

Crumbs from the Table

On many occasions in the Scriptures the actions of Jesus make perfect sense – but our text doesn't seem to fit into that category does it. The way Jesus acts in this passage seems to be so out of character, doesn't it?

What if you came to me with your need today. What would you think of me if I simply ignored you, or told you that you were not worthy of my help? I don't know all of your needs today. But most people in this room today have one or more major needs in their lives and some of us may not see how our need can be met.

Some people are looking at devastating family problems. Some are looking at financial difficulty. Some are looking at a problem with a child. Some see their own souls and realize that they are lost. Some are looking at a disease and wondering what lies ahead. Some are looking at their parents and realizing they won't be here forever. I could stand here all day and not exhaust the list of problems that many of you are facing today.

In the midst of your problems, you need someone to help you. You need someone you can turn to for your solution. You need God to work in your life.

That is the situation we are looking at in this passage today. Jesus is approached by a mother who is in a desperate situation. She needs something in her life. She comes to the Lord and as she does she is just asking Jesus for a crumb from the table. Here the story again from Mark 7:

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 far in in chapter 7 we saw two weeks ago that Jesus has just told the Pharisees, the scribes, His disciples and the multitudes that nothing in and of itself is unclean, Mark 7:14-16. He told them that defilement is from within, Mark 7:20-23. His message was simple: What a man is in his heart is what he truly is! We learned there that as our Lord addressed many of the man-made rules and regulations of the Pharisees and Scribes, He was really pronouncing null and void the 'clean and unclean' system of Old Testament. The Lord wasn't just critiquing these extra rules that the Pharisees and Scribes had added to God's law, but He was pronouncing that there was a new age

beginning that would open up God's way of salvation not just to Jews but to Gentiles, in effect the whole world.

Now what we have here this morning in verses 24 to 30 is the Lord practically demonstrating that the way to God had been opened to the Gentiles. These next four miracles in Mark are performed in Gentile regions. The Lord is going into Gentile places and dealing with Gentile people. Therefore, when it says in verse 26 that the woman who is meeting the Lord now 'was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation', it's not a superfluous detail - this woman was a Gentile. She was a Greek, a Syrophenician, which spoke of the fact that she was a Canaanite. Remember that the Canaanites were the people who were driven out of the land in the Old Testament, to give the land to the people of God, the Jews.

Verse 24 tells us that Jesus and His men go to Tyre and Sidon, which is in the heart of Gentile territory. Tyre was an ancient non-Jewish city that had a long history of hostility with the people of Israel. Tyre is located in modern day Lebanon, and it was from Tyre that Queen Jezebel had come, Israel's most wicked rulers during the years of the divided kingdom. The Jewish historian Josephus called the people of Tyre Israel's most bitter enemies (Against Apion 1.13). Tyre represented the most extreme kind of paganism that a Jewish person of Jesus' day could expect to encounter (Edwards 217).

We get the impressions that once again, Jesus is trying to get alone with His disciples away from the crowds, **"And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it."** But the verse goes on to say **"but He could not be hidden"**.

That is always the case! When Jesus is in a house, a person, a family, a church, a community, or wherever, He simply cannot be hidden! Word will get out that He is in the house. Is Jesus in your house? If so, He cannot be hidden! From whom could He not be hid? From a person in need! We've seen that right throughout this gospel, haven't we? The Lord has come to meet the needs of the needy, and the Servant always made Himself reachable to those who were in need.

Here in verse 25 a burdened mother locates Jesus. She begins to petition Him for the help she needs. She faces several challenges, but she persists and she gets what she came for. So, even Jesus apparently displays an unfamiliar harshness toward this woman, here's a clue to the secret of understanding this incident: Jesus always made Himself reachable to those who were in need and who came believing in Him.

As I preach this text today, I want you to understand that there is hope for you. No matter who you are, or what you've done, or how desperate your needs is, Jesus is the solution to your problem.

I. THE MOTHER AND HER REQUEST v. 25-26

The Reason She Came – This woman came to Jesus because she was concerned about her daughter. The child was demon possessed and was probably acting out in violence and anger. She needed help in a desperate way. It may be that the demon was causing bodily harm to the child. This was the situation in the case of another demon possessed child that we will see in Mark 9:22.

Verse 25 tells us that this woman had **"heard about Him"**. Perhaps she had heard about how Jesus had healed all manner of diseases; about how He had opened the eyes of the blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf; about how He had driven the demons from other people. She may have heard about how Jesus had gone over into

the country of the Gaderenes and had delivered the man possessed by a legion of demons. She may have thought, “If He can deliver that man from a legion of demons, surely He can deliver my daughter from the grip of one devil!”

This woman came and fell at Jesus’ feet. Verse 26 says, “**she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.**” She was insistent because she was heartbroken over the condition of her child and she was determined to get her child the help she needed.

This woman came to Jesus because faith and hope had been aroused in her heart. She needed something that society had not been able to provide. She was looking for something that her dead religion had been powerless to give her. She needed a solution that she had not been able to provide by her own self-efforts. She was desperate and she saw Jesus as her only hope!

How many of you can identify with this poor, anxious mother? Perhaps you are dealing with a child that is out of control. Perhaps you are at your wits end over some situation in your life and you need help. Perhaps you have exhausted every means at your disposal and do not know where to turn for help. Maybe what you need is salvation. Or, maybe what you need is restoration and forgiveness. Whatever the need in your life may be today; you should take a lesson from this woman: Get that need to Jesus!

Regardless of what you face in your life today, the answer will be found in Him! He can move your mountain; meet your need; save your soul; forgive your sins; touch your loved ones; you name it, He can do it! But, you have to get it to Him! Don’t be afraid to call on Him; He invites you to come, Matt. 11:28. You do not have to bear this burden alone! Bring it to Jesus, He cares, 1 Pet. 5:7; and He can help, Heb. 4:16.

II. THE MOTHER AND HER RESOLVE v. 27-28

This woman comes to Jesus for help and when she doesn’t get the response she desires, she stays after Jesus until she gets what she wants.

This isn’t the first time someone has come to Jesus with a special request. But out of all the people who do this, this woman has the most against her. First she’s a woman, and many of the Jewish men of Jesus’ day wouldn’t even speak to a woman unless it was their wife or their mother. But this isn’t just any woman; she’s a non-Jewish woman, a Greek woman born in Syrian Phoenicia. Yet despite her strikes against her, she begs Jesus to deliver her daughter from a demonic spirit

A. The Obstacles to Faith v. 23-27 – She had to overcome many obstacles in order to secure her daughter’s healing. It seemed that she met resistance to her request at every turn. Yet, she persisted until she achieved her goal. Look at some of the obstacles she faced and overcame by faith.

1. The Obstacle of Race – Verse 26 tells us that this woman was from Tyre and Sidon. Matt. 15:22 tells us that she was a Canaanite. This reveals two things about this mother. First, she was descended from a cursed people. When Joshua led the people of Israel into Canaan, they had been commanded to totally destroy the Canaanites, Deut. 7:2. She was a member of a doomed race. Second, she was from a region known for vile religious practices. This woman had two strikes against her from the very start.

2. The Obstacle of Religion – Matthew tells us she came to Jesus and called out to Him and said, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David”. Here she was a Gentile mother crying out to the Jewish Messiah. She had no right to come to Jesus through the

door of Judaism. She was a Gentile and according to Matt 15:23, Jesus gave her the response she deserved: "He answered her not a word."

3. The Obstacle of Rejection – As Jesus speaks to this woman, His words appear harsh to our ears. His words must have shaken her to the very core of her being. His words probably broke her heart. Matt. 15:23-26 adds much detail concerning this conversation.

First, Jesus simply ignores her. It is as if He turns an indifferent ear to her cries for help. Then, He tells her that His whole purpose in coming to this world was to reach the lost sheep of Israel. When she persists, Jesus tells her that she is a dog and does not deserve the children's bread. It appears that Jesus is rejecting her.

The realities of this situation are harsh! Her daughter was possessed by a devil. She was a member of a doomed race. These religion men did not seem to care about her or her situation at all. It must have appeared to her that her situation was hopeless.

Some of you are looking at some of the same barriers today. You might be a lost person and you know you need Jesus; but you feel like you have no right to come to Him. You have experienced the rejection of the religious people around you. Yet, you still want to see your life changed. Let me tell that you can come to Jesus! If you do, He will not turn you away, John 6:37.

Others have been praying and seeking God about matters that trouble your heart. You have cried out to Him and asked Him to do this or that in your life and there has been no answer. You feel like giving up! Let me encourage you today. God's silence is not an indication of God's unwillingness to meet your need. God's silences serve to prove our faith and to remind us that He is Lord.

What obstacles are you facing today? Persist in seeking the Lord and in His time, you will see every barrier fall! Your faith is not so much defined by what you receive from God; but by what you overcome to get to God!

B. The Opportunities of Faith v. 27 – As Jesus speaks with this woman, He never slams the door of hope in her face. Jesus says, "**Let the children be filled first ...**" That word "**first**" was exactly what this broken hearted mother needed to hear! Jesus did not say, "You cannot have what you are looking for!" He said, "I have come to the lost sheep of Israel. And, they must be filled first." She took that to mean that "**seconds**" were available.

You see, these obstacles that were thrown up by the Lord Jesus were not placed there to discourage and defeat this lady. The obstacles were placed there to mature her faith.

What surprises us is Jesus' seemingly harsh response to the woman. He uses a parable, a metaphor, to explain his reluctance to heal her daughter. 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.**" Clearly the "**children**" in this parable refer to the people of Israel, and the "**bread**" refers to Jesus' ministry. The "**dogs**" must refer to non-Jewish people. Jesus is saying that he should finish His ministry in Israel before he branches out to non-Jewish peoples. Jesus is affirming the priority of the people of Israel in His mission, that his main focus has been the people of Israel.

What disturbs us here is that Jesus likens this non-Jewish woman to a dog. And in the ancient world, dogs weren't usually the cute, cuddly pets we think of, but they were wild scavengers. In Jewish thought, dogs were associated with ritual impurity because they scavenged off dead bodies. For a Jew to call a non-Jewish person a "dog" was common

enough. It was a term of derision, of contempt, which is why we find it difficult to imagine the word coming from the lips of Jesus.

But the word Jesus uses for dogs is not the degrading one for “despicable street dogs.” Both Jesus and the woman use the term meaning, “little dog, puppy,” and it is found only here and in the parallel passage of Matthew 15. This is a term for a beloved family pet. Still these words seem harsh coming from Jesus.

But what surprises me even more is the woman’s response to Jesus, because she accepts her role in the parable. Her response is clever, as she seizes on the imagery of the parable to make her case. She says that even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the children’s table.

I always imagine that Jesus has a twinkle in His eye as He says this and she immediately catches the meaning. The image here is of a beloved puppy sitting under the table while the family eats a meal. It sits there hoping and expecting that someone will slip it a morsel of food. The puppy can see the food. It can smell the food. It knows what it wants is within easy reach. It just needs someone to acknowledge it and give it a bite.

She says, “I know that it isn’t right to take the food from the children’s table and give it to the dogs. But, even the dogs are sometimes treated to a morsel from the table. All I am asking for is a crumb.”

Can you see how Jesus took this woman and her small faith and led her along and helped grow her faith? The obstacles of faith almost always turn out to be opportunities in disguise. When we continue to seek the Lord in spite of every hindrance we will eventually see Him do what we need done.

C. The Obligations Of Faith v. 28 – A lot of people would have given up! Jesus ignored her and even compared her to a dog; yet she persisted.

Most folks would have thrown up their hands in frustration and stormed off in anger saying, “I don’t need this! So much for your God of love; for your message of compassion and your narrow, bigoted religion! I don’t want anything to do with a God or a religion like that!” That is the way many react when they do not get what they want, when they want it. But, not this woman!

She persisted in spite of everything that was thrown into her pathway. Why? She persisted because too much was at stake! Her little daughter needed to be delivered from her bondage. Her family needed to be saved. She needed help and she was determined to get it! A crumb might have been all she could get; but she knew that a crumb from His hand was more than enough! She wouldn’t give up until she got what she needed!

How much does your problem mean to you? Have you encountered some obstacles along the way that have made you throw up your hands and quit seeking God about the answer you need? Have you looked at the hypocrisy and the apathy of the church and concluded that since God’s people don’t care, you won’t care either? Have you decided that God can’t help you and Jesus can’t save your soul?

Friend, too much is at stake! Be like this poor mother. Keep bringing that need to Jesus until He answers. Keep seeking His face until He responds. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking and in His time, He’ll hand you down a morsel of answered prayer!

Matthew 7:7-8, **“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”**

III. THE MOTHER AND HER REWARD v. 29-30

A. Jesus Responded To Her Faith – He was amazed by the depth of her faith! In fact, this woman is only one of two people Jesus referred to as having “great faith”, Matt. 15:28. The other person was a Roman Centurion who came to Jesus to have Jesus heal a sick servant. Amazingly, both of these people were Gentiles!

Jesus had tested her faith with hard words and her faith had risen to the challenge! Her faith exceeded that of the people he had come to save! Here was a Gentile dog that had more faith than the Jewish scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and priests. This kind of faith excites the Lord!

B. Jesus Rewarded Her Faith – He rewarded her faith by giving her exactly what she asked for; He healed her daughter! Her faith was so strong that she didn't ask for proof, but she took Jesus at His word and turned around and went home to her family. When she arrived home, she found her daughter healed and her family restored! What a blessing! What a challenge!

I realize that some people in this very room are looking at situation and problems that are every bit as hard and as painful as that faced by this woman. I know that many of you have prayed and sought God about your situations and things remain the same. I know that the devil and the flesh are whispering in your ear right now. They are saying, “It's no use! God doesn't care! Go away and don't bother Him with this anymore. It's never going to change.” I know that some folks are discouraged and defeated and you wonder if there is any use or any help for you.

Take heart today, dear friends! There is hope!

Bring that need to Him again today. Bring it with faith in your hear that He will hear you; that He will help you and He will fix it. Bring it to Him and place it in His hands. Watch Him take it and make it as it ought to be.

You say, “Preacher, you don't understand how big my problem is.” No I don't, but He does!

A little crumb from the Lord's Table might be all you need today. Others may need Him to drop the whole platter down for you. I don't know what you need or where you are today; but I know a God Who can meet you where you are and help you get what you need today.

- Do you need to be saved?
- Do you need a mountain moved in your life?
- Do you need to be restored to faith and fellowship?
- Do you need to see God moving in someone else's life?

Regardless of what you need today, you can come to Jesus and you can get it. Even if you have sought Him for it in the past and received no answer, today might be the day when He says to you what He said to this mother in Matt. 15:28, **“O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”** Has He spoken to you today? Get to Him and get what you need from Him.