

## CRUMBS UNDER THE TABLE

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**Date:** 09-11-2025

**Scripture:** Matthew 15: 21-28

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“<sup>21</sup> Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.” <sup>23</sup> But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, “Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us.” <sup>24</sup> But He answered and said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” <sup>25</sup> But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” <sup>26</sup> And He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” <sup>27</sup> But she said, “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said to her, “O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at once.”

Speak Lord, we pray. We pray in the quietness of these moments. Connect our spirits with Yours, and teach us. And even beyond teaching, Lord, we pray that You would touch our ears, they would be unstopped. And that our wills would align with Your holy will this morning, so that what You have for us will find purpose and direction in our lives. to that end, we pray in Jesus’ name, as always. Amen.

Jesus, we read, has just left Galilee, which is Jewish territory. And it says that He has gone into Tyre and Sidon, which is Gentile territory that were outside the borders of Israel. Most devout Jews would avoid these places as they were considered spiritually and culturally unclean.

A woman approaches Jesus and it says that she is a Canaanite, whose people have a long history of opposition to Israel. They’re seen as outsiders, enemies to the covenant promise, people who are beyond the circle of God’s blessing and His favor. For a Jewish rabbi to engage with, respond to, or even acknowledge such a person would have been very, very shocking. And yet, it is precisely this woman, a marginalized outsider, with no claim to the promises of Israel, who comes to Jesus with remarkable faith.

Matthew calls her a Canaanite, as he writes. And that word is not neutral. It carries the weight of Israel’s oldest enemies. We read about that in Deuteronomy 7, which you can read later. The Canaanites were the people Israel was commanded to drive out. They were associated with idol worship, pagan rites, child sacrifice, and temple prostitution.

So, when Matthew calls her a Canaanite, he is saying she represents everything that Israel has been told to avoid. So her presence here is very striking. Matthew wants us to feel the distance between her and Jesus, ethnically, religiously, and culturally. She stands outside of the worshipping community of Israel.

With that kind of background, we can understand the disciples’ reaction to her. Makes sense! They are not simply being rude. They’re responding out of deeply ingrained religious assumptions – assumptions that said that people like her did not belong among the people of God.

And yet, she comes. And her cry in v. 22 is “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. Have mercy on me. my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”

This is not a polite kind of request. It's a desperate, heartfelt cry. She does not come wanting to have a discussion with Jesus. She does not approach with a rehearsed, eloquent speech. She simply cries out from a place of agony. And there are three things that we need to notice in her cry.

1. She recognizes Jesus' identity. She calls Him 'Son of David'. And Son of David was a Messianic title. Many in Israel itself had not yet confessed to that title for Jesus, but she did.
2. She asks for mercy, not merit. She does not say, "I deserve this." She says, "I need this."
3. We can see that her pain is very, very personal. "Have mercy on me," though the affliction is on her daughter. We can resonate with that. when someone we love suffers, we suffer as well. so many times, we have watched children suffer and said, "Lord, I wish I could take that away from them. I can bear it, but they can't." and it breaks our hearts to see loved ones suffer. Prayer can sound just like this. Lord, help me. Lord, I need You. Or just, Lord, please. It's a kind of intercessory love that we have for people whom we care for. And heaven hears this.

But when we look at v. 23a, the way that Jesus responds is unusual. He did not answer her a word. He didn't say anything. I think this is one of the more difficult parts of this passage. She cries, Jesus hears, and yet, He remains silent. Not absent; He's there. Not unaware, not unmoved; but silent.

I don't think in this context, silence was a form of rejection. Because we know the end of this story. Silence was more a kind of formation that Jesus was doing to her, which would then inform us about how we can come to God today, so much later. Because sometimes when we pray, we expect God to respond quickly, and clearly, and in a way that immediately comforts us.

But scripture and experience show us that God often uses silence, not to withdraw from us, but to work more deeply within us. Silence, in a way, draws out our faith. When we are met with silence, we have two options:

- To withdraw and say, "I'm done. God, I know that You hear prayers. I've said this many times, and now I'm done."
- The other is to continue to press Him, and press Him, and press Him.

She didn't walk away. She stayed. Silence draws out faith. Because when the noise and the feelings settle, we learn whether we trust because God is God, or only because of what He can give us. Silence, in a way, purifies our motives. It allows us to see whether we seek God for who He is, or only for the outcomes and solutions.

It goes back to Job, doesn't it? Satan throws his gauntlet at God and says, "Of course, he'll worship You. You bless him. You give him everything. Of course, he'll worship You." And God says, "Take it." The whole confrontation between God and Job had to do with this: that we will worship Him as God not because He's a glorified Santa Claus, but because He's God. Regardless of what comes our way, He remains God.

So, silence deepens and must deepen our persistence. It must strengthen our faith as we wait, as we endure, and keep on believing even when there are no signs and no immediate breakthroughs. Faith that is never tested often remains a very theoretical faith. An idea rather than a lived-out conviction. We can talk endlessly about it, but if we haven't put it where the rubber meets the road, we don't really know what faith is.

Silence sometimes becomes the classroom where trust grows roots, where dependence matures, and where we learn that God is still present, still working, still faithful, even when we cannot yet hear Him.

Maybe that's where some of you are today. Maybe you've dragged yourself to church this morning because it's what you do on a Sunday. You put your things that are pressing in on you, the issues, the problems that are around you on hold, as it were. Then said, "For this one and a half hours, I'm just going to do what I need to do to get through." Maybe you've prayed long and hard, and the silence is now deafening. Maybe you're at the point where you're saying: Should I just give up? Should I not go any further?

And yet, we read later that Jesus Himself experienced that silence in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed, sweat drops of blood. "Lord, if this cup can pass from Me, let it pass. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done." And there was not a whisper from heaven. And in that silence, something happened that helped Jesus understand that this was the path forward. Sometimes, silence is the most eloquent part of our journeys.

But then we see the disciples' response. "Send her away, for she keeps crying after us." They don't see her pain. They see her as a problem. And sometimes, it may be that people begin to see you and your problems through that lens. They've heard you talk about the things that are besetting you, or the prayer requests. Maybe you've asked them. and sometimes, you are met with that kind of resistance. People grow tired of your prayer requests, or your story, or even your tears.

But here's the thing. Jesus does not. That's why, even on Friday prayers, we keep saying, "Send in your prayer requests." This morning, we had a dedication. Donna and Lionel's child was dedicated. And as we were fellowshiping around, they introduced me to a lady as the person we prayed for on Friday prayer, who had a problem with conceiving because of a problem with her Fallopian tubes. She came to say thank you because she was expecting.

That's why we keep praying. Because somehow, this side of heaven, we will never understand. But there is a moment when God says, "Yes". And God forbid that we have stopped before that moment. Even when others grow irritated, or maybe overwhelmed, impatient, God is still present, still listening, and still shaping and molding us.

Then Jesus speaks. He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." When you read that, you wonder who much longer is she going to stay there? At what point is she going to turn on her heels and say, "Forget you, I'm gone. You're not listening to me; the disciples want to send me away. Okay, I'm finished." And then Jesus tells her what His mission is. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Here's the thing though. Jesus is not rejecting her. He's actually revealing the barrier that she must push through. So He states the theological order of the Messiah's mission: first to Israel, then to the nations. This is not cruelty; it's just about timing – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the outermost parts of the world. There's a plan in place. And somehow this lady who is in this place, is suddenly in this moment in front of Jesus.

When she hears that, v. 25 tells us, instead of turning and walking away, she came and knelt before Him saying, "Lord, help me." First, she cries out, now she bows down, and it seems like worship has entered the moment. She's not here to argue about fairness or any of that. she simply falls at His feet and says, "Lord, help me."

Those may be the only three words that are left in some of you today. You're really close to the end, and the only words that you can muster are these three words: Lord, help me. This is the cry of somebody who's exhausted. The parent who has no solutions left, the believer who has fasted and prayed and waited, the one at the end of their strength. This is the beautiful worship that does not quit. God is still on the throne in spite of all that is going on with us.

In v.26. Jesus says, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

It gets better and better, doesn't it? And it sounds so harsh to our modern ears. But when we look more closely, and I want us to do that today, to look at the language, to look at the culture, and the tone, and see what Jesus is really saying here.

We discover that Jesus is not insulting her. He wouldn't. That's not part of His character. He was inviting a deeper faith response. Why? Because there are two words that are used in the Greek for dogs.

- One is the word *kyon*, which means wild, scavenging dogs that we find on the streets that roam around dangerously. And when that word is used, it's normally harsh and insulting and degrading.
- But there's another word that is *kynarion* which means little dog, or household pet. When that word is used, it's used in familiar ways, in an affectionate tone; it's a gentle word. And that's the word that Jesus uses.

The Jews were very comfortable with having little dogs, pets in their home. They lived in the home with them and most often were found underneath the table. They would wait for the crumbs to fall over the edge so that they could have them. Those of us who are pet lovers know what that is all about. Sometimes the crumbs fall unintentionally, and sometimes they fall willingly. We want to give them something that we are eating. You look at him drooling there and you think: Gosh, how can I eat and not..... Dogs wait for that.

That was something that used to be a part and parcel of that culture. So Jesus was speaking within that culture. The beloved little dog that eats inside the home, not the wild dogs that are outside. So, the tone is gentle; it's not a slur. And the implication is this – in God's house, there's a table.

God has an order in how He distributes things: first to Israel, then to the nations. And the woman understood the image. She understood it very well because of the way the first century Israelites lived. So, when Jesus said this, the woman wouldn't have heard humiliation. She would have heard: you are in the house, there is room for you. But wait, the bread is being served to the Jewish children first.

Her response is so wonderful. It ties right into where Jesus was, because she says, "Yes, Lord. I understand. Yet, even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. That's all I need. I need a crumb. I don't need the main course; I need the crumbs that can fall." This is one of the most beautiful acts of faith in all of scripture. "Yes, Lord, I accept Your order of redemption. Yes, Lord, Israel first. Yes Lord, the table is Yours, but Your table is so full of grace that even the crumbs are enough to heal my daughter." She does not demand a place at the table. She simply believes there is enough grace overflowing. She trusts in the character of Jesus. It's like she's finally broken through that last barrier.

Then the response of Jesus is a response that He has only used one other time. He says, "O woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you desire." He does not say this to many people; He only said it to two people, and both were Gentiles.

It's a beautiful reminder for us that faith is not about background or status or religion, but about recognizing Jesus and who He is, and trusting Him. Her daughter was healed that very hour.

We have many lessons we can draw from this particular story.

- Faith persists and must persist even when heaven is silent, even when there's no response that is coming. There is a perfect time for God to respond. Don't stop praying just because you don't see movement yet. You know the acronym we have used before – PUSH – Pray Until Something Happens. Keep praying.
- True faith bows, trust, and worships. Don't let worship get taken out because you get jaded, because there's no answer. Keep worshipping.
- Bring your need before God with surrender, not entitlement. Surrender.  
Simply to the cross I cling,  
Nothing in my hands I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling.
- God's grace is sufficient for whatever you're going through.

Jesus responds to persistent, humble faith. This side of heaven, we. May never understand why it is that we have to pray so persistently. But when we get to heaven, we will know. But now, it is sufficient for us to look at scripture and see the many times people have prayed persistently.

The prophet Elijah prayed seven times before rain fell, even though it was God's will to send rain. He prayed persistently seven times.

And so, to you this morning I would say, "If you're at that point where you think nothing is working and you've come here actually dragging your feet. Maybe you love being here because the worship lifts you, and for that hour, or hour and a half that we are together, you can put aside those things that are weighing heavily on you. But you know that it meets you the moment you leave the sanctuary.

I wonder whether you can make that front and center right now. Bring it out the front and say: "Help me, Lord," even if the answer is not going to come now. I want to feel Your grace supporting me. I want to feel the lifting up of faith within me, for it's almost dried. Lord, I want to feel the support that You can give through Your spirit.

Whenever God gives a message like this, with an invitation that seems to flow from it, I always believe that He does that because He knows those of you who are seated here, He knew that you would be here today, and He wants to meet you. He wants to do something in you to restore faith and hope and trust.

And so, in closing, I want to pray for you. If that is who you are, if you wouldn't mind, I want to invite you just to stand. And if that's who you are, if your heart is breaking this morning, if you're desperately in need of a touch from the Lord, I'm going to ask that you just bow your heads. And if you need prayer this morning, would you stand just where you are?

Oh heavenly Father, we know that Your eyes are on this room. We know Lord that You see every single person who is standing here. And Lord, I ask that You would do what only You can do. That You would come alongside of them and just let faith arise. Lord, give to them a sense that You are

still with them. You haven't forgotten them. You never will. And that there is a time coming for that answer. And Lord, if that time for them is to tarry Abba, can I be bold enough to ask, Lord, that You would fill them with Your grace that You say is always sufficient?

Oh Lord, would You pour into their hearts, into their souls, into their very beings enough grace, Lord, that they walk out of here with that peace that You promise is beyond situations and circumstances. Let that peace Lord, settle upon each one of them. And as it does, Lord, fill their hearts with joy, the joy of knowing that they are sons and daughters of the most high God, Who has His eye on them and Who will accomplish His purposes in His time.

Oh Master, I pray that Your presence would so fill each one who's standing Lord that they would be able to look at whatever situation or circumstance they face and walk through barriers also Lord that may be there. I pray that they would walk through them and that they would see the light of day, Master, when You choose it. And then, Lord, along with them, we will rejoice. For we know that You are a prayer answering God who loves each of us deeply, cares deeply for us and will never leave us. So Lord on this let Your heavenly benediction rest in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.