

Mark 7: 24-30 and Matthew 15: 21-28; "The Little Dogs under the Table", Sermon # 43 in the series - "Astonished at His Teaching", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 12th, 2009, in the Morning Worship Service and again on April 15th, 2012.

If someone were to come to you and they were to ask you, "What is the gospel?", what would you say to them? I think that one of the best answers to that question would be, "It is what Jesus can do for you." The gospel is the good news of Jesus healing the sick and raising the dead and casting out demons; but it is also His healing us of our sin-sickness, and raising us from the dead spiritually, and giving to us the free gift of eternal life when we ask Him for it. And the added blessing for the one who has faith in Christ, is the ability to come to Him, bringing to Him our greatest concerns for our loved ones who are unsaved; those who either cannot help themselves or refuse to help themselves. Over and over again as we read the gospel accounts, we find persons in great need coming to Jesus with a variety of requests. They came to be healed of their diseases and infirmities. And they came asking for the healing of their loved ones. And we do not find Jesus turning one of them away. Even when he tried to get away to obtain a little rest, "He could not be hid," it says in Mark 7: 24. He was always full of compassion and willing to minister to the multitudes. But in this particular incident we find that the Lord Jesus was apparently unwilling, at first, to minister to the need, and grant the request of this Syro-Phoenecian woman. There was a reason for this; and the reason was the purpose and plan of God. The woman knew nothing of God's eternal purposes when she came to Jesus, looking for His help in casting the demons out of her daughter. She had heard that He had cast out demons before, for others. She was a woman who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the son (or descendant) of David. And so she reasoned; if He could do these great things for Jewish people; why not for her? But she found it to be a much more difficult thing than she thought; having her request answered. And so this leads me to ask if there is not something here for us this morning in relation to our prayers being answered by the Lord Jesus. What do you do, when you have come to the Lord Jesus seeking for Him to do something for you; something like the salvation of your soul, or the salvation of your loved one; or the healing of their body, and you appear to be receiving no answer? I believe that this woman's faith and how she exercised it, have great lessons for us. She had to come to terms with the reality of God's sovereign purposes, and still she pressed on to show the Lord the strength of her desire; that her prayers might be answered. Let me give you 3 lessons which we can learn from her. 1st of all - This woman, in faith, had to come to terms with the purposes of God in relation to her prayer. And so will you. 2ndly - This woman, in faith, had to reckon with being called a name which, by nature, she would not like to be called. And so will you. And 3rdly - This woman, in faith, had

to give to the Lord an answer of both acquiescence and hope. And so will you. I believe that if you and I can do the same, that we will see our Lord do greater things yet, in relation to our prayers to Him.

1st of all - This woman, in faith, had to come to terms with the purposes of God in relation to her prayers. And so will you. (Verses 25-27a of Mark 7, and Verses 22-26 of Matthew 15)

This woman's faith had all the right components, in her approach to Jesus, with her request. Matthew 15: 22 says that she came to Him crying to Him, saying to Him, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!" "My daughter is severely demon-possessed." She recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lord, the One who was sent by God to be the fulfillment of all the promises given to David and to the Jewish people. She calls Him by all these respectful titles and addresses Him with utmost earnestness. In Mark 7: 25 it says that "she had heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet." She would reverence Him in her approach. If you would have the prayers which are most important to you answered, you must do the same. And you must do it in faith. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, or the word concerning Christ." (Romans 10: 17) You must hear about Jesus before you come to Him. You must believe that He has done great things for others, and He will do great things for you, the one who comes to Him. If you are ever to be heard by God in the most serious issues and concerns of your life; if you are ever to become a prayer warrior on behalf of others; you must set aside all your qualms about what other people think of you, or how you view yourself as a calm and unaffected person, and learn to cry to the Lord. You should understand that unbelieving people whom you love are either possessed by the Devil, or they are influenced by him; they are under His dread sway. You cannot remain unaffected while they are perishing and held captive by him to do his will. This woman knew that her crying was bothersome to the disciples and perhaps even to the Lord Himself, and yet she loved her daughter enough that it did not matter to her what they thought of her; she would show her love for her daughter by crying for a hearing. Do you love your loved ones enough to cry to God for a hearing? This woman did, but in Matthew 15: 23 it says, "But He answered her not a word."

It seems almost cruel to hear of it; the Lord Jesus ignoring her cries. But our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to fulfill His Father's purpose. His father had a purpose in the way that the gospel would come to certain people first, and to others later on. There is always order and progression in the way that the Lord reveals Himself, His Son, and His Son's kingdom. His order in the way that He does these things glorifies Himself whether we see it or not. This purpose of God was the reason why the Lord Jesus was so distant towards her. Do you realize that God has His sovereign purposes in salvation? They are mysterious and you know very little or nothing about them. Even the most mature believer does not know much of the sovereign purposes of God in His Electing love. He shows mercy to whom He will show mercy, and He will have compassion upon whom He

will have compassion. The gospel does not come to all men or women with saving power. There is a purpose behind the exercise of power. The Lord God Almighty has power enough to save countless worlds of men should He choose to do so. But He has a purpose, and that purpose is to show forth His glory in the salvation of the Elect; those whom He has chosen before time began, that they should have everlasting life.

In Mark there is no mention of the disciples getting involved in this incident. But in Matthew it says that His disciples urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, for she cries out after us.' She was the essence of perfect persistence, and He was like the man who we read of in Luke 11: 7 who had a friend come to Him at Midnight asking for bread because he had nothing to set before another friend of his who had come to him on a journey. And He says, "Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you." These words might as well have been said by the Lord Jesus here in this incident because of what He said to the disciples at this time. Verse 24 - "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He did not even address the woman. He said this as though He would not directly pay attention to her, or address her personally. You would have thought that this would have immediately brought such discouragement to this dear woman's heart, that she would have burst into tears and fled away. But it was not so. Instead she renews her efforts. It says in verse 25 of Matthew 15, "Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, Lord help me!" She thought the direct approach best. She went directly to Jesus.

When will people come to understand that it is always best to come directly to Jesus for the things that you would have Him do for you? Some people come through Mary to God, thinking that they will find greater sympathy and greater mercy in her than they will find in Jesus. But Mary does not have the Divine Mercy to give. She does not have the power or the authority to hear the prayers of the sinful, the needy, and the discouraged. She was a blessed woman, but she is not a Mediatrix. Some people try to come through the saints, making their prayers to those who they think will best help them. But will you not see that they cannot hear prayer either? They are not Mediators appointed by God to answer prayer. These disciples, at the time of this woman's crying, were so bothered by her that they wanted Jesus to send her away. No, you should come as this dear woman did. Come and worship. Come directly to Christ and ask for His help. But when you come, you must also come seeking to understand the purpose of God in relation to your request. He answered this woman and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." In Luke 11, the man in bed with his children says, "Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed." I cannot rise and give you bread. Jesus Himself links the bread here with the bread there. The bread is that word of strength and power in the gospel, that only Jesus can give in answering our prayers. The Father's purpose, which He had to fulfill, is that the children, the Jews whom the Father would call to Himself to be saved and to be His people, are those whom Jesus will give bread to. He was

not sent to others besides the Jews to give these miracles and these answers to prayer, to. "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." It is not good that that exclusive purpose of God's, in sending Jesus to bring the gospel, the miracles, and the message of salvation to the Jewish people, be thwarted.

It is always very important that when we come to Jesus with our requests, and we are crying out to Him to give us answers, that we listen very carefully to what He says to us in His word. You will notice that Jesus did not say, "It is impossible to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." He said that it was not good. The woman could therefore infer from this answer that although it might not be good, that there would come a time when it could be. In Mark 7: 27, Jesus words this sentence differently. He says, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." There the word "first" was a word of hope to this woman's heart. She could see that even if she could not receive a blessing as one to whom it was promised first; possibly she could receive it as one to whom it would come later. What might not come at the first request may indeed come, after a time. Will you not understand this morning that "all things are possible to the one who believes." (Mark 9: 23) The Lord will not close the door upon faith; but He will test it to see if it will really persist and persevere to attain the desired blessings. The purpose of God, His plans which were formed long ago in perfect faithfulness, before the foundation of the world; these purposes also encompass your believing thoughts and words and acts. His purpose to do and accomplish all that He has determined to do, is fixed; but that purpose takes in all of your prayers and your faith, and the answer will be given accordingly. Therefore why should you give up praying, thinking that you are not one of the Elect, or that this or that loved one cannot be saved or helped because you do not whether the Lord has determined to show them mercy. It is your responsibility to interact with His purpose and search it out to the depths by your prayers and requests, and by your persistence in them, you may receive a good answer in time; just as this woman did. And this leads me to our second point.

2ndly - This woman, in faith, had to reckon with being called a name which, by nature, she would not like to have been called. (Verse 27 of Mark 7 and verse 26 of Matthew 15)

Matthew's gospel says, "But He answered and said, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.'" Now, if it is not obvious to you by now, Jesus is making an observation on this woman's being a Gentile, a Greek, and a Syro-Phoenecian woman. He is calling her what the Jews traditionally called people who were not Jews; a dog. Granted; He is calling her a puppy dog, a little dog; but He is still calling her a dog. Now, to call someone a dog, let alone, a woman who was seeking for mercy for her demon-possessed daughter, seems like a very rude thing for Jesus to do. It seems like a word which would indicate that Jesus did not care for her at all; that He really despised her. But certainly this was not the case. At one point in His teaching He said to those who were seeking for

bread from Him, "All that the Father gives me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will not cast out." (John 6: 37) He said to those who had come to Him seeking the bread of life, "I am the bread of life." "He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." When Jesus said this He did not say "all the Jews who come to Me". He said, "The one who comes to Me." This woman had come to Him, and He knew that He needed to test her, to see if she could receive the truth of the purpose of God and accept it. If she could accept it; then He would be able to perform this miracle for her. The purpose of God was bound up in these words "children" and "dogs". How could this woman accept this description of her? In Mark 7, verse 27 it says, "But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first." He spoke these words directly to her. It was a test of her humility. It was a test to see whether she understood her unworthiness to be given the bread of the children, seeing that God's purpose of fulfilling all that He had spoken concerning His ancient people the Jews must be fulfilled. They must be fed first. She understood His meaning. She also grasped by faith, the compassion behind all that He said, that must await and eventually come, to the one who trusts in Him. She was willing to receive the name of a little dog in the context in which Christ was giving it.

Let me ask this morning if you can do the same. In our day, because Christ has broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, the gospel and all of its benefits comes to all the nations. God is no respecter of persons in that all who will come to Jesus and trust in Him for the forgiveness of their sins, will receive the blessings of grace. But there is one thing that He will test you with. And that is, whether you will receive the name and title of sinner? He would have you come to Him asking for these blessings as one who owns that name and title. "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Mark 2: 17) Will you take that name and that title? If you will take it, and also take Christ's name upon your lips, and call upon His Holy name, then you shall be saved. Will you still have the faith to come and take His title, the King of Kings and Lord of Lord, Savior of sinners, and Helper to the weak and helpless to yourself? He was the One who was willing to die for you, a sinner. He was the One who was willing to die in your place as a substitute for your sins, bearing the punishment your sins deserve, on the cross. And once you believe, and begin living the Christian life, will you not remember that He is in the process of making you over into a new creature and He will, in time, give you a new name? This woman's faith overcame all the offense which she could have taken, at Jesus' giving her this name of dog. In Revelation 2: 17, Jesus says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." "To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat." "And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

I believe that this woman's faith was an overcoming faith. And overcoming faith is a true faith. And in time, the overcomer shall receive the assurances of

exercising it. That person who overcomes will receive the blessings of answered prayer, and the blessing of the assurance that God and Christ are for them; God will give them the white stone and acquit them from all guilt. He will give them the bread of the children; the hidden manna which will nourish and strengthen their souls all through their earthly pilgrimage. He will hear our cries in prayer to do all that He can, within the plan and purpose of God, to see to it that our prayers are answered. And He will give us the new name based upon Christ's grace at work in our lives to build our Christian character into holiness. The one who receives the new name is the one who has, like Jacob, "wrestled with God and prevailed." You remember that Jacob's name meant deceiver or supplanter, and he surely lived up to that name. But when He wrestled with God at Peniel and prevailed, then the angel changed his name to Israel; one who wrestled with God and prevailed. This is what this woman also did. She wrestled with Christ for the blessing. And so will you, my dear friends, if you would see Christ answer your prayers and grant your requests. There will be situations of difficulty in your life as a Christian which will indeed try your faith. Christ Himself may lead you to the place where He will show you that you are unworthy of the least of His mercies. But if you will own this, and cry to Him for the mercy that you need, you will find Him blessing you and answering your prayers.

And 3rdly - This woman, in faith, had to give to the Lord an answer of both acquiescence and hope. And so will you. (Verses 28 and 29 of Mark 7, and verses 27 and 28 of Matthew 15)

"And she answered and said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs.'" In Matthew she is recorded as saying, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." This is no doubt one of the greatest sayings recorded for us in all the Scripture. Our Savior attests to it. He said to in Matthew 15: 28, "O woman, great your faith!" "Let it be done to you as you desire." "And her daughter was healed from that very hour." "Mark 7: 30 says, "And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed." This woman, who was really very dear to Christ, was able by faith, to acquiesce in Jesus' calling her a dog. And yet she turns His saying to display even further, the strength of her faith and hope. She uses the best of illustrations to do so. How often, if we have a puppy dog at home, will we see that little dog sitting under, or near the table, waiting and hoping that some crumbs would fall from the table and land on the floor next to them? And then they would be able to eagerly grab at them with their mouth and eat them up? This is the saying which conquered the Savior's reluctance to grant her request. This was the saying that took away His reluctance to grant her the answer she desired melted away. Even though a Gentile dog by nature; by faith she had overleaped all the boundaries of being a stranger and an alien to commonwealth of Israel, and had become "one of the children." She had pole-vaulted over all of the obstacles which her race hindered her with. She was a Gentile convert "born before the time", born before the door of faith was opened to

the Gentiles. "Nothing shall be impossible with God." We are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. "O woman", He says to her in Matthew 15: 28, "great is your faith!" "Let it be done to you as you desire." It is faith in Christ that saves from sins; it is faith in Christ that heals in accordance with the purpose of God. It is faith that brings to our souls and bodies and the souls and bodies of others, that blessed healing that result in eternal life. It is faith in Jesus that results in His casting the demons out of this woman's little daughter. It is by faith that our every holy desire is born, and our every fervent request made, and the very answer given.

I hope that each of us here this morning will take this message to heart. What is the strength of your faith as a Christian? It is seen in your ability to acquiesce in the purposes of God, and at the same time to interact with them concerning whatever seemingly impossible obstacles there are, which seem to stand in the way of your greatest desires for the salvation and the healing of your loved ones and friends, being obtained. This comes from hearing what Christ has done for others, and believing in what He can do for you. Faith becomes stronger as it conceives of Jesus as fulfilling all the purpose of God to save and to heal. The answer is always with Him. Faith cries out to Christ and answers the initial refusal with pointing out Christ's goodness and mercy to all, even to dogs. Faith knows that Jesus loves little children; loved all the world so much that He died for it. His death makes effectual the salvation of all the Elect. But faith would hope and believe in Christ, that He would do the impossible, and save and heal the ones whom they love, as well. Will you not consider the faith of this woman, and make it your own, as much as God shall give you the grace to do so?