

The Famous Faith of a Nameless Mother

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[0:00] Take your Bibles, would you?

And open them to Matthew chapter 15 and find verse 21. Matthew 15 verse 21. I'll read it here in just a moment. But first, let me just say a few things by way of introduction.

A principal subject or character in this little piece of Scripture, little part of the narration in Matthew, second to Jesus, the principal character is a woman.

That seems to fit for this day. And more specifically, she's a mother. A mother. Certainly, a good subject for our sermon this morning.

This is Mother's Day. And so the principal character subject is a mother. Motherhood. And I think you would agree with me, I hope you would agree with me, that motherhood is an occupation that is to be greatly honored.

[1:16] At the same time, I think you would also admit with me, that motherhood is an occupation for which our culture, over the years and especially lately, sadly, has very little respect for and honor for.

Motherhood. I read a rather amusing story this past week that I'd like to share with you. It's about two mothers, Marge and Emily. And I could just kind of relate the story, but I'd rather read it because some of it, well, I would just botch it.

So let me read it to you. When Marge was picking up her children at school, Emily rushed up to her and fuming with indignation, and she asked, do you know what you and I are?

But when Marge, before she could answer the question, Emily blurted out the reason for her question. It seems that she had just come from renewing her driver's license at the county clerk's office and had been asked by the woman recorder there to state her occupation.

Emily wasn't sure just how to classify herself. What I mean is, explained the recorder, do you have a job or are you just a... Of course, I have a job, snapped Emily.

[2:47] I'm a mother. But the recorder responded emphatically, we don't list mother as an occupation, but housewife covers it.

And so Emily was just fuming when she was relating this to Marge. The next day, Marge found herself in the same situation, only this time it was at the town hall.

The clerk was obviously a career woman and possessed the high-sounding title, Official Town Registrar. What is your occupation?

She probed. And how Marge came up with her answer, she couldn't remember. But the words just popped out. I'm a research associate in the field of child development and human relations.

Well, the clerk paused, ballpoint pen frozen in midair, and looked up as though she had not heard right. And so Marge repeated the title slowly, emphasizing the most significant-sounding words.

[3:53] Then she watched with delight as her pompous pronouncement was written in bold black ink on the official questionnaire. Might I ask, said the clerk with new interest, just what do you do in your field?

Calmly and coolly, without any trace of fluster in her voice, Marge heard herself reply, I have a continuing program of research in the laboratory and in the field.

I'm working for my master's and already have a number of credits toward that. Of course, the job is one of the most demanding of the humanities, and I often work 14 hours or more a day.

But the job is more challenging than most run-of-the-mill careers, and the rewards are in satisfaction rather than just money. There was a note of respect in the clerk's voice as she completed the form, stood up and personally ushered Marge to the door.

Upon returning home, Marge drove into her driveway, exhilarated by the thought of her impressive career. And as she stepped out of the car, she was greeted by her lab assistants, ages 13, 7, and 3.

[5:05] And from an upstairs window, she could hear their new experimental model in the child development program, aged 6 months, who was testing out a new vocal pattern.

And Marge felt triumphant. And so she should. Our culture may not be getting it right today. And really they're not. But motherhood is one of the noblest of occupations. And more than that, motherhood is a sacred calling.

Now why we have lost sight of that, I don't know. But it has been to our detriment as a society. Now I would also quickly add that motherhood, of course, comes with its own unique struggles. Very tough struggles at times.

[6:14] And it comes with its own heartaches, severe, deep heartaches of motherhood. And I'm not speaking as one who knows personally.

I know it's true. And all the mothers here would affirm that. Heartaches and struggles and difficulties and challenges and setbacks and pain and suffering that goes along with motherhood.

It has from the beginning, from the very first mothers. In fact, the Bible bears this out, doesn't it?

The Bible doesn't give us very many examples of motherhood.

Not specifically. But of those that we do have on the pages of Scripture, this thing of motherhood being a difficult thing is borne out in Scripture very clearly.

Eve, for example, took the blame for original sin. I think you would agree that quite a struggle. She had a son, one son, who murdered his brother.

[7:21] What a burden that would have been. Hagar, Abraham's handmaiden, had a son by Abraham, Ishmael.

And she and her son were exiled and they both nearly died in the desert. Jacob had to hide her son, Moses, for several months to escape the murderous edict of a Pharaoh.

And eventually, because she couldn't keep him quiet and couldn't keep him concealed, had to place her son in a basket and launch him out into the Nile River and just trust him to the hands of God.

Could you imagine the burden that this mother carried? And one of the most famous mothers, of course, in all of history would be Mary, the mother of Jesus.

And she had to travel, you know, great with child. She had to give birth to that child in very unsuitable surroundings.

[8:25] She had to flee to Egypt to flee the wrath of Herod. And of course, she watched as her precious firstborn son.

was crucified right before her eyes. I think you could say that the death of her son Jesus was both a source of great affliction, great heartache for her, and yet at the same time, great joy.

Great joy. But motherhood. And we have this mother in our text. This mother whose daughter, as we're going to discover, was demon-possessed.

And so with that, let's read the text. Matthew chapter 15, and starting with verse 21. Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

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.

[9:34] My daughter is severely demon-possessed. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, Send her away, for she cries out after us.

But He answered and said, I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then she came and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me.

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, Lord, yes, Lord.

Yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's 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. Interesting story, isn't it? Perplexing story.

[10:38] Maybe even alarming on the face of it as we read this story. And here's a woman. She's a Canaanite.

She's not a Jew. She's a Canaanite. That means she's a Gentile. A Canaanite woman. A Gentile woman. A mother who has a daughter.

She's a mother like many mothers right here in this room this morning. And yet, of course, unlike I'm sure every mother here this morning, her daughter was demon-possessed.

Demon-possessed. And we likely have no mothers here today who carry around a burden like that. Though I'm sure we do have mothers present here today who have children, a son, a daughter, who

are living for the devil.

Not followers of Jesus Christ. Care nothing about the church. and you are deeply, deeply burdened for your son or daughter, your children.

[11:51] And I think that would be an apt parallel to the kind of burden that this particular woman was carrying at this time. But really, the larger picture is that she represents, she's representative of all mothers who have experienced burdens of great magnitude.

The burdens of motherhood and the burdens that would manifest themselves or characterize themselves in many different ways.

But they're burdens of motherhood. And so like this Canaanite woman, possibly, you have sought God for an answer.

an answer to your burden. Whatever it may be. You've sought the Lord in prayer, agonizing prayer, to meet a need of your life.

And you have sought Him to remove the burden, but as yet He has not answered. You see how very easily many, possibly all the mothers in this room here today, maybe not today, but at some point, maybe today, can relate to this Canaanite woman, this mother.

[13:18] And so you've not had an answer and like this woman in our story, God has seemed to turn you away. It seems that way.

You see, she did not get what she asked for right away. In fact, verse 21, according to verse 21, Jesus answered her not a word. You know, that makes us a little uncomfortable when we read that. Here she is, she's agonizing, she's crying, her daughter is grievously vexed with a devil, a demon. And Jesus does not even answer a word to her.

Was there something wrong with her priorities? I mean, let's just kind of analyze this and say, well, maybe there's a reason why Jesus did not answer her right away, didn't even acknowledge her.

Was there something wrong with her priorities? And maybe this need that she had was really not all that important. certainly it was important. Huh?

[14:26] I mean, you can't read the story and think that. Very important. Her daughter, the Bible says, was severely demon-possessed. That's bad enough to be demon-possessed, but it says severely.

I don't know how you measure what's a worse kind of demon-possession over another kind of demon-possession, but the Bible says severely. And the idea there, the word severely means that she was not only demon-possessed, but she was suffering tremendously as a result.

That's what the text means. And mothers today are faced with some pretty tough things. Extreme burdens. And they and their children, their families, are hurting and suffering as a result.

So why didn't Jesus answer her question? Why didn't Jesus meet her need? Why didn't he acknowledge her at least right away? Was there something wrong with her priorities? Certainly not. Was there something wrong with her passion? Maybe she just wasn't serious enough or passionate enough. And maybe Jesus was just waiting for her to really express emotionally that this is really a serious thing.

[15:45] Maybe she didn't mean business. So she wasn't passionate. Well, that's certainly not true. Just the opposite is true. Matthew recorded here that she cried out.

She cried out. And based upon the reaction of the disciples in verse 23, this woman could not stop crying. Maybe difficult to get the sense of this from the text, but in verse 23, the Bible says, and the disciples came and urged him, urged, pleaded, begged with Jesus, saying, send this woman away. I'm kind of paraphrasing. Send this woman away, for she keeps on crying and crying and crying and crying at us. That's really what they said.

I mean, these guys are a compassionate lot, aren't they? Get rid of this woman. She's bothering us. But I think it's clear that this woman came to Jesus asking, asking for mercy, asking for some big thing, and she came with the greatest of passion.

Yet at first, Jesus did not even acknowledge her presence. That's disturbing, isn't it? Well, then was there something wrong with her prayer?

[17:16] That's it, right? Something wrong with her prayer. And yet that can't be. Well, what can we learn about her prayer here from this little scanned information that we have in the text?

Well, in the first place, there was nothing prideful about her, her prayer. prayer. I don't think that you could get from this that she was presumptuous about a request, just demanding in a very prideful way.

I don't think you could get that from the prayer. In fact, in Mark's record of this same event, in Mark chapter 7, he tells us that the woman fell at Jesus' feet.

that's certainly not, you know, a show of pride. There's great humility in her prayer.

And here in Matthew 15, we're told that she called Jesus Lord, Kurios, Master.

[18:26] And not only that, but she added the title, Son of David. Now, what does she mean by that? Well, clearly, it meant that she professed a belief in Jesus as the true Messiah, the very Son of God.

Now, there wasn't anything wrong with the prayer in the sense that she was not humble enough.

And second, there was clearly nothing faithless about her prayer.

Right? I mean, Jesus said, O woman, great is your faith. There was nothing wrong with her prayer.

She was not faithless. Great is your faith, he said. And listen to me, Jesus never said that to any one of his disciples. Not Peter, not James, not John, kind of the inner circle.

John, his beloved disciple, he never said it of John. Not any of the other disciples. In fact, Jesus, as far as I can tell from Scripture, Jesus said this to only two people in all the Bible, and guess what?

[19:33] They were both Gentiles and not Jews. We have this woman here in Matthew 15, 28, and then he said it also of the Roman centurion in Matthew 8, verse 10, where he said, Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

It is nobody among Jews have I found with this kind of faith. It's this Gentile. Now, you see, there was nothing wrong with her priority, nothing wrong with her passion, nothing wrong with her prayer. She had a great faith. That's what Jesus said. And yet, just look at how Jesus treated her.

He seems to be ignoring her. He answered her not a single word initially. And worse than that, and we can hardly believe our ears, but Jesus actually said to her in verse 26, look at it.

Look at verse 26. Look closely. He said, it is not good. Kalos is the word not good, not right, not proper.

[20:52] It wouldn't be the right thing for me to do, to take the children's bread, my children's bread, and throw it to the little dogs.

What? What's this? Jesus said, you want me to do something for you, but I can't do it.

It wouldn't be right for me to do it. You want me to heal this demon-possessed daughter of yours, but I'm not going to do it because that would be like throwing my children's bread to the dogs.

Throwing my children's food to the dogs. That's what it would be like. On the face of it, that's what He said. What? What would you have done if Jesus had given you a response like that?

What would you have done? Well, let me ask you this. What do you do when He is silent?

[21:58] And He often is. He's just bound, determined to have us live by faith. And many times God is silent.

What do you do then? I mean, even when you have a great burden, a huge request, a great need, and He's silent.

What do you do? What do you do when God allows you to continue in need, continue in pain, continue in suffering?

What do you do? What do you do, moms, when God leaves you with your burdens? He does, doesn't He?

He doesn't take all your burdens away. Now, He does a lot of other things, but He doesn't take them away always.

[23:02] What do you do then? Well, I think we need to look at this mother in our story. I know that's a long introduction, but it won't take long to work through an analysis of this woman to see how she responded to Jesus and then what we can learn from her encounter with Him.

in the first place, she had a prideless faith. I've already mentioned her pridelessness, but that's number one.

At least it's the first thing that we see here in her response. She was prideless. No pride about her. She was prideless. essentially, and there's no way around it, essentially Jesus compared her to a dog. There's no other way around it.

That was her status. I know you're thinking that can't be, because that just wouldn't be right. But that's what we see. He essentially compared her to a dog.

[24:22] But did you notice her response? What did she say? She said, yes, Lord. Yes.

And the word yes is the Greek word nigh, and it is a word specially used to make a strong affirmation of truth. Not just your everyday run-of-the-mill yes, or agreement that we might say and

not necessarily mean.

She said literally, true! That's what I am. True, Lord. There was no debate about it.

There was no argument with Jesus about it. There was seemingly no offense taken. Now, regardless of just what Jesus meant by calling her a little dog, it is clear that she was void of all pride before the Lord.

No pride whatsoever. Can you imagine what most of us would do if we'd been in that situation?

[25:37] Can you imagine? But there is something special about this woman. That's what we need to see. There's something very special about her. There was something exemplary about this mother.

Something that we could all learn. mothers and fathers alike. Men and women alike. Something we could all learn. Have you ever prayed for a financial need?

Of course you all. We all have. Have you ever prayed for a financial need? Some money that maybe you need to pay a bill? Or bills? Have you ever done that? Sure you have.

But instead of money, you get more bills? Has that ever happened to you? A car breaks down? The heating unit of the house stops working and you find out you've got to buy a new one?

Or one of the kids breaks an arm or gets run over by a trailer? Something like that. And we think, Lord, God, why are you calling me a dog?

[26:53] Have you ever prayed for a loved one to be healed? We all have. But instead of healing, the illness gets worse and sometimes the loved one dies.

Nearly every one of us in this room have had that experience. Some of you are going through that right now. And you might be thinking, Lord, stop calling me a dog.

perhaps you have prayed over and over again for God to just remove some big burden in your life.

But God doesn't remove the burden. And sometimes it gets even harder. Have you ever prayed repeatedly and earnestly for God to save your spouse, a son or daughter or really good friend?

But instead of salvation, you watch as your loved one seems to drift further and further away from God, deeper and deeper into sin. And you say, Lord, am I no better than a dog to You?

[28:24] You see, I think we can learn from this woman. These scenarios that I've kind of laid out there, they're very common, not just to mothers, but to all of us.

But it is a mother that God uses to show us the way. We don't know her name. Isn't that interesting? She's nameless, famous. Famous for her faith. And the first thing that we see right out of the gate is that her faith was prideless before God.

True, Lord. True, Lord. See, God, this may be a rude awakening for many of you, but God is not in the business of answering all of our needs and wants.

God is not in the business of giving us everything we ask for, even some of the big things. God is in the business of making us holy, drawing us closer to Him and making us more like Jesus.

[29:40] That's what God is in the business of doing. Yes, He does answer prayers many times. He did see, when I read the text, He did answer this woman's prayer, but it isn't always.

And it's not His chief concern. His chief concern is holiness. Be more separated unto Him.

That's what God is up to. And to do that, He has to remove all pride. Let me give you something else about this exceptional mother.

She was persistent in her faith. She was persistent. And the two can and must go together.

Pridelessness, certainly, but persistence. She's persistent. Notice what she said in verse 28. She said, as we've already talked about, yes, Lord, true Lord, yet.

[30:44] Do you see that? Yet, now watch this, yet, even the little dogs get the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

Do you see that? She was persistent. And when I say persistent, I'm not referring to the number of times she made her request.

I mean, you can ask a thousand times and God doesn't answer. You can ask one time and God immediately answers. It has nothing to do with that. I'm not talking about repetition. I'm not talking about how many times she came.

Let me explain. The Bible says, you know, that without faith it is impossible to please God. And the implication there being that without real faith, real faith, persistence is little more than vain repetition.

there must be faith. And you see, this woman had faith when she prayed. That's what made her prayers persistent.

[31:53] Now look closely at what she said. Verse 27, Yes, Lord, meaning you're right, my standing is a dog in relation to your children, and your right is not proper that you should take the children's bread and cast it to the little dogs.

Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

That's key. Do you see? When Jesus called her a little dog, by the way, He was using the word *kunarian* is the word, and it's a reference to domesticated dogs, pets.

That's a reference to that kind of a dog, a household dog. And this is probably true in some homes out there who have little domesticated dogs in the house.

They eat the crumbs that fall from the table. Now, with many of us, it just happens that way. In these days, it was pretty common.

[33:08] The household dog would eat the crumbs that fall from the table there from their master's table. And that's what this dear woman is saying to Jesus. She's saying, Jesus, You are my master.

The master of my life. And I'm asking for something here, and I'm asking a big thing. I know that it's a big thing, and I really do need it. I really do want it.

But if I can't have it, nevertheless, you're still my master. That's what we need to understand about her persistence in prayer.

It was a persistence that clings to the Lord, clings to Him constantly. That was her persistence. clinging to Him and will not let go, no matter what.

Hers was a persistence that was rooted in a great faith. So great that Jesus took note of it and honored it.

[34:20] Let me give you an illustration, a rough illustration, but you take a stray dog that follows you home, and if you pat him on the head just once, or give him a little food, he's yours.

Yeah, for life. Until he dies or you die, he's yours. That's just the way it is. And if he could talk, this is what he would say, he would say, you may kick me and shut me out of the door, but I've taken you to be my master.

And you can shut me out of one door, and I'm going to go around to the other door. And if you shut me out of both doors, I'm going to sit down on the mat and just wait here. If you kick me out into the street, I'm going to stand here until you come out, and then I'm going to follow you everywhere you go, even if you drive.

You can't get rid of that dog. He's saying, I've taken you to be my master, and my master you will be. Now, that, of course, is a rough illustration of this woman's faithful, persistent.

But she is agreeing, yes, Lord, I am a little dog in my status, but I am not a dog without a master.

[35:34] And you are my master, Lord, and I trust you, I trust you regardless of how you answer my prayer, or when you answer my prayer, or if you answer my prayer.

You're my master. This poor mother exemplifies a persistence that flows from her unqualified faith and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior no matter what.

She was prideless, persistent, and one other thing, she was positive. A positive faith. She was very positive.

Not presumptuous, but positive. confident. Essentially, this godly mother said, I am a dog, yes, but I get the crumbs.

I get the crumbs. She was positive about that. She was confident in the Lord about that, and that was her faith. Can you imagine how Satan must have tempted this poor woman to be discouraged?

[36:47] I mean, from the get-go. She was a Canaanite, a Gentile. That means she was not a Jew like Jesus. She was of a culture that was marked by idolatry.

Paganism. And she was a woman. She was. I'm telling you that a Jew in that day would not give the time of day to anyone with those kind of qualifications.

medications. There was nothing about her that would commend her to Jesus.

Not spiritually. She was a sinner like all of us. Not culturally. She was a woman.

not religiously. She was a Gentile. But her faith would not let any of these things hold her back.

[37:51] She was positive. Confident. Jesus may throw me a bone, but there's life-sustaining marrow inside that bone. He may throw a rock at me, but there is a lump of gold inside.

And it may seem that this is a dark cloud in my life, but this dark cloud has a silver lining. As long as I cling to Jesus, I will have the crumbs that fall from my master's table.

She was very positive. You see, she knew what a great and loving master Jesus is. That was part of her faith.

She not only had a great faith in Jesus, but she thought great thoughts about Jesus. Her daughter was severely possessed of a demon, and it would be difficult to find a need that would be greater than that.

But she thought, you know, this is really not that hard for Jesus. It's not a hard thing for Him.

[39:05] it's but a crumb from His table. Consider this Canaanite woman.

Consider this Gentile mother. Get inside of her. She was prideless before Christ. True. Lord, I'm just a little dog before You.

She was persistent before Christ. I'm not a dog without a master. And You, Lord, are my master no matter what.

And she was positive before Christ. Her confidence was in Him. I will have the crumbs that fall from Your table and even Your rich crumbs are more than enough for me.

And Jesus said to this mother, O woman, great is your faith. Let it be to you as you desire.

[40:24] The Bible says, and her daughter was healed from that very hour. Thank you.