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Sermon Notes

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## **Humble Faith Unleashes Limitless Power**

**Mark 7:24-30**

This is the story of a mother's humble and persistent faith, for which Jesus' unleashes limitless power.

Great faith... greater power

We are called on to marvel at her faith and learn from it; but even more, we are summoned to join her in falling at Jesus' feet and beseeching him by faith for every blessing he alone can bestow.

So, we are looking in two directions... at the woman, to learn from her faith; and at the Savior, to worship him for his wisdom, grace, and power. But Jesus is the main point... he always is!

This woman has a desperate plight... her little daughter is demon-possessed. The horror of that affliction is overwhelming. She is a pagan, living in a pagan land. But she turns away from all her idols and her pagan heritage to Christ. She knows he alone can save her daughter, and she cries out to him desperately and persistently for his mercy on her little girl.

Some of you may be like this desperate mother this morning... you are hurting deeply with some affliction in your life. God brought you here to stand in line behind this woman and imitate her faith. But you won't be saved from looking too long at this woman. She can't save you... but Jesus can. This account calls on you to see Jesus and specifically his compassion and power anew and TRUST IN HIM ALONE

When I was a new Christian, the man who led me to Christ, Stephen Chamberlin, gave me the gift of a daily devotional written by Charles Spurgeon... it was called *Morning and Evening*. It consisted of two devotions per day, one for the morning and one for the evening. Spurgeon wrote two of them about this one encounter.

He spoke about the fact that, in Matthew's account of this encounter between the Canaanite woman and Jesus, it says "**He did not answer her a word.**" She is desperately begging Jesus to heal her daughter, and he basically ignores her, like she doesn't even exist.

Spurgeon picked up on this moment as an example of unanswered prayer for us all. Let me quote him extensively:

"Genuine seekers who as yet have not obtained the blessing may take comfort in the story before us. The Savior did not at once bestow the blessing, even though the woman had great faith in him. He intended to give it, but he waited awhile. 'He answered her not a word.' Were not her prayers good? Never better in the world! Was not her case needy? Sorrowfully needy. Did she not *feel* her need sufficiently? Oh, she felt it overwhelmingly. Was she not earnest enough? She was intensely so. Had she no faith? She had such a high degree of faith that Jesus was amazed and said 'O woman, great is your faith!' See then, although it is true that faith brings peace, yet it does not always bring it instantly.

There may be certain reasons calling for the TRIAL of faith rather than the REWARD of faith. Genuine faith may be in the soul like a hidden seed, but as yet it may not have budded and blossomed into joy and peace. A painful silence from the Savior is the grievous trial of many a seeking soul, but heavier still is the harsh cutting reply such as this: 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.' Many in waiting upon the Lord find immediate delight, but this is not the case with all.... A deeper sense of sin may be given you instead of a sense of pardon, and in such a case you will need to have patience to bear the heavy blow. AH! Poor heart! Though Christ beat and bruise you, or even slay you, trust

him! Though he should give you an angry word, believe in the love in his heart! Do not, I beg you, give up seeking or trusting the Master because you have not yet obtained the conscious joy which you long for. Cast yourself upon him, and perseveringly depend where you can not yet rejoicingly hope.”

So... that is the lesson on persevering faith we learn from the woman.

Her faith was great! But Jesus’ compassion and power are greater!

What has struck me the most about Mark’s account of this occasion is the EFFORTLESS POWER that Jesus displays over the demon... in a SPLIT-SECOND he drives the demon out without moving a muscle!

***Mark 7:29-30 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.***

That’s simply astonishing! One moment, the demon was inhabiting her little girl. The next moment, after her statement, the demon had been evicted! Not, “The demon WILL LEAVE.” No!! “The demon HAS GONE!” When?? NOW! How?? “By the power of my thoughts!” Jesus didn’t move a muscle. He didn’t walk over to her home. He didn’t lay hands on her. He didn’t rebuke the demon. He did nothing but exert spiritual force on the demon and it was gone! This is really the clearest example of the “effortless power” I have talked about throughout the Gospel of Mark.

So... at the very beginning of this sermon, I have tipped my hand completely! I have described the woman’s faith... and I have praised Jesus’ infinite power.

Now, let’s walk through the details of this text, along with its parallel in Matthew’s account... Matthew 15.

## I. Jesus' Strategic Retreat

***Mark 7:24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret.***

***Matthew 15:21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.***

### A. Why the Retreat?

1. Greek word Matthew uses means more than just “went away”; he effected a strategic retreat
2. Why? To escape building pressure that would bring issues to a head too soon
  - a. Jesus had a strong sense of the timing of his mission, and especially his death
  - b. In John’s Gospel, often they tried to arrest Jesus and kill him but John tells us “his time had not yet come.” (Jn. 7:30, 8:20)
  - c. But there is a human factor... the pressures were mounting to a point of explosion
    - i) The huge crowds were constantly pressing in around him, sometimes even depriving him of air, wanting to take him by force and make him king
    - ii) Herod Antipas, the same depraved king that executed John the Baptist, would certainly have opposed Jesus as well and arrested him if he could
    - iii) Most of all, the religious leaders—the scribes and Pharisees and chief priests—were increasingly hostile to Jesus and were actively plotting his arrest and death
  - d. For all these reasons, Jesus had to get away

### B. Especially to Spend Time with the Apostles

1. Jesus wanted to be alone with the Twelve to get them ready for their world changing mission
2. He wanted to pour into them away from these mounting pressures

#### C. SO... He Retreated to Tyre and Sidon

1. Gentile area, away from Judea and Galilee; Jesus would not be as well-known there
2. Tyre and Sidon were notorious centers of Gentile wickedness
  - a. Port cities, trade centers with the entire Mediterranean world
  - b. All the wickedness of the world gathered there like a cesspool
  - c. Ezekiel 28 openly implies that Satan was the true king of Tyre, the master of that economic power

So... Tyre was a perfect place for Jesus to retreat to... the Jewish crowds and leaders would not follow him there

#### D. However... this Desperate Woman Found Him Anyway

***Mark 7:24 He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret.***

#### II. A Mother's Desperate Plea

***Mark 7:25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet.***

***Matthew 15:22 [She was] crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."***

#### A. Who Was this Woman?

***Mark 7:26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.***

1. She's a Canaanite, the very people God had commanded Joshua to destroy completely when the Jews conquered the Promised Land

2. This woman would have been a complete outcast as far as the Jews were concerned... a pagan woman

#### B. Her Desperate Plight

1. She says in Matthew's account, "**My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession**"
2. The Greek is intensive... as if the demon is thrashing her around, beating her up, abusing her constantly
3. The daughter is little... a tender little girl, powerless against this spiritual force
4. There is nothing the mother can do

#### C. Her Repeated Pleas

1. Mark gives us a sense that she was repeatedly crying out to him again and again
2. She uses the Jewish term, "**Lord, Son of David...**"
3. She seems to understand the significance of that title

#### D. Her Bodily Position

1. She will eventually cast herself down before him at his feet
2. This is a position of abject weakness, and an ascription of majesty to Jesus
3. By calling him "Lord" and by throwing herself at his feet, she is worshiping him
4. She has nowhere else to turn, but she has no doubts whatsoever that Jesus has the power to heal her little girl

### III. Jesus Tests Her Faith... and She Passes the Test

#### A. Jesus' Strange Response

***Matthew 15:23 Jesus did not answer a word.***

1. He acted like he didn't even hear her
2. This was basically initially a complete rejection of her
3. God doesn't owe us a hearing! He doesn't have to respond if he doesn't choose to

#### B. The Disciples' Annoyance

***Matthew 15:23 So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."***

1. They want nothing to do with her
2. Like typical Jews of that day, they almost certainly disdained her and looked at her as a noisy annoyance only... initially they had no compassion on her at all

#### C. Jesus' First Verbal Response

***Matthew 15:24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."***

Jesus limits his ministry to the Jewish nation; but this is temporary

#### D. Next... the Woman Presses in and Jesus Answers Her Directly

***Matthew 15:25-26 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. <sup>26</sup> He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."***

1. This is initially deeply troubling to us
2. It seems harsh and demeaning to her as a human being; it seems so unlike Jesus, who usually treated outcasts with special tenderness
3. Some mitigating factors:
  - a. We don't have a record of tone of voice or facial expressions
  - b. The Greek implies Jesus had a longer conversation with her than is recorded here... literally "Jesus **was saying** to her, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to their dogs'"

- c. “Dogs” here in Greek is not the wild, aggressive stray dog that roams the street, fighting off other strays and picking through garbage; the word here is more like “puppies”

YET... for all of that, it still seems strange

#### E. WHY Did Jesus Do This? Eliminating Some of the Possibilities

- 1. Not because Jesus didn't care about Gentiles, or God had no ultimate saving purpose for the Gentiles

***Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."***

***Isaiah 49:6 "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."***

***Psalm 67:1-4 May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, <sup>2</sup> that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. <sup>3</sup> May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. <sup>4</sup> May the nations be glad and sing for joy...***

- a. After Christ's resurrection, he would send his apostles to the ends of the earth to make disciples of ALL NATIONS
- b. One of the places they would go first would be this very region

(Acts 21) Paul, on his journey to Jerusalem, visited the disciples in Tyre, of which there were many who loved Paul deeply

- c. Jesus clearly had a saving intention for the entire world!

- 2. Not because Jesus lacked the power to do miracles in a Gentile land
  - a. Jesus was God Omnipotent... there was nothing he could not do
  - b. Jesus was no less powerful in Tyre than he'd been in Judea
  - c. Clearly, he was effortlessly powerful over this demon when the time came



3. Not because ministry in Tyre would not have been effective!!

***Matthew 11:21 “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”***

Amazing! If Jesus had unleashed the same river of miracles he did in Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Korazin, there would have been a stunning revival there! The whole city would have repented in sackcloth and ashes! BUT he didn't do those same miracles in Tyre and Sidon!

4. Not because Jesus lacked mercy or compassion for her plight or that of her daughter
  - a. Jesus had the most perfect compassion of any human being in history; again and again the Gospels speak of Jesus' compassion
  - b. Anyone who came to him empty and as a beggar went away full and rich, with their need abundantly met
5. Not because Jesus was weary and annoyed and gave her a surly answer based on his fatigue... even while dying on the cross, he didn't sin
6. Not because he was taking a break from ministry and didn't want to care for her needs at that point
7. Not because there was only so much “bread” to be fed to his children, and if Jesus gave some to her there wouldn't be enough

Jesus' power is in no way diminished by doing miracles, even thousands of miracles; like a torch lighting a thousand candles is in no way diminished in its heat and light

8. Not because she didn't ask properly or with enough faith
  - a. As Charles Spurgeon said, her asking and her faith could not have been more amazing

- b. Jesus himself commented on her great faith

It wasn't for all these reasons... why then?

#### F. The True Reasons

1. Salvation order: to the Jew first, then to the Gentile

- a. Jesus gives his marching order from the Father

***“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel”***

- b. As he said to the Samaritan woman

***“Salvation is from the Jews”***

- c. As Paul said countless times,

***“To the Jew first, then to the Gentile.”***

- d. God's strategy

It was part of God's redemptive plan for Christ to be sent FIRST to his own people, then to have them REJECT HIM so that he would die on the cross

***John 1:11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.***

2. Christ Hadn't Died Yet, so the Gentiles were still on the outside

- a. There was still the “barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles

- b. When Jesus died, the curtain in the Temple was torn

- c. This signified the end of the Old Covenant and the barrier between Jew and Gentile... and as Ephesians 2 says, the opportunity for “one new man” being made out of Jew and Gentile believers

3. To Test Her Faith

- a. He was testing to see if she would HUMBLE herself

***James 4:6 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."***

***Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the spiritual beggars, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."***

If she had been proud and bristled at the word "Dogs" and said, "I am a human being... not a dog! How dare you!" and walked away in a heat, she would have gotten nothing

Sometimes God HUMBLER US IN PRAYER to see if we understand who we are and who he is!

- b. He is also testing her faith to DEVELOP it and make it STRONGER

Physical therapists strengthen weakened muscles by testing them vigorously, even OPPOSING the motion so the patient has to exert more force, more willpower, more strength, thus developing the weak muscle

So Jesus seems to OPPOSE her and FIGHT AGAINST her, despite the fact that he really DESIRES to give her what she wants

- c. Finally, he wants to PUT HER FAITH ON DISPLAY for all time, for all of us to LEARN from her!!

The Woman Passes the Test... and Puts Her FAITH on Display

#### G. The Basis of Faith

1. Faith must have a BASIS... something to trust, a reason to believe
2. Canaanite woman clearly had heard of Jesus' miracles and knew of the Jewish prophecies concerning the Messiah...

***"Lord, Son of David..."*** she calls him... she has HEARD of Christ and has believed what she has heard; FAITH COMES FROM HEARING THE MESSAGE ABOUT CHRIST

#### H. The Reverence of Faith

1. She calls him "Lord"

2. She bows down before him and worships him
3. She is submissive, reverent... not presuming on him or demanding from him; she knows he is exalted and treats him accordingly

#### I. The Confidence of Faith

1. There is no doubt in her mind whatsoever that Jesus is CAPABLE of doing this; that is why she is so persistent

#### J. The Repentance of Faith

1. ***"Have mercy on me"*** she calls
2. She recognizes she doesn't deserve anything from the Lord...she's not in a position to demand anything
3. Once we acknowledge that we are sinners, all we can do is cry out for mercy and humbly accept what comes

#### K. The Persistence of Faith

1. Jesus puts up ONE ROADBLOCK AFTER ANOTHER
2. True belief is PERSISTENT, and does not easily give up in prayer
3. Notice her persistence springs also from her LOVE for her daughter

True intercession: to link yourself up entirely with the misery of another and pray for that person as though it were happening to YOU

***Matthew 15:22 have mercy on ME! Matthew 15:24 "Lord, help ME!" she said.***

I think God tests us in prayer to strengthen our compassion, so we care MORE for the person we're praying for

4. Faith OVERCOMES all obstacles and keeps persisting; Jacob wrestled all night with an angel

***Genesis 32:26 Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."***

#### L. The Humility of Faith

***Mark 7:28 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."***

Amazing answer!! She finds hope even in a seeming put-off...

1. Faith takes its rightful place and says appropriate things

***Matthew 8:8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed."***

Humility of faith sees things as they really are – God is infinitely powerful, wise and loving; we are amazingly weak, ignorant, and selfish... we come humbly and ask for what is on our hearts as it lines up with His word

M. The Reward of Faith... she gets what she sought!!

#### IV. Jesus Unleashes Effortless Power

***Mark 7:29-30 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." <sup>30</sup> She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.***

A. The Healing is Instantaneous, as we've said

B. The Healing is EFFORTLESS...

C. This is an AMAZING PICTURE of the Power of Jesus

D. Demons are vastly more powerful than we are... Jesus is infinitely more powerful than they are

E. Consider Again the TIMING...

1. From the end of her reply to the beginning of Jesus' statement is less than a second

2. The demon is already gone!

F. This is OMNIPOTENCE on display

***Jeremiah 32:17 "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.***

## V. Timeless Lessons

### A. Start With the Infinite Majesty of Christ

1. This woman had great thoughts of Christ's lavish bounty

Spurgeon: "This woman thought great thoughts of Christ. She thought, 'I know you are so generous a Master of the feast that there is sure to be abundant bread on your table...if even a crumb fell to the ground, it would suffice for me.' Now remember, for the woman, having a demon cast out of her daughter is a very great thing, but she had such high thoughts of Jesus that she knew for him, it was but a crumb falling from his feasting table.

So, dear child of God, think great thoughts of Christ! Thinking great thoughts of your sin alone will drive you to despair. But great thoughts of Christ and his atonement will navigate your troubled soul to a peaceful haven. So though my sins are many and mighty, it is as nothing for Christ to atone for them and remove them from me by his work on the cross."

So... lost sinner... be like this pagan woman and COME TO CHRIST!

2. EFFORTLESS POWER: Nothing is too difficult for Jesus

***John 1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.***

***Isaiah 40:26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.***

3. I cannot understand the power of Jesus in the invisible, spiritual realm
4. But the demon was evicted by force against its evil will... through the power of Jesus' mind

5. Is there any situation you are facing in your life that Jesus cannot handle?
6. Meditate on this effortless power of Jesus
7. Know that, if you are suffering in some way and you are a child of God, there is a purpose in your suffering; it's not that Jesus is too weak to do anything about it
8. Understand also the present power of Jesus over Satan and his demons still...

***Ephesians 6:10 be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.***

***Ephesians 6:12 our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.***

#### B. Don't Be Discouraged About God's Silence When You Pray

1. Remember that Jesus began this encounter with the woman by not answering her at all
2. Many of you are troubled by God's silence when you pour out your heart to him in prayer
3. KEEP PRAYING and do not give up
4. God tests us so that our faith and our prayer lives are strengthened

#### C. Learn the Lessons of Faith

1. Make sure your faith has a strong BASIS in the Word of God... find out HIS nature, HIS purposes, HIS promises, and base your faith on that
2. **Be reverent** in your approach to God... understand how exalted he is, and speak to him accordingly
3. **Be strengthened in your faith** and grow in **confidence**... know that God can do IMMEASURABLY more than all you can ask or imagine, then ask confidently and trust him to give you according to his will

4. **Be humble and repentant** in your faith; let God speak to you of your sin and be humble and willing to hear what he says; do not be proud but be willing to ask for his mercy
5. **Be persistent...** don't give up quickly
6. Wait on God until you have your reward