

## “Loyalty, Obedience, and Faith”

This is Scout. He is our family dog. We got him when he was puppy. He's a good dog. In fact, he's the best dog we've ever had in our family. When studying today's Gospel reading from Matthew, Scout kept popping into my mind. Why? I guess because when I read about such loyalty and obedience shown by the Canaanite woman, I kept thinking of my friend Scout here. And as I thought more and more about this reading it wasn't just loyalty and obedience. Other parallels came to mind between the two.

For starters, the Canaanite woman was considered an outsider. She was no card-carrying Israelite. She was a foreigner! She may have spoken the language of the Israelites- after all she refers to Jesus as Lord- as “Son of David”- but she was still not one of them.

Scout, I guess to other pure breeds is probably looked at the same way. He too is an outsider in a sense. He's not a card-carrying pure breed Shitzu nor is he a card carrying pure bred miniature poodle. He's a mixture of both. He might speak the language of one or the other but he is still a foreigner.

The Canaanite's daughter we are told was severely oppressed by a demon. Is Scout severely oppressed by a demon? It doesn't look like it now but if you would have been at my house a while back the day after he ate a half pound of chocolate, you might change your answer.

The Canaanite women asked for something from someone she knew could help her and at first received the silent treatment. I can assure you Scout has asked for something many times in his own unique way from the ones he loves and has also been ignored.

And they continue. The disciples want Jesus to send her away- maybe give her what she wants so she'll leave. Scout has certainly been given a treat or a warm place to sit just to get rid of him.

The woman was told by Jesus that it was not right to take the children's bread. Scout has been told numerous times by me and the rest of my family that it is not right to take our bread.

Another parallel between the Canaanite woman and Scout here is that they both are willing to eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. Now of course Scout does this literally. He is the best floor cleaner money can buy especially during meal times. And the woman? She was willing to do this figuratively knowing that even the crumbs of Christ no matter how small would give her full access to him.

And the final parallel between these two loyal and obedient creatures, which is the focus of our text today? They are two powerful examples of firm and persistent faith.

We can learn a lot about faith from dogs can't we? How many of you have dogs? Aren't they, at least for the most part, models of faith? They know who feeds them; who gives them shelter; who takes care of them and they show it. Dogs inherently latch on to their masters and will generally follow them no matter what the situation might be.

Maybe you've heard this story. On Sept. 11, 2001, a blind computer technician was working on the 71st floor of the World Trade Center with his guide dog. When the hijacked plane hit the tower, the man knew it would take him a long time to evacuate the building, but he wanted his Labrador retriever to have a chance to get out so he unclipped his leash in the crowded stairwell. The dog was swept downstairs by the mass of evacuating people, but a few minutes later the blind man felt the dog nuzzling his legs. His dog had come right back to his side. The dog and a co-worker then helped the man climb down 70 flights of stairs, which took nearly an hour. Soon after they escaped the tower, the building collapsed, and man says he owes his life to his faithful dog.<sup>1</sup>

Dogs can be such models of faith and believe it or not so can people. In fact we have one of the most profound examples of a faithful person in our Gospel reading today in the Canaanite woman. She exhibited immense faith in Jesus. Of course we don't know how she knew of him; we can only assume she, like you and me, heard of him from someone. But of course it wasn't just hearing about him. Through the power of the Holy Spirit she believed in him as the only one who could provide the healing she and her daughter needed. What loyalty, what obedience, what faith in the goodness and mercy of God even when it appeared- at least at first- that her faith was of no use.

Look again at the story. She asked Jesus for mercy and he doesn't say a word. She hears him tell the disciples that he was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel- that wasn't her- but she still persists. Jesus finally tells her that it is not right to throw the children's

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mnn.com/family/pets/photos/7-incredibly-loyal-dogs/dorado>

bread to the dogs. She didn't say- "ok thanks for your time, I'll be on my way" or "I didn't expect you to care about me anyway." She persisted because somehow she knew he was the Lord; somehow she knew he was the only one to free her family.

Now that's faith isn't it? That's the kind of faith I pray for. I pray for the kind of faith that drives me to my knees begging the Lord to help me when all seems lost and knowing he hears me even when it seems he's silent. I pray for the kind of faith that pleads to my Lord Jesus Christ to have mercy on me even though I know I don't deserve it. What about you? Is that the kind of faith you long for?

I sure hope it is because the truth is even though we may want to be loyal, obedient and faithful, we still have the tendency to turn on our master don't we? Think again about dogs. Even the most loyal can turn on their masters. Even little Scout turns on me every now and then ignoring my commands in favor of what he wants. How often do we hear about pet dogs who are one minute loyal and obedient to their masters and the next vicious and out-of-control? Just like them, our tendency is to do the same. One minute we are loyal, obedient and faithful to our Lord and the next we can be doing something, or thinking something that is vicious and out-of-control. Such is the nature of sin.

And the brutal truth is many of those dogs that turn on their masters receive the worst possible punishment don't they? Many are simply put to death because of their behavior. The Scriptures tell us that's exactly what we deserve when we turn on our master. "For the wages of sin is death."

But with faith, that's not what we receive is it? We receive forgiveness and forgiveness is- as the second part of the verse from Romans I just referenced the "free gift of God that is eternal life in Christ."

That's why we need to hear the voice of the Canaanite woman today reminding us all that even though none are entitled to the Lord's mercy when we relentlessly throw ourselves at his feet he doesn't ignore us- I know it sometimes seems that way but he doesn't ignore us- he acknowledges our confession of faith.

That's what the Canaanite woman did. It may appear that she just bowed down and took what she could get but it was more than that. "Lord help me," she said only to hear that "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." If you missed this take note. The woman says "yes, Lord." "Yes, Lord." She agrees with him. She doesn't argue; she doesn't try and make a case for herself or her daughter. She

confesses! She confesses that it isn't right to take what she doesn't deserve but then stands firm in her belief in the power of the one and only Lord. Throwing herself at his feet was not only a confession but an acknowledgement that she, by eating only the crumbs that fall from the master's table, would be sustained by this smallest portion of the Lord's mercy.

My friends, we are doing exactly the same in worship today. We are throwing ourselves at the mercy of the Lord and in doing so admitting our desperate dependence on him. We are crying out to him in faith, confessing our sinfulness to the one who took the punishment that we deserve. And then with repentant hearts, we are receiving way more than the crumbs. We are receiving the full abundance of his mercy and grace which is his forgiveness proven by his resurrection.

You see, what we must take to heart in regards to our faith is the truth that Christianity first and foremost is a religion that saves. That is the most important part of this whole thing. Faith in Christ saves. He doesn't give us the death that we deserve. He gives us life in his name.

So thanks be to God for this account of the faith of the Canaanite woman. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, may these words continue to speak to us and strengthen our faith in our Lord to life eternal. **Amen.**