

## Sermon – Matthew 15.21-28 (Lent 2 – 2021)

Let us pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, grant us, we beseech You, by Your Holy Spirit, that He may strengthen our hearts and confirm our faith and hope in Your grace and mercy, so that, although we have reason to fear because of our conscience, our sin, and our unworthiness, we may nevertheless, with the woman of Canaan, hold fast to Your grace, and in every trial and temptation find You a present help and refuge; through Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." 23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

These are Your words heavenly Father. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

### **Wrestling with God; and Coming Out the Victor**

Dear fellow redeemed,

The woman in our text was a Canaanite. She was a member of one of the nations which God had commanded the Israelites to destroy in the Old Testament. The Israelites didn't carry out God's command, and they were punished for that. And so about 1500 years later, here she is, this Gentile woman, definitely not an Israelite. But she has much in common with the man who was given the name Israel, and in fact that name Israel would certainly be fitting for her.

Who was this man that was given the name Israel?

Jacob had taken his brother's birthright and blessing. Esau was livid. Jacob feared for his life. Esau might retaliate with deadly violence. So Jacob fled his home to live with his uncle Laban. But on the way God promised Jacob that he will eventually return home, and that he and his people will live and through them the Messiah, the Savior of the world, will come. This happened in his dream, a ladder appeared on earth and touched heaven. And God spoke from the top of the ladder in heaven and said, **"I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you"** (Gen. 28). This promise remained with Jacob throughout his twenty years with his uncle Laban's homeland. God caused Jacob to prosper there, and while there he married Rachel and Leah and had several children, and he amassed great wealth. After the twenty years at Laban's, God instructed Jacob to return to his homeland.

Jacob knew the wonderful promises that God had given him. He didn't need to fear. But at the same time, Jacob was dreadfully afraid. Going home meant that he was going to meet Esau again. He expected Esau to attack his family, his workers and livestock. It was a great struggle Jacob had between belief and unbelief, between peace in God and the fear of man. The struggle came to a head when a Man came to wrestle Jacob. This must have confounded Jacob? Who is this Man? Why is He wrestling me? Why will He not let up? But at some point in the intense hours long struggle he realized who this man was, it was God Himself. We see faith in action here. Jacob would not let God go until God gives him a blessing. He demanded God to assure him of His promise to him. He relied on that promise of God and longed for that gracious Word of God. And God gladly gave him a blessing. And he gave Jacob the name, **"Israel"**, saying, **"You have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed"** (Gen 32:28). God is glad to have been conquered by Jacob. God loves to be held to His promises by faith. And in the promises of God's Word, which are grasped by faith, men are conquered as well, for Jacob no longer feared Esau.

There was a wrestling match in our Gospel reading, too. Jesus seemed to be the woman's opponent by the way He was treating her. God seemed to have been her enemy, because of the evil she was suffering in her life. Here she struggled between belief and unbelief. She struggled against fears. She had the fear of the devil who afflicted her daughter, fear of losing her daughter, fear of God being her enemy. But she had one thing. One thing left that she could hope in. One thing that she could grasp. And it was this Word—that Jesus is the

LORD, the Son of David who is merciful. And she wrestled and struggled against Jesus, holding Him to His Word. She holds on to Him until He would bless her.

What great faith! And let this faith be an example for us. Luther said, “We should not immediately cast aside courage and all hope at the first blow but press on, pray, seek, and knock.... Even if He hides Himself in a room in the house and does not want access to be given to anyone, do not draw back but follow. If He does not want to listen, knock at the door of the room; raise a shout! For this is the highest sacrifice, not to cease praying and seeking until we conquer Him. He has already surrendered Himself to us so that we may be certain of victory, for He has bound Himself to His promises and pledged His faithfulness with an oath, saying, **‘Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in My name’** (Jn 16:23). Likewise, **‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved’** (Mark 16:16).”

A great faith prevails over God; it demands what He promises. It relies upon His Word.

So that we may not have any misunderstandings about this great faith, we should know what it is not. It is not something that we produce in ourselves. A person with great faith does not rely on his own faith. He does not rely upon how much he loves God, trusts in Him, or follows Him. Great faith does not look within for comfort or strength.

Do you think the Canaanite woman thought, “Jesus, you should help me because I trust in you so much”? Or do you think that the Canaanite woman said to her daughter after she had been freed of the demon, “I really mustered up some powerful faith there, and thanks to my great faith, you are now well!” One who rests upon the strength of his own faith is set up for a horrible fall.

Great faith rather despairs of one’s own might. The woman sees her helplessness before this demon that possessed her daughter. She despairs of her own weakness. There was nothing of any help within her. But the one thing that she did have was the Word of Christ’s mercy.

The faith that clung to that word of Christ’s mercy was a gift given to her by God. And Jesus, by wrestling with her, exercised her faith and made it strong. So also, God uses our times of trial to make us wrestle with Him, and to strengthen our faith. He makes us learn that our help and strength in life and in death is not in ourselves, but it is in Him. We have the truths and promises of His Word. He **“is our refuge and strength, a very present help in**

**trouble” (Ps 46:1). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” “His mercies are new every morning.”** He has overcome the world. He has delivered us from the evil one. He is our righteousness and salvation. His promises are the sure foundation of our faith.

So, you who are beset with the troubles and fears of the world. When it seems as though God has turned on you, do not look within, but take hold of the true promises of God’s Word for you. Luther said, “Enter the arena!” Wrestle with God; hold Him to His promises. You will prevail upon Him, and be the Victor. This is God’s desire. Christ went to the cross so that these promises may be yours. He will show you His mercy, and grant you victory. He will deliver you out of your trouble now, or strengthen you to persevere with the certain hope of deliverance in the life to come. He frees you from sin. He gives you Christ’s victory over death and the devil. His promises are sure. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.