

Mark 7:24-30

²⁴ From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know *it*, but He could not be hidden. ²⁵

For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs." ²⁸ And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs." ²⁹ Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter." ³⁰ And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.

So the religious leaders had tried to trap Christ after Christ and his disciples had crossed the sea to get away from the crowds and to get far away from Jerusalem. They are at the very northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. The ministry there has fallen on deaf ears, with many departing after finding out that following Christ requires more than just a willingness to receive free fish sandwiches.

That is where we start this morning.

²⁴ From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know *it*, but He could not be hidden.

Jesus is intentionally distancing himself from both the Jews and King Herod. He knows that he must keep to a time table that requires him to live for over 7 months. So he does what He needs to do to make sure that happens.

But where he goes is interesting.

Tyre was about 30 miles away from where Jesus was ministering. Sidon was about 50. This was in the territory of Phoenicia along the Mediterranean sea. It is gentile territory. So Jesus travelled at least 30 miles to get out of Jewish territory and tried to get away from the crowd's notice. He goes into a house. We could imagine Him looking around to see if anyone noticed Him. But to no avail. He could not be hidden. In Mark 3:8 we see that some of the people who sought Christ earlier in His ministry were **from** Tyre and Sidon. So they would know **who He was** and **what He looked like**.

Jesus is our example here for how the life of a minister should be lived. He desired his own comfort. He made plans for it. But when life interrupted His plans, he prioritized others' needs over his own comfort. I would be far more comfortable if Christ would have said to this woman, come back on Thursday at sundown and I will have time for you then. But that is clearly not what Christ did. He dropped what He might have **felt like doing** and did what was most important. Is that how **we** deal with the needs of others? Are we masterful in letting people

know that we are too busy and important to meet their needs? That is not a good thing.

Now, what we are going to see is a wonderful example of how to seek Christ. And it comes from a most unlikely source.

²⁵ For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

Here is the seeker. She is a Greek. So we know that she is a Gentile. She is of the Syro-Phoenician race. Matthew tells us she was a Canaanite, so she was a descendent of the ancient enemies of the Jews. As such, it was likely that she was accustomed to idol worship to the fertility goddess Astarte, known as Ashtaroth in the OT.

This woman had everything going against her. No self respecting Jew would give this woman the time of day. While many Jews might think **they had much merit** to appeal to Christ with, this woman would probably guess that **she had nothing**. And that is a very good trait for a follower of Christ. Sometimes the hardest thing for us to let go of is that which we consider a virtue. It is hard for us to let go of those things **we think give us merit with God**, those things about ourselves that **we are proud of**, those things that **make us think we should have a higher position than someone else**. When we first came to Christ we may have thought that Christ chose us because we were smart or pretty or friendly or a hard worker. Eventually we learn that we really brought nothing to this picnic. There really was nothing of **us** that caught God's attention. We had no desirable traits that God found difficult to pass up. He saw us **as we were** with our desperately wicked hearts, with our stiff necks, with our rebellious behavior and attitudes. We were unlovable from every perspective. Except for one thing. Christ **chose** to love us. That is all. That is the only thing we had going for us in God's consideration of us. Salvation truly is all about God.

This Syro-Phoenician woman had an advantage in that she already realized that to this Jewish Rabbi, she had nothing to offer. And that is the first thing that we learn about following Christ. We do well to start like she did, realizing that she has nothing to offer Christ. So **first**, this woman came realizing **she had no merit with Christ**.

Second, this woman recognized **her need**. She recognized that she had a spiritual need that only Christ could meet. She had probably done all she could do to help her daughter, but she knew that all her efforts were futile.

Isn't that often what has to happen to us? We get to the end of our efforts. We try everything we know to try to get rid of a problem and in the end we still have the problem. It is often **then and only then** that we take it to Christ in the way

that this woman did. She came understanding that the only solution was to put the problem in the hands of Christ.

What is there in our lives like this, something we have come to realize that only God can change, something that only God can do? Something we call upon God for because we know it is only He who can help us?

Third, this woman came **humbly**. Look what it says here. She came and fell at Christ's feet. This was probably not an easy thing for many of her countrymen to do. They didn't want to submit themselves to a Jew, the former enemy of their clan. They knew what Jews thought. Most Jews thought themselves superior to these gentile heathens. To come and fall at Christ's feet would be the ultimate of humility. She showed that she was not holding **any point of pride** as an obstacle between her and Christ.

What keeps us from coming and putting ourselves at Christ's feet, holding nothing back in our worship of Christ? What bright idea do we hold that will not allow us to fully submit to His Lordship? What test have we put up to Christ where Christ has not yet quite fulfilled our expectations. We need to let those things go and recognize He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We are not. And He doesn't owe us anything but that which He has promised.

Fourth, she came **worshipful**. She knew that Christ was worthy of worship. She knew that He was something and she was nothing. He was a spiritual man, and she was an earthly woman. She recognized something superior about Christ. How do we come to Christ? Do we come to Him like a cosmic Santa Claus who exists primarily to give us what we want and to make us happy? Or do we come to Him realizing that we are owned. We were bought with a price. It is He who owns us. He is not our errand boy. We are His.

Fifth, she came **committed**. This woman displays something that is rare. She would not quit until she had received from Christ the thing she so desperately needed.

How quick do we give up? We start praying for something, but if it doesn't come easy or quick, we just give up. And even though we might know it is something that we really need from God and God has promised it to us, we won't persevere until we have that thing from God's hand?

The woman in our text is an excellent example so far.

Look what scripture says here. **She kept asking.**

What was she saying?

Matthew tells us more than Mark about this.

Matthew 15:22-24

²² **And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."** ²³ **But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came**

and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." ²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

This woman kept asking. She kept pleading her case to Christ. She wouldn't be distracted. Oh, to have friends and parents like this woman. She didn't just give up. She placed herself upon the goodness of Christ and she would not relent. And look at her appeal. My daughter is severely demon possessed. The devil is having his way with my daughter. He is making her suffer. And there is nothing that I can do. You must do something.

You know, having **a little of the devil** often seems like a positive thing. Even as Christians don't we look at what the devil offers as being appealing? Seductive? Pleasing? Maybe we want vengeance. Maybe we want pleasure. Maybe we just want something that we cannot have. And having it, even if it means stepping into the enemy's territory, seems like such a desirable thing.

But look at what happens when **that same devil** we give an inch to takes a mile. Look what happens when his servants get control of a person. This gives us an indication of what the Devil wants to do when he gets his hooks in us. He is called the destroyer in scripture. That is what he wants. He wants to destroy **your peace**. He wants to destroy **your relationships**. He wants to destroy **your fellowships and your intimacies**. He wants to **inflict pain**. He wants you to suffer at his hand.

That is the same source as the one that holds out all these things as if you must have them, as if God is holding out on you if you do not pursue them. Always keep in mind the heart of our enemy when he appears to be handing out gifts. They are always hand crafted for your destruction. Just look at what is happening to our society and you can't miss that point.

Now, how did Christ respond to this woman's pestering? How did He respond to her relentless requests? Matthew says that Christ **didn't say a word to her**. He completely ignored her. Can you imagine how much harder that would have made things for this woman? She was not getting any response from Christ that would lead her to believe that He would show her any favor at all. But she just kept on asking.

Now what do the disciples do? I would guess they did what most all of us would do. Well, Christ, if you are not going to do anything for her, if you have determined that she is not someone you are going to minister to, would you please make her shut up? Could you please remove this disturbance from us? They must have said this where the woman could hear it. And **that** is what **this was all about**. Christ was testing this woman. He was going to have her display what she was really made of. He was going to test her faith in Him.

Have you ever considered that many of the delays in our lives are for the same purpose? Christ does not always move when we think He should. He often lets His people wait, because in the delay they prove what they really think. Do they really trust? Do they really have faith? The delay will often bring the truth out. Are you in a period where God is delaying your answer? If so, follow this woman's wonderful example. Keep trusting and keep asking Him for those things He has promised to do.

And then what does Christ say?

Notice, Christ doesn't even say this **to the woman**. He says it **to His disciples**. It is as if the woman doesn't even exist. She isn't even important enough to be spoken to. Think about this. How would you have responded if you were this woman? How **you would respond** would prove **what you really think** about yourself and your need and Christ. This woman proved herself to be congruent at all points.

Christ said- "**I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**"

Now there's the encouraging word for the day. This would be about like a very hungry black man walking up to a restaurant and seeing a sign posted that says- Whites only. Christ wasn't even expressing regret. He is simply saying I was not sent to minister to women like this. She isn't a Jew. She is unimportant to me. Now what would you have done if you had been this woman? Would you have been angry? Would you have been sad? Would you have been disheartened? Would you have hung your head and walked away? I think most people would have. How do we still respond **when we don't get from God** those things we ask for? How do we respond to **His silence**? How do we respond to **His delay**? How do we respond to His right to do anything He pleases?

That is what this woman is facing. They are many of the same things we face in our pursuit of God. God has the right to test us, to show us what we are made of, even when we don't think it is fair. Remember, He made us. He does not answer **to us**.

Notice too what Christ is saying. Christ isn't sent for all the humans who happened to be Jewish. He is only sent for the sheep **who are lost**. They are **His sheep** and they are **out of the fold**. At the end of the day He is going to get every single one of those lost sheep back. He will not save all the Jewish people. But He will save every single one of His lost sheep.

OK, so Christ has just told the disciples why Christ is not going to help this woman. Now He looks at her and actually speaks to her. He says this:

"Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

Matthew tells us a little more.

Matthew 15:25-26

²⁵ Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" ²⁶ But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs."

After Christ said that He came for the lost sheep the woman essentially threw herself at Christ's feet. She was absolutely committed to receiving what she needed from Christ. She didn't care how that made her look. She was desperate. She had no pride left. She needed what only Christ would give.

There is only one **wise desperation** on this planet. It is the desperation of needing Jesus. This woman got it right.

Then the woman pleaded for Jesus to help her. She is desperate. She is needy. She loves her daughter and her daughter is simply a toy for demons. She must have Christ's help.

So Christ addresses her, finally. But look what 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."

This would have been the final straw for anyone who had an ounce of human fleshly pride. Anyone who thought they had any merit, **any goodness to bring to this encounter**, would have left offended at this point. Just think of all the good lines they would have had as they left Christ's presence and talked to all their friends. He called me a dog. He treated me like trash. And on and on. But not this woman.

There is something in the Greek that I don't ever remember reading or hearing before. Maybe I have and just forgot. That is likely.

There are two Greek words for dogs. One refers to the mangy mongrels that lived in packs and mostly ate garbage and anything they could find. They were never referred to in a positive fashion.

Then there was another word for dog that referred to household pets and were treated like part of the family. This is the word that Christ used in this instance. This would not make what Christ said complementary. But oddly enough, I think it gave this woman a ray of hope.

Christ was clearly saying that his priority was the children- basically the Jewish lost sheep. His ministry was primarily focused on them. And she is not one of them. So those children need fed first, of first priority. And that was very true. That is how Christ prioritized. We as gentiles sometimes forget this. We mostly received the blessing we received after the Jews rejected Christ.

But this woman heard what Christ said and she must have thought, but what about the pet dogs? Aren't they also part of the family? Sure, they are not as important. But they also are not starved. This woman did not need to be at the top of the list. She didn't need most favored status. She just needed Christ to

regard her need. She needed Christ to move in her behalf. She had a faith in the goodness of Christ. She had a faith that He would not let the lapdogs starve. And that is what she appealed to.

²⁸ And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."

Do you see what this is? This woman is proclaiming her trust in the goodness of Christ. She can admit that, as one of these little dogs, she is not important. She has no innate goodness with which to recommend herself. Yes, she is just a Canaanite heathen woman. But surely Christ would not deprive her of the leftovers of the rich Jewish blessing.

Oh that we would learn this lesson. Oh that we would reflect this Canaanite woman's attitude.

How quick we are to bring the goodness of God into question. How quick we are to distrust His motives and His goodness. How quick we are to think that we are just being smart to come up with plans **that completely contradict what God says**. How smart we think we are **when we abandon our trust in God** for our trust in ourselves. Will we ever get rid of these dastardly tendencies? Will we ever get as smart as this Canaanite woman?

Even after every test to her faith, she still found a way to glimpse the goodness of God for her behalf.

She says, Lord with all these things you say are true, with all the ways that I don't deserve anything from you, you still wouldn't allow your pets to starve. It is not like you to withhold what people need from those who need it.

Do you believe that? Do I believe that? Do we live like we believe that? What comes out of our mouths in life's difficult situations? Do we ooze this kind of faith when our faith is tested? Why? Has God not proven Himself good to us? Look at us. Why would God have shown us His favor by calling us to Himself? We certainly aren't the prime cuts of this planet's beef. Why would He lift a finger for people like us? There is only one answer. Because of His goodness. So why can't we give Him the benefit of the doubt when we face difficulties? This woman did. And she didn't know a fraction about God that we know.

Now let's look at how Christ responded to her response.

²⁹ Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter." ³⁰ And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.

It isn't that what she said was so perfect. She had not stumbled on **the perfect answer** and Christ was rewarding **her clever response**. No. What she displayed was a genuine faith. She found a way to trust in Christ even when trusting in Christ was difficult. And she placed all of her faith on Him. She wasn't holding

anything back. If Christ wasn't who she thought He was, she would have looked like an absolute fool. But she was confident that 1) Christ had the ability to do what she asked and 2) He was very likely to do it.

So Christ granted her request. He sent the demon away. I don't think this woman doubted what she would find on her walk home. My guess is she was very confident that she would find things just as Christ said.

What a wonderful end to this story we find. When she gets home **her daughter has no demon** and she is **recovering from the struggle she had with it**. She is resting in bed, getting back her strength to live an un-tormented life. You can rest assured that this girl was going to hear the good news of what Jesus Christ did to her and her mother. I wouldn't be surprised that we get to meet **both** in heaven. You know, there are a lot of situations in our lives that **we will face that we do not understand**. When we look at what happened to Job, we can see that God has reasons we know nothing about. When we look at Genesis, where God cursed the earth, we see that God wanted this life to be less than perfect. He left it with enough beauty and goodness to show us what He has to offer, but with enough pain and suffering and sin and ugliness to remind us that this world is not our home. We cannot fix our eyes and hope on **anything** this world offers. But in this mix, in our lives on this planet, there is one thing that we cannot lose sight of. And that is the goodness of God. We are always choosing from one of two options. We can see our lives from the perspective **of flesh**. Or we can see our lives from the perspective **of faith**. Flesh will want heaven now. And it will blame God for anything that we want badly on this planet but we don't have. We will blame God for **what He could do but chooses not to**.

Faith holds on to the goodness of God and will not let go. It trusts that God would not allow the suffering if there was not something in the future that will **make it worth it**. Faith holds that God is not cruel. We do not know **why** things happen, but we know **to what end** they happen. Everything that happens, **here and now**, is a preparation for heaven. Faith believes in God's goodness to the point that it always believes that whatever is suffered has a reason good enough for God to allow it.

The woman in our story had a faith in the goodness of Christ that would not let go. How about us?