

Sermon Transcript

March 5, 2023

Grace Mercy and Peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Jacob wrestling with God, the Canaanite woman being called a dog by Jesus. What's that all about? And then we have Paul talking in the Epistle lesson about we rejoice in our sufferings. What? Okay, all of this is a little bit confusing, so we're going to get right into it and try and figure out how all these things are connected and why they're here today.

So first off, let's start it with the Canaanite woman, the Gospel lesson in Matthew. Jesus is in Tyre and Sidon. This is the Gentile section of the Sea of Galilee. Up North, on the other side is Nazareth, and where Jesus was from, that's the Jewish side. And then Tyre and Sidon are on the other side, completely Gentile. And this is where the Canaanites ended up eventually growing up through the Old Testament, the Canaanites being this cross between half Jewish and half Gentile and mixing everything up and basically being the most offensive people to the Jewish people you could possibly be.

Nobody expected the Canaanites to have faith in God, yet alone to actually find Jesus Christ. And in fact, this passage, this passage with Jesus and the Canaanite woman comes immediately following after an interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees, and the Pharisees' lack of understanding of who Jesus is, a lack of understanding of the law and what God gave it for. This was a time when the disciples were plucking grains of wheat off of the stalks on a Sabbath day. And the Pharisees got all up in arms. "You can't work on the Sabbath day." And because the Pharisees, though they looked like upstanding people in society, and everybody would say, these are the citizens that you look up to. But what they had done was them and their ancestors had created a system of rules and laws to help them obey the 10 Commandments because in their mind, their life was all about obedience.

And so rather than just having the 10 Commandments, they devised 613 codes of law to try and help us follow and obey the 10 Commandments. You can imagine why, how it's so difficult to obey the 10 Commandments. They had to come up with 613 different codes to try and figure it out. But they were focused on the wrong thing. They were focused on the obedience. They were focused on what they did so that they looked good. And Jesus makes it very clear to his disciples

that the Pharisees are kind of like whitewashed tombs. They look beautiful on the outside, but they're rotten on the core. And the disciples don't understand this because the Pharisees are the upstanding young citizens of the world, of the Jewish community. And yet Jesus is trashing them because they don't understand. They're looking for Jesus to be a law-giver and follow the minutia rather than being the Messiah, the Savior, of the world and the Savior of Israel.

So, he tears down the Philistines and he leaves the Jewish community because he doesn't want to deal with them anymore, doesn't want to deal with the chaos and the animosity and the strife. So, he goes to Canaan for some respite. And he gets there and suddenly there's this Canaanite woman's yelling out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me. My daughter's got a demon." Now this is strange because, again, the Canaanites did not understand God very well in general. And they definitely would not celebrate somebody being called the Son of David because he was the king of Israel and he was basically the enemy of the Canaanites. So, there's no way the Canaanites would willingly cry out Son of David unless they knew something. And so, this is the question, does this Canaanite know something about Jesus that the Pharisees didn't seem to figure out, nor have the disciples understood? Does this Canaanite woman get it?

And that's kind of what this whole lesson is about. So, the disciples finally looked at Jesus and say, "Jesus, can you just heal the woman? Get her out of here. We're getting tired of listening to her yell and call out to you all the time." I mean, that's what they're saying. "Lord, can you just send her away?" They're not really saying just get rid of her. They're really kind of saying, "Jesus, we know you're a miracle worker. You can heal all sorts of things. Just heal her daughter so we can get some peace, please." So, they're looking at Jesus as a miracle worker, as somebody to solve the immediate issue of the day.

But the Canaanite woman seems to see something bigger just by the terms that she uses. Lord, and that's a term that you use as a disciple to your master. That's a term of subservience, of submission to the authority of recognizing that Jesus is right to be called master. And then she calls him Son of David, the ruler of Israel, the rightful king. And we know that the Messiah was to be born of the line of David. And so, it seems like she, in some way, is recognizing that Jesus is more than just a miracle worker. He's there to do more than just solve the immediate concerns of the day. He's there to save. He's there to be the anointed one, the Son of David, the Messiah.

But she's a Canaanite woman. How can she possibly have faith? So maybe she's just parroting the words that she's heard from other people that have been around Jesus.

And this is where it gets interesting. So, the disciples say, "Can you just heal her and be done with it?" And Jesus turns to them and he says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And what's he trying to say there? He's trying to help the Israelites see, or the disciples see he's not just a miracle worker. He's not just somebody. You cry out to him; you pull the handle and you receive the reward. It's not that simple. It's not that small. He is to bring the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He's asking the disciples; do you really understand what my mission is about? Or do you think you're just following somebody who's going to do miracles? Do you understand the depth of what I'm here to do? I'm here to save the lost sheep. And by inference, you could almost say the Canaanite woman is part of that lost sheep, maybe not of the house of Israel, but what does the house of Israel mean? Is it just the 12 tribes or is it larger?

But then she comes to him and she says, "Lord, help me." And then he answers in a way that just doesn't make any sense initially. It is not right to take children's bread and throw it to the dogs. I thought Jesus was supposed to be filled with compassion and care and concern. And here he is calling this woman a dog. What is going on? Again, part of this is do you really understand what I'm here for? Or are you simply looking for your free meal or your instant miracle or whatever to solve the problem of today? And this woman gets it. She understands because Jesus says, "It's not right to take children's bread and give it to the dogs." And she says, "Yes, that is absolutely sure and true. You did come to save the children of Israel." But if you've heard my preaching for any length of time you know that one of my favorite parables is the parable of the prodigal father, not the prodigal son.

Because the story is not about the son. Prodigal means wasteful or abundance. The son was prodigal. He wasted his money on wine, women and song. True. But it's not about the son, it's about the father who is so generous with his gifts that it seems to be wasteful. He gives so much more than we could possibly imagine. More abundant grace have we been given than we could possibly even use or think about. It's almost wasteful in the substance and the breadth and the depth of the grace of God given to us. And so she understands. Yes, it is right to give the grace to the people of Israel. That is who you are called to be, the Son of David. But in

your abundant and prodigal mercy and love, there's going to be more than enough left over for me. I know you're here for them, but I also know that's not enough for you, that you want to be generous and you give far more abundantly than the children could possibly ever use. And so there's definitely more available for me.

And so, she's not just parroting words that she's heard. She understands. She believes in the grace and the mercy of God. She understands the gift. And so God commends her. Jesus commends her for her great faith.

And then we get to Jacob here in the Old Testament. Jacob wrestling with God. Now come on. Let's be serious. Jacob and God wrestling and God can't win against Jacob. Really? That's what we're talking about here? Obviously, there's something greater and different going on than this. Think of it rather as a father wrestling with his six-year-old kid. And the kid's got his arms wrapped around the father's legs and going, "Okay, kid, you're winning. Yeah, okay. Yep, very good. You got it." They're wrestling, but Jacob is holding on for dear life, not that he's winning or not that God couldn't pass him along if he wanted to. But remember who Jacob is, remember what his name means. He is the liar, the deceiver, his very name. He stole his brother's birthright. He's stole his brother's blessing and then ran away.

And now he's coming back. Is he still a deceiver? Is he still a liar? Is he still relying upon his own cunning and his own abilities, or does he trust in his God and Savior? And that's what this is all about. This is more about Jacob learning that he can trust in God. I mean, he sent all of his family away and all of his goods away just in case. And so, God comes and he wrestles with God. He's struggling with what's going on. He's struggling with his identity, with what it means to be a child of God, what it means to be the one that God has chosen. What is all that about? So, he's wrestling and he's holding on and looking to God for the answer.

And finally, God says, "Okay, you're not going to let go. You are putting your trust in me, so I will bless you," instead of, "Jacob the liar, Israel, the anointed one. You are chosen. You are called by me." And then he touches the hip and puts it out of joint. And I think this is kind of like Paul and the thorn in his flesh. Paul was reminded every time with whatever the thorn was, that God was gracious enough to save him and to be with him in spite of the fact that he had this thorn, this pain, whatever it was. And I think Jacob also, in spite of the fact that he's walking with a limp now, he always remembers that God is faithful, not just for the immediate concerns of life, but for everything, for life and death. And so, the limp is a

reminder for Jacob to always hold fast and cling to his God as he did when he wrestled with him and received the hip in the first place. So, it's a helpful reminder. It's a tool to help Jacob remember, Israel remembers God is faithful.

And finally, that then brings us to the Romans passage. We also know that God has been faithful because we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We poor miserable sinners, who fail to live up to the law every single day, have peace with God. That is incredible. That is amazing. And we know that it's more than just him solving the day-to-day problems. This is about life and death literally. We have peace with God because we know that in spite of our sin, in spite of the fact that we will die, we will live again in all eternity with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ at peace with him. Because it's not about the day-to-day grind so much as it's about the big picture. And if the big picture is solved, life and death, then surely, we can handle the daily grind of life through His strength in us.

And that's why He says we can rejoice in our sufferings, not because we enjoy suffering, but because we know that God has come to give us life everlasting. And if we know that to be true, if we are confident of that, then the temporary setbacks and sufferings and trials of this world are nothing compared to the surpassing glory that is in Christ Jesus.

In other words, we can handle the suffering because we know the greater good. We know it's more than just the day-to-day grind. And not only that, our suffering produces that endurance. The hip out of joint, it produces a confidence. We are constantly reminded in our suffering that God is faithful and that He will bring us through. So, we endure, which produces character, and that character produces hope. Because when we face trials, we no longer say, "Ah, why me, God? This is unfair." Instead, we say, "Okay, God, you are God of all. You have brought me from life to death. I trust you to carry me through even this because I know I'm at peace with you through your son Jesus Christ."

And that produces a hope, a sure and certain hope. Not like, "Oh man, I hope it's not going to rain today." I don't know if it is or not. I have no clue. That's not what the hope is we're talking about. This is a sure and certain hope, a hope that is based upon the power and might of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who applied that might and power to the cross so that He might give us love and mercy and peace. And with that, we can endure all things because God's love had been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that He has given to us. So may the hope that we

have because of the peace of God through Christ Jesus, our Lord, be and abide with you always this day forward and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.