

"Yes, Lord"

Matthew 15:21–28.

Let us pray: Father, thank you for placing before us the nourishment of your Word today. We receive it with gratitude, trusting that you will strengthen our faith and make it grow. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Through today's word, may you know the heart of God and receive the great faith that the Lord himself delights to acknowledge. Amen.

Right before today's text, the Pharisees criticized Jesus and his disciples for eating bread without washing their hands. They said it made them unclean. Jesus responded that what goes into the mouth does not make a person unclean, but what comes out of the mouth does, because it comes from the heart (Matthew 15:11, 18 NIV). The Pharisees placed the traditions of the elders above the word of God, and they worshiped without any true love for him. So Jesus said that this kind of outward religion is worship that is in vain (Matthew 15:9).

After that, Jesus went into the region of Tyre and Sidon, a place the Jews considered unclean because it belonged to the Gentiles. There he met a woman whose heart was the complete opposite of the Pharisees. She becomes a model of genuine faith that rises from deep within.

This Canaanite woman is called the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7. She cried out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me. My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." While the people of Israel treated Jesus lightly and failed to honor him, this Gentile woman, who was often despised and looked down on, came and fell before the Lord.

Who was the one this woman prayed to? She prayed to Jesus, the Son of David. She believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lord who had come from the line of David. And what is at the heart of her prayer? "Have mercy on me." She confessed that she had no ability to help herself. She realized that everything she had relied on until now was useless and that only the Lord could be her answer. A prayer like this can come only from a heart that has been humbled to the very bottom.

Yet Jesus refused her. He did so three times. First, he remained silent. Second, he said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (v. 24), which sounded like he had no interest in her at all. If he had no interest, why did he go to that region in the first place? Third, he said, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs" (v. 26). With those words, he crushed her pride and allowed her to feel the sting of rejection.

This was not his usual way. It was exceptional. Jesus is the one who welcomes, yet here he refuses her. It is a rare moment. What was his intention? He was bringing to the surface what was inside her heart so that he could bless her.

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At the same time, he was revealing her faith for the sake of two groups. The first group was the Pharisees, who practiced a religion without life. The second was the disciples, who had little faith. Last week we saw how the disciples faced a storm and their faith collapsed. So the true intention of Jesus was to show, through this woman, a model of genuine faith.

The first kind of rejection we must pass through on our way to a higher and more mature faith is the Lord's silence. The woman cried out, but Jesus did not answer a single word. The disciples wanted her to stop following them and making noise, so they urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us" (v. 23). It sounds like they simply wanted Jesus to solve the problem quickly and dismiss her.

But the Lord was giving her time for her faith to grow. It is said that when a Native American boy turns twelve, he goes through a rite of passage. He is taken into the forest and must spend the night alone. The boy has to overcome the fear that a wolf might appear. Yet in reality he is not alone. The elders hide nearby and watch over him. God does not ignore our problems. He watches closely, protects, and observes us while remaining silent. His silence is not indifference. It is a special kind of love. We can see this in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph.

The second kind of rejection we must pass through is the Lord's outward appearance of indifference. When Jesus spoke as if he had no concern for anyone outside Israel, what did the woman do? She knelt before him and said, "Lord, help me" (v. 25). She laid down her pride and showed a faith that bows low. The word for "kneel" in the original language is the same word used for "worship." When we feel rejected, that is the moment to worship. If we believe we can handle things on our own, who would ever kneel? It is clear that Jesus went to Tyre and Sidon specifically to meet this woman, so why did he reject her?

We are formed into worshipers through being broken. Look at the life of Jacob. The same is true for Abraham. Every time they were broken, they became worshipers. At every turning point in life, whether it is hardship or blessing, there must be the mark of worship. Through the time of worship, we draw closer to the Lord and the Lord draws closer to us.

The third kind of rejection we must pass through is the feeling of insult. Anyone would be angry if they felt they were being treated like a dog, yet this woman accepted it. She said, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table" (v. 27). What she was really saying was, "I am like a dog. I am a sinner. I have no hope. I will stay near you and receive even the crumbs of grace that fall. I cannot live without grace." This is the humility of her heart. At that moment Jesus said, "Woman, you have great faith" (v. 28). She is the first person in the four Gospels to whom Jesus said that her faith was great. About the Roman centurion in Matthew 8, Jesus said he had not found anyone with such faith, but he did not use the word "great."

Jesus then said, "Your request is granted," and her daughter was healed from that very hour. His rejection was not rejection at all. Through those moments of rejection, he caused her to grow.

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Through rejection, he made her a worshiper. Through rejection, he led her to the highest confession found in Scripture, the confession of a sinner who says, "Have mercy on me," and "Depart from me." There is no greater blessing than realizing that we are sinners. This is what it means to be poor in spirit and to mourn. The Lord fills such people and gives the meek the grace of inheriting the earth. In the end, they receive the blessing of eternal life. Those who receive grace overcome everything.

In life, we sometimes feel disappointed. There are moments when we feel rejected or abandoned by God. But would God ever truly abandon us? We only feel that way for a moment. Through those moments, we grow. We become true worshipers. We do not become like the Pharisees who offered empty worship, nor like the disciples who often spoke out of their own thoughts and drifted away from the Lord's will.

The faith that says, "Yes, Lord, it is right," is the faith the Lord recognizes. Since the word of Jesus is itself the answer, all we need to do is kneel, believe, and wait. What is the "yes, Lord" you need to say today? Do you believe that through that obedience you and your household will receive healing?

I came across a testimony from someone who reflected on this very passage. He had been a successful professional in the financial sector, but without telling his wife, he borrowed money and invested in risky futures and options. He ended up losing his job and even his home. After that, he followed his wife into a community of faith, where he was nurtured by the word and was able to break free from his addiction to risky investments. His wife continually prayed that the Lord would give him a new job. He kept sending out résumés, but no one called him. Because of his age, he assumed it was impossible and eventually gave up searching.

One day he saw an announcement for a position at a public financial institution. He stayed up all night writing his personal statement and applied. But he failed the document screening. Some time later, the same institution posted another opening, so he applied again, and this time he was invited to an interview. He decided that he would not rely on his own effort but would seek the grace of God, and asked his church community to pray that he would be able to approach the interview with that heart. As he prepared, he depended on the Lord like the Canaanite woman and asked for the crumbs of grace.

On the day of the interview, he experienced something remarkable. The interviewers directed the easier questions to him first and saved the harder questions for later, giving him time and space to answer well. In the end, he was offered the position. He now testifies that all of this was the grace of the Lord, and he shares his story with people who are trapped in risky investment addictions and cannot find a way out.

I am reminded of something that happened with my younger son. About eight years ago, because of a visa issue, he suddenly had to leave his family and return to Korea. Like Jacob or Joseph, he has gone through much shaping while being separated from us. I believe that through this journey he has been coming to know God not just as the God of his parents, but also his own God.

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After finishing his undergraduate studies, he deeply hoped to join one of the Big Four accounting firms. He had previously interned at each of them, had connections there, and had received good evaluations during his internships. So he expected that at least one of them might accept him. He worked hard on his applications and prepared for interviews. His documents passed the initial screening, but strangely he kept failing at the interview stage. After that, he found positions at a few smaller companies and worked very hard for several years. During that time, he continued to apply to the firms he had originally hoped for, giving his best effort, but nothing worked out. His heart became humbled, and he began to pray more.

Then about a year ago, one of those firms posted another opening. Although he thought he might not get the job, he applied with no particular expectations, simply thinking, "I'll just give it a try." When they invited him for an interview, he hesitated about whether to go, but eventually went. Since he didn't think he would get the job, he went without any special preparation and answered the questions comfortably and honestly. When they asked why he had left his previous company, he simply answered, "Because it was hard."

He didn't ask anyone he knew within the company to put in a good word for him, nor did he try to impress the interviewers. He simply asked his family to pray for him. And even though there were some very strong candidates, he was offered the position. Even now, he says it feels unreal that he is working there. Before every interview, he always asked the family to pray for him. And when I prayed, I said, "Lord, if this company is good for him in your sight, let him be accepted, and if not, let him not be accepted." Because I did not know what was best. I entrusted it to the Lord. Looking back, he says that not being accepted at the places he first wanted, and instead working his way up from the bottom at other companies, helped him tremendously in learning the work.

There are times when God seems to reject us, remain silent, or humble us. Yet through these moments we learn that such experiences are actually a special grace, and that in the right time he lifts us up. My son's training is still ongoing, and the same is true for us as his parents.

Beloved, the Canaanite woman showed us a model of faith in a desperate situation. If you are in a desperate place right now, I pray that through it you will become a model of faith as well. The Lord uses words that feel like rejection to grow us into the great faith that he recognizes. May you become people who live by the power of grace, people of strong and enduring faith. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord, give us a faith that does not give up, a faith that kneels before you and worships you in every circumstance. We believe you prepare special grace for the moments that feel impossible. Help us always say, "Yes, Lord, you're right," whenever we hear your Word. We thank you for growing our faith and for recognizing it with your grace. We pray in our Lord Jesus' name. Amen.