

Faith In the Home

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 15:21-28, "Dogs, Crumbs, and the Perseverance of Faith."

It doesn't matter how many times you read it or hear a sermon about it, Jesus always seems so harsh during the story of a Canaanite woman pleading with Him to heal her demon possessed daughter.

He tells the woman, "I was sent only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and as she continues to press Him, Jesus compares her to a dog. "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." The woman then astonishes Jesus with her faith, because she not looking for bread, she is looking for one crumb just to feed her daughter. "Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." The woman is not offended by Jesus, she just perseveres in her faith that Jesus can help her daughter. Moved by the woman's faith, Jesus heals her daughter instantly.

There are three things we draw from the text today.

The first rests in the context of Jesus ministry and teaching of His disciples. Jesus was dealing with people who thought they were righteous and would be blessed based on their keeping of traditions and their works. They did not understand that God measures righteousness based on one's faith in their heart. The disciples were confused as to why Jesus would debate the Pharisees on this issue. This woman demonstrated that faith in God means putting all trust, hope, and faith in Him, and her faith was demonstrated through her perseverance. Jesus is not really being a jerk, He teaching His disciples a lesson.

Secondly, while the overall context of the text demonstrates that Jesus was teaching His disciples a lesson on faith, He also was deeply moved by the woman's faithful answer in being willing to be a dog who just gets a crumb from Him. The woman is an example to us that when we are deeply burdened in this world that clinging to Jesus will get us through. Even when it seems like He is not answering, Jesus will answer faithfully to our needs. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that "God didn't answer my prayer because of my lack of faith." Sometimes God gives us a completely different answer than we were looking for. However, He may be growing your perseverance in your faith in Him. That's why Jesus tells us to pray without ceasing.

Finally, we can draw from this text that no matter what your background is, Jesus honors your faith in Him. It doesn't matter how much money you make, your sex, your race, your education, your status, your prior sins, and so on, Jesus honors your faith. And it is faith in Him that saves us. It is faith in Him that makes us righteous before God. Even though Jesus came for the lost Jews first, He still came that whole world would know who He is.

How can we apply this to our lives?

Let's pretend for a minute that Jesus just ignored the Canaanite woman. What would that say about Jesus? It would show us that Jesus' sole focus was getting to the cross to die for our sins, and rise again. He came to bring us to salvation as the perfect sacrifice. However, we have these healing stories that only demonstrate Jesus' divine nature as God, but His compassion for us in our suffering.

Furthermore, this story demonstrates that He allows Himself to be moved by our faith. We are not stuck in some fatalistic existence where we must just accept circumstances. We can faithfully call out to God, and know that He answers prayer. We can pray then act on what we prayed for in faith, and trust that God is going to take care of what we need. (If two farmers ask God for rain, which of the two farmers believed God would answer the prayer? The one who prepared his fields for rain, or the one who didn't? If you are praying for God to give you a new job, then make sure you are applying to new jobs.) We know He loves us and is filled with compassion for us. Romans 8, promises that, "God works all things to His glory and to the benefit of those He loves." God cares about your eternal salvation, and He cares about your current circumstances and invites you to pray to Him in faith.