them all when they entered the promised land of Canaan. And now the One the Canaanite woman

knows to be the Messiah, the Son of David, declares that Canaanites, enemies of God, aren't worthy of the gifts He came to bring.

4 Where did Jesus go to seminary? He won't win any converts with such an offensive, stand-offish attitude. He needs to be more winsome, more accommodating, more delicate with His words, and more gentle with His approach. Shouldn't He care about the lost of every nation, not just Israelites?

5 And how does the woman respond to being told she's not a worthy recipient of the Lord's good gifts? Again, she could react in despair, pride, or faith. Despair would have concluded that God is unapproachable and left Him alone. Pride would not have endured such treatment: "If the Son of God won't be merciful to me, I'll go find mercy elsewhere. My Canaanite gods—handmade though they are—are friendlier than this." What does she do? She falls to her knees, an obvious act of worship, and prays, "Lord, help me."

6 Certainly, Jesus cannot ignore this adoration. She's persistent, and she does what scribes and Pharisees are unwilling to do: she bows to her knees. What could Jesus do but grant her humble request? He answers, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." He calls her a Gentile dog. It's tantamount to a racial slur. Anyone with a shred of self-respect would have left at this insult. What does she do? She accepts the insult. She acknowledges that she is a dog, a Gentile, and worse, a sinner. She does not despair; she is not self-righteous. She's repentant. "Yes, Lord, I'm a dog. But even dogs get the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Faith and repentance go hand-in-hand.

7 This is what the Law of God does. It accuses you; it humiliates you; it exposes you for the sinner you are. Jesus doesn't care about being a nice guy or a winsome fellow. He cares about being your Savior from sin. And not until you realize the gravity of your situation will you trust in Him for complete mercy. The Law of God rips everything out of your hands, leaving you nothing to which to cling. You have nothing righteous within you, no good works that make you worthy of the mercy Jesus comes bringing, no hope within yourself. Repent.

8 "Faith takes Christ captive in His word, when He's angriest, and makes out of His cruel words a comforting inversion...You say, the woman responds, that I am a dog. Let it be, I will

gladly be a dog; now give me the consideration you give a dog. Thus she catches Christ with His own words, and He is happy to be caught" (Luther, 325).

"O woman, great is your faith!" To no one but this Gentile dog does Jesus give such a compliment. Great is your faith. Faith is an empty hand, so that Jesus may place into it forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and everlasting salvation. Faith receives these good gifts your Lord came to die to win. Let it be done for you as you believe. Jesus answered the woman's prayer for mercy. He answers your prayer for mercy, too. You have the advantage over the Canaanite woman of knowing the end of the story: the cross. Jesus came to show mercy through His death on the cross.

9 You have nothing to which to cling except the mercy that comes from Jesus your Lord. His answer to this woman's prayer is "yes," not because of anything in herself, but because God is merciful. In Jesus, all the promises of God are "yes" (2 Cor 1:20). If you look to yourself, there is no source of consolation, but if you, like this woman, look to Jesus, the source of all mercy, there is hope. The Jewish Messiah took the sins of all people, even this Canaanite woman, even a Gentile dog like you, and died for them on the cross. All your unworthiness, all your condemnation, is taken away. Jesus came to show you mercy. Even crumbs of His mercy are more than enough.

10 You are a dog, a sinner, no more. By God's mercy, you are a true Israelite by faith, a beloved child of God. And you feast on far better than crumbs. Your Lord gives you mercy through His very Body and Blood. With Jesus, there are no crumbs. You get His true flesh and blood for the complete forgiveness of your sins. And feast though this is, the Body and Blood of Jesus in, with, and under bread and wine are only crumbs compared with the feast that awaits you at His return.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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