

Catechism Story 28

*The Lord's Prayer—Introduction and First Petition
Memory Verse and Catechism Prayers from Congregation at Prayer*

BIBLE STORY: A CANAANITE WOMAN PRAYS TO JESUS FOR MERCY FOR HER DEMON-POSSESSED DAUGHTER

Matthew 15:21-28

Central Thoughts

- God's promise of salvation has always been for all people, Jew and Gentile alike.
- True faith trusts only in Jesus and His Word; it does not trust in what it sees, experiences, or feels.
- True prayer is the voice of faith which claims the promises of God's Word.
- True prayer always confesses one's unworthiness and trusts only in God's mercy in Christ.

Discussion Questions

Was this woman from Canaan a Jew or a Gentile?

A Gentile

What is her prayer to Jesus?

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

What does her prayer tell us about her faith?

She believed Jesus to be the Christ, the Savior of all people, the promised Seed of Abraham, and the Son of David, because she addressed as the Lord and the Son of David.

What had God promised Abraham for all nations?

That in Abraham's Seed ALL the nations of the earth would be blessed with the gift of salvation.

How does Jesus respond to her prayer?

With silence

How do Jesus' disciples respond to her?

They ask Jesus to send her away as if she is unworthy of His mercy.

How does Jesus respond after the disciples request that she be sent away?

*He appears to agree with them, saying, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
She was a Canaanite and not a Jew.*

How does the woman respond to this apparent rebuke?

She worships Jesus, saying, "Lord, help me!"

How does Jesus answer her?

He calls her a little dog, saying, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

Who are "the children" that Jesus is referring to?

The children of Israel

Who are "the little dogs"?

Unworthy Gentiles, like this woman

How does this woman respond to being called "a little dog"?

She agrees with Jesus, because she believes that she is an unworthy Gentile sinner, nevertheless, she expresses her faith in Jesus by saying, "True, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

What gave the Canaanite woman such boldness to continue to pray to Jesus?

Her prayer for mercy was based entirely upon God's promise of salvation to all nations in the promise made to Abraham.

How might human reason interpret experiences like this woman had?

That Jesus does not care for her because she is a Gentile woman who is outside the kingdom of God and therefore unworthy of His mercy.

How do we know that Jesus came into the world to save Gentiles as well as Jews?

God's promise made to Abraham was: "In your Seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 22:18).

Why is this woman not angry or insulted by being called "a little dog"?

According to God's Word, she believes that all people are sinners, Jew and Gentile alike, and that no one is "worthy" of God's mercy or the gift of salvation by anything in them.

What does Jesus mean when He tells the woman, "O woman, great is your faith!"

Her faith was great because she trusted in Jesus' alone and in the promises of His Word. She clearly believed what God's word teaches: we are all sinners and salvation from sin, death, and the power of the devil is a gift of God's grace through faith in Christ and not by works.

What does the example of the Canaanite woman's experience and cry for mercy teach us about prayer?

Prayer is the voice of faith that only trusts in what His Word teaches us. We do not interpret whether or not God loves us on the basis of our experiences but rely only upon His Word teaches us, even if His Word contradicts our experiences, feelings, or emotions.

What is the basic prayer we sing at the beginning of each Divine Service that expresses the faith that we, as unworthy sinners, are completely dependent upon God's mercy for everything we need?

The Kyrie, "Lord, have mercy upon us!"

Meditation on the Bible Story

Experiences like the ones the Canaanite woman had are often used by the devil to convince us that God does not love us and that we are beyond the hope of salvation in Christ. Faith never depends upon what it experiences; it believes only in the promises of the Gospel. This Gentile woman, whose daughter was severely demon-possessed, dared to cry out to Jesus for mercy because she believed the promise of the Gospel. She believed that Jesus was the Son of David who came into the world to save sinners according to the promise of salvation made to Abraham. All the nations would be blessed through the Seed of Abraham. Despite her experiences with a demon-possessed daughter and the apparent silence and rebuke by Jesus and His disciples, she would not let go of the Word of God. If she let go of the promises of God's Word, then she and her daughter would have no hope of salvation. Jesus treats her this way for our benefit, so that we might see the nature of true faith and be given an example of how we are to call God in prayer according to the promises of His Word alone. He works the same way in our lives. He uses the struggle with sin and the experiences of living in a fallen world to strip us of all reliance upon ourselves and to incite us to call upon His Word of grace in every trouble. Faith always agrees with and confesses what Jesus says, even if the Law condemns us as "little dogs," knowing that even unworthy sinners, like little dogs, "eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." This woman's faith was great because it was entirely in Christ and the promises of God's Word alone.

Every petition of the Lord's Prayer is first a promise of God's Word to us. In the Introduction, "Our Father, who art in heaven," God invites us to trust in Him as dear children trust their dear father who loves them, no matter what they are experiencing. In the First Petition, "Hallowed be Thy name" we are taught to believe that God's Word is the foundation for faith and prayer. God's name is hallowed when we receive God's Word when it is taught to us, and cry out to Him, as the Canaanite Woman did, according to the promises He has made to us.

Prayer on the Bible Story

Heavenly Father, as the Canaanite woman trusted in Your promise of salvation rather than the bad things she experienced in her life, so teach us to rely upon Your Word and pray for Your mercy and help no matter what we face or how difficult our life becomes, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen



A Canaanite Woman Prays to Jesus for Mercy for Her Daughter
Matthew 15:21-28