What do you do when God says: No? That is a very practical question, isn't it? God has granted us the privilege of prayer where we get to ask him anything. Sometimes he says: No! It is like children with their parents. Children can ask them for anything. Good parents often say: No. They say No when what they ask for is not good for them, or when parents want to protect them or train them to be stronger or better on their own.

God is our perfect heavenly Father and in love for us he often says No! What do you do then? Some people, like little children, get mad at God. They turn their backs and stomp away, much like children who are acting bratty. Some despair. Guilt over sin leads them to rightfully admit they did not deserve God's help anyway. But that is where it stops and they stop coming to God. Others try to bargain with God when he says No, promising to work harder and be better or put away some sin if God does what they want. None of those ways work. They all come from hearts controlled by a sinful nature.

There is a right way to respond when God says No. It is the way the Canaanite woman in our text did. Did you know that in the Bible there are only two people whose faith Jesus praised? One of them is this woman and from Jesus' response to her, let's learn what to do when God says No.

Jesus had been teaching near the Sea of Galilee when Matthew tells us: Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. It was no coincidence that Jesus headed for this Gentile territory. There are no such things as coincidences, only God-incidences, where he works for his purposes. The purpose was to meet this woman and provide encouragement for all his followers. Like our other readings pointed out, the Savior would be for all people, not just the Jews.

This woman came with a problem and a prayer. We are told: A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession. The woman's daughter suffered from demon possession. Yes, it is possible for demons to take over people's bodies. While we do not see much of it today and it is not like the horror movies, in Jesus' time as Satan threw all his forces against our Lord, it was much more prevalent. We are not told how but in some way the Holy Spirit had revealed to this woman that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. That is why she called him Lord and Son of David. She asked for his help.

And God said No. We are told: Jesus did not answer a word. It got worse. So his disciples came to him and urged him, Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us. Not only did she get the silent treatment from God, the disciples also were a discouragement. Don't be too hard on them. They had been taught from little on that the Savior was only for the Jews. Jesus seems to say the same thing when he told disciples: I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. I said Jesus seemed to say the same thing. It is true that Jesus was sent to do his work among the people of Israel, but the results of his work were for all.

Despite God’s No, despite the discouragement, this woman was not deterred. The woman came and knelt before him. Lord, help me! she said.
Why does she act this way? Why didn't she give up? This woman humbly relied on God's mercy. Look again at how she talks to our Savior! She kneels. She calls him Lord and Son of David. She pleads for mercy. What a remarkable woman! No despair. She does not try to bargain with God. She humbly pleads for mercy. And why not? She is talking to the Savior, the one who loves sinners so much he dies for them.

My friends, this is what we get to do when God says No to us! Humbly rely on his mercy. When you pray and God is silent, when the answer is No, do not give into your sinful nature that would lead you to turn your back on God, to blame him. Don't make bargains with God because you cannot keep them and you have nothing that God needs. Remember first your own sinfulness, that you do not deserve anything from God but his punishment. That will humble you. Then remember to whom you are talking - your Savior-God. The one who loves you so much he was punished for you. This is a merciful God who delights in showing mercy.

He also delights in people who take him at his Word. Jesus' reply to the Canaanite woman's second plea was this: It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs. How harsh that sounds, but it was not though. Now, he did not call her a wild dog like the Pharisees would have done. Instead he uses a word meaning pet dog. But still, he calls her a dog. Jesus was just expressing in picture language the truth that he had been sent to conduct his ministry among the Jewish people, who were like the children, not the Gentiles, who were like the dogs in the picture. You do not let children starve to feed the dogs.

What would you do if Jesus said this to you? Would you get offended? Would you tell Jesus that you are just as good as any Jew, maybe even better because you know who he is and believe in him? Would you say: I deserve this, Lord? Would you tell Jesus that he offended you and should apologize? Would you leave in a huff, thinking: Good riddance, if you're going to be like that. I know that my sinful nature would tempt me to think such thoughts. But such thinking is wrong.

No, look at the faith of this woman. She says: Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. I don't know about you but I am tired of reading about so-called Bible scholars and supposed leaders of the Christian church who promote themselves as experts in the Bible, who then take something God has said and twist it around to mean something different then what it says. They could learn something from this Canaanite woman. She is wiser and more learned in the Scriptures than those supposed theologian scholars. She is a master of the Scriptures.

Why? She humbly takes Jesus at his Word. Did you see how she did that? What Jesus said is true. It is not right to take the children's food and give it to the dogs. It is also true that the dogs get the crumbs. The woman just took Jesus at his Word and said: If I'm the dog in your word picture, give me my crumbs. How this delighted our Savior! Then Jesus answered, Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted. And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Friends, God loves it when we take him at his Word. That is really what faith is - taking God at his Word. That is what we need to do when God says No. Now we are not talking about forcing God to do what we want by persistence in prayer, using prayer like some kind of leash to yank God around. This Word of God does not say God will give us whatever we want. He will only give us what is good and that is really what we want.

This Word of God does show the blessing of taking God at his Word. It is just like it
is with children and their parents. I think of the times I told my kids I would do something with them later - play a game, read a book - all kinds of things. When later came and I was busy with something else and they asked again, I often forgetfully said No. But when they said: But you said so, things changed. They had caught me. I had to act.

Now that is a sinful earthly father. How much more so won't our perfectly heavenly Father act when we take him at his Word? When we pray to the Lord with our job, our money, worries and we ask God to fix things in a certain way and God says No, we can still say, Yes Lord, but you said you would provide for my daily needs. Take God at his Word and go on with comfort. When we pray for our children and they stray in their teen or twenty-something years and God says, No, we can take him at his Word and say But you said to train them when they are young and when they are old they will not depart. When other things worry us and we pray to God to take them away and God says No, we can still take him at his Word and say, But you have said to seek first your kingdom and your righteousness and all these other things will be taken care of. And God loves that. He loves it when we hold him to his Word because he never breaks his Word.

Now, you might be tempted to say that this is all well and good for this Canaanite woman. She can do that. You might say that works for mom or dad or some good Christian but can I do that? God's Good News for you is absolutely you can. God proves it to you here. The Canaanite woman was an outsider, a Gentile. It was no coincidence our Savior came to her. He would die for everyone's sins.

It is no coincidence that the same Savior-God has come to you. He deliberately worked in your life because he wants you in heaven and he wants you to be comforted here on earth. And because he wants you comforted, he wants you to know what to do when in loving-kindness he says No to you. Humbly rely on his mercy and joyfully take him at his Word. You will not be disappointed. Amen.

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