

NOTHING BUT A HOUND DOG!

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

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Matthew 15:21–28

Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!

I. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever lived on the wrong side of the tracks? Or driven through the wrong side of town? Those are derogatory terms and demeaning statements used to point to an area that is considered seedy and unsafe. Jesus in our text today is taking the disciples to such a place. It seems like Jesus is moving the disciples from one peril to yet another.

First they're out on the Sea of Galilee, they nearly perish. And now they're in the land of the Canaanites. The Canaanites carried that name because of the wickedness of Cain who was an enemy of God. And these people had lived up to that reputation. They were enemies of God and the people of God, the Israelites. They considered the Jews dogs to be exterminated. But let's remember this hatred was mutual. Under Joshua the Canaanites were to be purged from the Holy Land. That never happened and the animosity still continues to this day. If Jesus and His disciples were discovered in this region their lives would be forfeit.

II. THE CANAANITE WOMAN

And that brings us to an interesting point. If you are traveling through the wrong side of town, do you try to bring attention to yourself? You don't drive down the road honking your horn, flashing your headlights and yelling obstinacies at the people. You try to remain as stealth as possible. You don't want to draw any attention; you want to remain nearly invisible, don't you? And so it was for the disciples. Tyre and Sidon were seedy areas, right on the Mediterranean. They were sea ports and with that came all sorts of vices and unsavory characters.

As Jesus and His disciples passed through this region in stealth mode their presence became known. A Canaanite woman started yelling out after them. She was desperate. You could see it in her eyes, you could hear it in her voice. That urgency, that fear on the verge of panic, her despair. Her little girl was suffering from demon possession. We don't know more than that. She was a desperate Canaanite woman seeking help for her daughter.

She heard that Jesus had come to town. She'd heard the reports that were going around about His power to heal and cast out demons. There was finally some hope for her and her daughter. She sees Jesus and starts running after Him, crying out, ***“O Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*** Son of David is an Israelite way of speaking. She didn't yell some obscure, could be anyone sort of greeting. This was a Hebraic, Jewish way of speaking. It was like throwing a floodlight on Jesus and the disciples. There goes the stealth and invisibility mode. No more sneaking through the bad side of town unnoticed.

This Canaanite woman was speaking like an Israelite. Maybe if Jesus mistook her for one of His own countrymen He would help her. It's kind of clever, actually. Talk like an Israelite and maybe Jesus will do you a favor. Some people still think in those terms. Do you? Some

people try to negotiate with God in prayer, trying to bargain with God for a favor. Do you? People like to get all “religious” when they pray. Pile on those religious phrases higher and deeper thinking God will be impressed and do what they ask. Or even strong arm God with His Word. Do you?

Jesus meets her pleas with grave silence. **“He did not answer her a word”** nothing, but complete and total silence (pregnant pause). But she keeps on calling out to Him, over and over again. “O Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me. O Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me. O Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me.” The disciples feared for their lives so they begged Jesus, “Send her away. Tell her to get out of here!” We’ve heard this before haven’t we? This must be their default mode. When Jesus fed the 5000 and they didn’t have enough food, what did they say? “Send them away!”

What would you have done? Jesus is your last hope and yet greets you with silence. He turns His back on you in your time of need. He turns a deaf ear to your heartfelt prayer. He slams the door in your face, and His buddies give you a cold shoulder and a brush off, “Send her away!” What would you have done? Leave? Maybe give some obscene gesture of dissatisfaction? Go and find another healer, another religion, or at least another congregation? What do you do with this sort of Jesus?

Jesus speaks. He doesn’t really speak to her directly. He just speaks, reminding her of who she is, and who she is not. **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”** Ouch! It doesn’t get much harsher than that. Sorry, I’m busy. Sorry, I’m not here for you. Sorry, you’ll have to go elsewhere; I can’t be bothered with you and your problems. If His silence didn’t work on this woman, this should have settled it completely. It’s a dead end. Jesus isn’t going to help you.

But she is persistent and keeps on pressing and pleading and praying. She comes up to Jesus, this man who had just said He hadn’t come for her or her people, and she kneels down at His feet. “Lord, help me.” No more Son of David pseudo-Israelite verbiage! Just a simple Lord, help me, Kyrie Eleison. It doesn’t get more basic than that. No religious fluff, no charades.

Jesus seems unmoved, hard, cold, uncaring. “It’s not right,” He says. **“It’s not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”** Ouch! His silence was bad enough. His harsh statement about His being sent only to the lost sheep of Israel was even worse. But this was the worst of all. A dog! He called her a dog. A “little dog, a house dog, a pet dog, useless dog, not even a working dog” yes, but a dog nonetheless. She’d heard that slur in the marketplace, on the street corner, from the mouths of the Israelite men as they spit in the direction of the Canaanites. But from Jesus?

And what about this Jesus? What do you think of Him? What would you have done if He called you a useless little lap dog in your hour of need? This isn’t the kind of compassionate Savior we picture in our minds or with our hymns or our church art. This Jesus appears mean, uncaring, and unmoved. This woman isn’t even asking anything for herself, she’s asking for

her helpless little girl, and the only thing that Jesus seems to notice is that she isn't an Israelite

But she is undeterred. She won't let Jesus off the hook so easily. His calling her a little doggie gives her the opening she's been looking for. "Yes, Lord, a Canaanite dog I may be. Call me whatever you wish. It's true, there's no way around that. I'm a dog. I ain't nothing but a hound dog, (actually lap dog) I'll accept that. Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

III. Faith in Action

Did you hear that? Did you catch that unreasonable line of reasoning? She accepts Jesus' word on her, that she's nothing more than a yapping dog bugging Him on His way and that He really wasn't even sent to help the likes of her. Yet she finds a handhold for faith. Even the dogs get to lick the crumbs off the floor. And what glorious and wonderful crumbs they are when they fall from this Master's table, more than enough to create hope and miracles and restoration.

This, by the way, isn't meant to get you looking at your faith and sizing up your believing. It's intended to get your eyes off yourself and onto Jesus. Your faith is only as good and as strong as the Jesus it clings to. The Hymn Rock of Ages says it this way: **Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling!** The woman's faith, her trust in Jesus, was vindicated. **"Let it be done for you as you desire."** He is for her, and for her daughter, and for all. Though she's a Canaanite, a little dog, yet through faith she is a daughter of Abraham, as Paul explains in Romans. Jesus is Son of David, even for her. And His Word is solid and sure. Her daughter was healed instantly.

But some children aren't healed instantly. Prayer isn't like instant oatmeal. Some prayers get put on hold. But when God puts you on hold, as Jesus put that poor Canaanite woman, it doesn't mean He's abandoned you. It means instead that Jesus wants to put your faith on display so that the world would understand what faith in Jesus looks like. It looks like a little dog lapping up crumbs falling from the master's table. And if that comes as a blow to your ego, maybe that's good! Our ego, that old Adam in us, needs that. We call it repentance, that change in mind from self to God. It's the realization that we are nothing but a hound dog and don't deserve even the scraps from the Master's table.

There's really is no shortcut to faith like that of the Canaanite woman. There's only life under the cross of Jesus. It may be the unexpected surprise of sickness or demonized daughters or silence or a harsh "no" or being humbled. It may mean waiting patiently for the resurrection while feeling like a dog most of the time. To the world's way of looking at things, life under the cross of Jesus can be a dog's life, but the crumbs that fall from that table are indeed rich - His Body and Blood given for you for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. These are the very crumbs of eternity, the very bread of Life given for you. A dog never had it so good. May we truly be thankful, in Jesus name, Amen and Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, **AMEN!**

