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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
August 30, 2020
13th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Romans 11:13-15,28-32
Hymns: 239; 245; 32; 45:1

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 15:21-28

Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre
and Sidon. 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."

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."

²⁷ And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs
which fall from their masters' table."

²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great *is* your
faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed
from that very hour. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Putting Faith to the Test.

We sometimes think of tests simply in terms of passing or failing. When it comes to faith it is a sad truth that not all who claim to have faith actually believe. However it was not Jesus' goal to ascertain if this woman did or did not have faith. Jesus knew this woman's heart. He knew that her faith was genuine. What, then, is the point of the Lord testing this Canaanite woman's faith?

The Lord may have a couple of different and yet important goals when He subjects one of His children to a testing of their faith. One that we often discuss with individuals who are enduring difficulties in their life is that when the Lord allows these trials to come upon us, it may actually drive us deeper into our faith in Jesus, that we turn to Him, cling to Him, that we might seek our strength as well as our deliverance from the Lord. The second is for the benefit of others who surround us, that they also might learn a lesson in faith.

The central thought of our worship this morning is the universal nature of the God's plan of salvation. This was an important lesson for the twelve disciples accompanying Jesus. It remains a very important lesson for believers today. This lesson is also featured in our text this morning. As we consider the plight and the faith of the woman in our text may the Spirit strengthen our confidence of faith as we consider how --

THEME: Jesus Tested the Faith of a Gentile Woman.

Let us first consider --

I. The Nature of these Tests.

Because of a number of circumstances in Jesus' Galilean ministry Jesus determined that it was appropriate for Him travel to the northwest, to enter the area of Tyre and Sidon. While there would be a significant number of Jewish people living there, the population of this area would have many more gentiles, including people native to that area. The woman featured in our text was one of those people.

News of Jesus' coming spread rapidly and there were great crowds of people gathered to see this Man who was thought of by some to be a prophet, and by others as a great miracle worker. The crowd pressed upon Jesus and His disciples as they made their way along the road. One can only imagine that there was quite a clamor of voices with everyone talking and pointing at Jesus and calling out His name. However, one voice stood out over the rest. It was the voice of this Canaanite woman. And the tests begin.

Matthew 15:22-23 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."

There are a couple of significant points for us to note. The manner in which this woman addressed Jesus is significant. First she addressed Jesus as Lord. Lord is a title acknowledging authority. (It would be good for us to keep that in mind for ourselves, that as we call upon the Lord we are acknowledging the authority of Jesus in and over our lives.) Secondly, this Canaanite woman addressed Jesus as "*Son of David*." This is a Biblical title for the Messiah, the Savior promised of old! This is a confession of faith in Jesus as Savior as well as Lord. It is especially significant that a Canaanite woman addressed Jesus in this way, because among the Jews the commonly held expectations of the blessings the Messiah would bring were of a nationalistic nature rather than spiritual. This wouldn't mean anything for a Canaanite woman! And yet she addresses Jesus as the **Son of David**. This woman looked to Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

She came to Jesus desperate for help, not for herself, but for her daughter who was severely demon-possessed. What better choice could one make than to turn to Jesus for deliverance from the power of the devil!

Now the test begin. It begins with silence. For a time as they walk down the road Jesus doesn't answer her pleas at all. Her response is one of faith. It would be easy for us to characterize all this as desperation, but it is not simply the depth of her distress that keeps this foreign woman, an alien from the Jewish nation, crying out to

Jesus. **This is faith!** Faith leads the believer to keep on asking. Faith knows the depth of Jesus' love, and is not dissuaded.

Ultimately the disciples speak up, and the nature of their response is telling. They don't urge Jesus to help her, for she continues to cry out after us. NO, they urge Jesus to **send her away**, because she keeps crying out after us.

Wow! That is telling. By this point the disciples had to understand that Jesus had the power to help this woman. They had witnessed Jesus' power over demons many times. Their assumption at best was that Jesus wasn't going to help her. Perhaps that Jesus didn't care to help. Maybe their thoughts went so far as to assume that Jesus **shouldn't** help her.

Now whose faith is actually being tested? Well, clearly the Canaanite woman's faith is being tested, but so also is the faith of the disciples. And where would we come down in this matter. How do we respond to the anguish and sufferings of others? What if those others aren't like us? What if their skin has a deeper tone or color? What if they don't speak English well or at all? What if we conclude they brought their troubles upon themselves? What if it is simply a matter that we don't know them? They're strangers, so we may not care. Do we even have a thought, much less a prayer about Jesus intervening for good in the lives of others, others who are not like us? We all know in our heads that Jesus came to save the world, the whole world, but is that head knowledge communicated to our hearts?

And where do we fit in this picture? Aren't we physically closer to the Canaanite woman than to the Jewish born disciples? With this in mind let us consider the next phase of this testing.

Matthew 15:24-25 But (Jesus) answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

Did some among the disciples think: "Yeah, that's telling her how it is! He's our Savior!? These gentile pagans have their own gods they can call on!" God forbid we should ever entertain such thoughts! And yet in substance that is exactly what far too many

Christians are saying when they commend the different peoples of this world to find salvation in their gods; or adopt the philosophy that we are all praying to the same God anyway, just using different names, you know like different highways to the same destination. Those who truly believe this are on the road that leads to destruction! There is one God who saves, the God who sent His only begotten Son into this world that we might be saved by His merits and not our own. Jesus and only Jesus is the way to life and salvation. Jesus and only Jesus can deliver any, and has redeemed ALL from the curse of sin, death, and hell! While Jesus' personal ministry was focused on preaching the message of the coming of the Kingdom of God to the Jewish people, He did reach out to others time and again, traveling to the regions where gentiles resided and were even in the majority. Jesus commended the faith of Roman Centurion, and the Samaritan who having been healed of his leprosy returned to glorify God at Jesus;' feet. Jesus commissioned the apostles and all believers to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature! This was a test addressing the misconception of the limits of salvation to be found in Jesus.

Once again the Canaanite woman responded in faith! She came to Jesus, she didn't fall back in disappointment, she came forward, and she approached the Lord! **Note how the Holy Spirit tells us that she worshiped Him!** There is only one you ought to worship and that is God! Her plea was a cry to Jesus as her God! And her plea to our God and Savior Jesus Christ was, "**Lord help me!**" Is this passing the test? It is far more than passing a test; it is faith growing in time of trial!

And yet Jesus tests a little more, a test that addresses that same false idea of the gospel being exclusive rather than inclusive.

Matthew 15:26-27 But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Jesus is not being harsh or rude with the "little dog" reference. This was term for family pets, not dirty street mongrels. However, Jesus is clarifying a significant point. The gospel came to the Jews first. Remember the points the Apostle Paul emphasized in last

Sunday's meditation. In God's grace the Jews had been singled out from the rest of the world to receive great spiritual advantages. To them came the Old Testament Scriptures through the writings of Moses and the prophets. To them was given the worship of God that directed them continually to the Savior who was to come into the world. And yes, it was from among the people of the Jews that the Christ was born into the world. This is a feast of the gospel. And on top of that, for three and a half years Jesus was busy preaching and teaching and healing and providing numerous other signs and wonders all declaring the coming of Messiah among the Jews. He revealed Himself to the Jews as the Bread of Life! They said this is a hard saying and turned back and followed Him no more. (John 6:60, 66) This Bread was not to be thrown on the floor and given to the little dogs.

Again one can almost hear the disciples' thoughts as they looked down on this dark skinned woman, "That's telling her, this is for us! Jesus is for us!" Yet once again the Canaanite woman responds in faith! Observe how --

II. Genuine Faith Grew Stronger through these Tests.

Matthew 15:27-28 And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

What a contrast! What a wonder of grace! This woman, along with many others outside the people of the Jews, had been receiving crumbs compared to what had been regularly served to the people of the Jews, not only during Jesus' three and half year ministry, but throughout history leading up to this point. What we see is how the Holy Spirit works saving faith through these precious crumbs of the gospel! Jesus praised the woman's faith as great faith that would not be dissuaded! And yes, we may be confident that through this experience her faith was tried and tested, and **grew** in its determination to lay hold of Jesus, and only Jesus, and to **not let go!**

The Lord, in His grace granted her petition. Her daughter was delivered from the demon possession. Her daughter was made well that very hour!

Crumbs of the gospel. Sometimes we forget how the Lord has called us by the gospel. We as gentiles are among those who were blessed with the crumbs that fell from our Master's table. And yet in His grace we have received so much more, haven't we? Again let us remember how blessed we are to have the Holy Scriptures delivered into our hands. We all own Bibles that we may read. We can search the Scriptures knowing that in them is to be found the words of eternal life, the words that testify of Jesus. (John 5:39) So we are as abundantly blessed as can be!

And yet perhaps, as we eat at the Master's table, crumbs still fall from the table. Crumbs of the gospel pass our lips as we praise the Lord for the salvation that has to come us in Christ, as others see how we, like this Canaanite woman, **persist** in calling upon the name of the Lord, worshiping Jesus as our Savior and our God. Crumbs that are observed and picked up by others we may never know, but, as we live and breathe our faith in Jesus, these crumbs of the gospel will be picked up, and the Holy Spirit continues to work faith in the hearts of people, calling them to be Jesus' disciples.

So it is important for us to capture the lessons Jesus delivered when He tested this Canaanite woman's faith from both sides. May we cling tightly in times of trouble to Jesus, be that trouble our own or in the life of a loved one, or among the people of our nation, or people in a distant land. Come before the Lord Jesus knowing the greatness of His love that led Him to lay down His life for us will also be there to help in every need of body and soul.

Let us also recall that lesson that all this laid out for the disciples. This was not just some darker skinned woman who was pestering Jesus, and getting on their nerves, causing a scene. This was a soul, a blood-bought soul dearly loved by Jesus, and drawn ever closer to Him in her time of trouble. May the Holy Spirit open our eyes that we see others as Jesus sees them, and us.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)