

“How Christ Matures Our Faith”

Matthew 15:21–28

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I will be bringing a message to you today on how God grows our faith through affliction because without affliction, without sorrow, without trials, we often stagnate, plateau, or in worst case scenarios, backslide but God uses trials also in a church to purify, to grow, to mature our faith, and to bring Him glory. When we walk by faith and not by sight, we bring God the most glory. I want to show you this by looking at Matthew 15:21-28, which is a little precious story that often causes people confusion because it seems like Jesus is acting so unlike Jesus in this story.

Hear the Word of God as it comes to us today. Matthew 15:21-28 says [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 (or mature) is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.*

May God bless the reading of His Word. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord God be near to us as we expound this beautiful, humbling, instructive, challenging and refining story – history in which Thou does work mightily to mature the Canaanite woman's faith. Thank You for how she passed all three tests and how You rewarded that faith, Thine own gift with a great pronouncement of “O woman mature is thy faith.” Be it unto thee even as Thou wilt. Lord, grant, that that would be fitting not only for this congregation, but for many people in this flock today who are struggling with a silence, who are struggling with unanswered prayers. Lord, mature our faith through our every trial we pray, in Jesus' Name. We also ask Lord for a special benediction upon Cindy Reeder. We thank You for her. Thank You for the strength she's receiving. Please continue to uphold and bless her and be near to her in thy tender mercy and compassion, in Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen.

Today, more than ever before perhaps, the church needs mature Christians - Aquilla's and Priscilla's, mothers and fathers in Israel who can instruct others and lead them in the ways of the most high God. Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th century Baptist preacher, said “One mature Christian is worth 100 because of the witness of their lives and how they disciple others.” Surely today our great need in the bane of all the easy believism and all the shallow Christianity that surrounds us, we need Godly men and women who've been through the fires of affliction, who've come out of the tunnels of darkness and been filled with a light of Christ and are willing and endowed by the Spirit to be storehouses of wisdom to beginning Christians, to take them by the hand and walk them in the ways of the Lord. That is actually what Jesus was doing in this mysterious story with the Canaanite woman. He was refining and maturing her faith. So that's our theme for this study – how Christ matures our faith. We'll look at that in three thoughts. First

by apparent silence from Matthew 15:23. Second, by apparent rejection from Matthew 15:24 and third by apparent insult from Matthew 15:26.

When you consider how the Canaanite woman comes to Jesus and pours out her heart and cries out in prayer, “O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with the devil, have mercy upon Me” and the urgency of that request, it's the ongoing repetitive sense in the Greek, which means she cries it out over and over again. The streets are ringing with her noise that Jesus will answer her right away yet Matthew 15:23 astonishingly says, [23] *But He did not answer her a word.* What a contrast – a crying woman and a silent Jesus. What confusion, what cause for doubt. Was not this the Jesus of Nazareth, of whom she heard in her own country that He opened the eyes of the blind, gave the deaf to hear, picked up a little lambs in His bosom and was merciful and compassionate? Even though her neighbors must have said to her, ‘Why are you going to Jesus of Nazareth? At best He's a prophet to the Jews. He's not a God for the Gentiles. You'll get no hope from Jesus. He's a Jewish messiah. It's no use to go to Him.’

In those days every local area had their own deity and yet this woman cannot but go to Jesus. She realizes He is the Messiah. She comes using the Messianic title, ‘Lord thou son of David,’ which is the Christ, the Anointed, the Messiah. So, the seed of regeneration was certainly in this woman's heart. She was a beginner in grace and she comes to Jesus pouring out her need for her very demon possessed daughter and then we read but He answered her not one word. It's no use to go to Jesus or is it? Surely she's going to turn her back now on Jesus. She's going to go back home and say, ‘I tried. I did my best but He wouldn't hear me.’ The text doesn't say He didn't hear her. The text says He didn't answer her, yet in His time and in His way.

Maybe you too have struggled in your life with the silence of God. You have a prodigal son or daughter. You have a spouse with cancer. You have internal trials, fear, struggles with indwelling sin. You cry. You pray but it seems that things go from bad to worse and there is no Jesus to answer. You're tempted to go back but this woman couldn't turn around and go back because faith never turns its back on God. Faith has only one object – Jesus Christ. Faith that turns its back on God is no longer faith. It's unbelief. This woman could not do without Jesus. ‘Give me Jesus, else I die.’ Have you ever been there? Are you there now? Are you there daily? Can you say like the Dutch Reformer Wilhelmus à Brakel, “I fly to Jesus 100 times a day even when He is silent to me”?

This woman came into the pain of silence. Silence is not only confusing from God, it's also painful. Samuel Rutherford, the great Scottish divine said “The silence of Jesus Christ is the bitterest ingredient. Christians must drink in their cup of sorrow for the silence of God is a taste of hell on earth for the believer. The believer knows what it is to cry out, “Be not silent with David, be not silent unto me” as if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit. O, what a sorrow the silence of Jesus can be.”

The bride in the song of Solomon knew that silence, didn't she? She said in Song of Solomon 3:2, “I will arise and go about the city, in the streets and in the broad ways. I will seek him who my soul loves. I saw him but I found him not. I called him, but he gave me no answer.” Jeremiah, in Lamentations 3:8 and 44, “I cry and shout, but the Lord shuts out my prayer. Thou has covered thyself with a cloud that my prayer should not pass through.” You cry out. You know that your prayers are going above the ceiling. You know that they're going into heavenly places because you know that God has moved you to pray. You know that they are sincere prayers. You can say that in all honesty and yet there's no answer. You cry, you groan, you sigh,

you whisper. You groan with groaning that are unutterable as Romans 8:26 says by the Holy Spirit but all there is deafening silence and it multiplies the doubts within.

You cry out with the Psalmist from Psalm 42:8-9 “To God, My rock, I cry and say, ‘Why hast Thou forgotten me?’ While day by day, with taunting words, ‘where is thy God?’ the scoffers sneer.” It's like Martin Luther when he went to rebuild the church, there were a number of problems in a certain stretch of his reformation, and he said to his wife Katie, one day when he left for work. “God is so silent to me I think He's dead” and that night when he came home from work, all the shades in the house were drawn, which at that time meant someone died. Luther burst through the open door and said, Katie, ‘who died?’ She said, “You said this morning God was dead” and this convicted Luther, brought him out of his bondage. It's not always so easy, when God is silent, is it? Right now, you have unanswered prayers still going up to the throne, no doubt. How do you go on believing in the face of a silent God when He seems far away and you wonder why? In days gone by, God was more real than the chair you're sitting on but now He can seem distant.

A few years ago, I had COVID and during that five day experience I felt like God was just gone. I said words to Him, but I felt no contact. It was frightening. I had a friend who went through the same thing with COVID, he said, “I turned to my wife and said, ‘It seems like God is dead. It seems like there's no faith in me.’” But why would God remain silent to His own people? Why would he remain silent to you? We don't have all the answers, of course, because God is God. We never know all the answers why God does anything because He's so far above us. Our lives are like a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle, and God knows how every piece fits together. We don't and yet there are big pieces of that puzzle based on Scripture, based on our experience out of Scripture that we do know. I can give two of them to you assuredly of why God, sometimes is silent in our lives.

One is certainly this; for the glory of God, for the glory of Jesus. John 11 is an amazing passage where Lazarus is sickened to death and a messenger is sent from Bethany to Jerusalem, six miles away, an hour and a half journey where Jesus is. We're told that Jesus loves Lazarus and Martha and Mary. Then comes this message. John 11:3, 6 says [3] *So the sisters (Mary and Martha) sent to Him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”* [6] *So, when He (Jesus) heard that Lazarus was ill, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was.* Isn't that strange? If you were away from home and you got a call and the caller said ‘your child had an accident or your spouse had an accident and they're dying. If you want to see them, you have to come right away’ and you say, “Oh, I'll show up two days later”? Doesn't Jesus care? John 11:4 says [4] *But when Jesus heard it He said, “This illness does not lead to death. **It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.**”* It is so that God gets the glory. So does God get more glory through healing a sick Lazarus or raising a dead Lazarus? That's a rhetorical question.

In our lives it's the same way. If God answered every prayer right away, as soon as we prayed it, we would take Him for granted. We would be like a little infant who cries and gets Mommy's help right away. An eight year old doesn't act that way. We have to grow up. We have to learn to walk in darkness as well as light. We have to learn to exercise faith in dark times and learn that those dark times can bring God more glory when we walk in His ways, even though we can't tangibly feel His answers.

Think of how Jesus gets glory in your life. Doesn't He get more glory? Sometimes when you've prayed and prayed for something and you've actually almost given up and it's the flames of your prayer have been reduced to just coals that seem to have no heat in them anymore and then from the ashes of your forlorn hopes, He suddenly gives an answer so that He gets all the

glory. He does exceedingly abundantly above all that you could ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). So, from out of the ashes of our efforts, He revives the flames of faith and love and gives His answer, often when we least expect it *so that he that glories let him glory in the Lord*, says Paul in II Corinthians 10:17. So, that's one big piece.

A second big piece of this puzzle is to purify and mature our faith. A 19th century musician was asked why his playing was so much more memorable than others. His answer was, 'It's the pauses. It's the silence.' I have a have a book company, Reformation Heritage Books that I began 30 some years ago and I I'm very much into writing books for young children, for laypeople, for academics. I just love good typesetting. I love the way something is laid out on a page. If this church bulletin from the very top line to the bottom was just typed with no whitespace, no pauses you'd probably say, "I can't even read this bulletin." We need silences. We need God to speak into our lives but we also need God to show us our dire need of Him also through silence, to purify, to mature our faith.

When I was nine years old, my dad took me from Grand Rapids, Michigan, to Hoboken, New Jersey. It was a long trip and it was just my dad and me. That was very special. We went into some long tunnels. I didn't realize it was the Appalachian Mountains. I had never seen mountains before. When we got into the first tunnel, I said to my dad, 'Is this tunnel ever going to end?' I was getting a little bit claustrophobic, and my dad said, "Oh, yeah, don't worry. Pretty soon you're going to see a little pinprick of light. Then as we get closer, the light's going to expand and we're going to break out in the sunshine. You're going to enjoy the sunshine more than ever before." That's exactly what happened but 15 minutes later, there was another tunnel and another and another. There were eight or nine of them.

That's what the Christian life is often like, isn't it? It's when we're in the tunnel of darkness that we learn to cry out and hang with what Calvin called 'hang with naked faith upon our Sovereign, Almighty, heavenly, gracious Father in Jesus Christ, with no tangible evidences of answers to our cries.' That's precisely when we give Him the most glory. What a wonderful thing it is that when God seems to be pushing us away with one hand with His silence, He is secretly with His other hand, drawing us imperceptibly to ourselves, closer to Himself, so that we actually can look back in our lives and say, 'The times I was actually closest to God were the times I was in the tunnel – the darkest times of my life, the times of greatest affliction, the times when often there were no answers because He was maturing my faith.'

At such times, God deals with us even more than with our trouble. Just take the example here of a mother with a child. Notice how she comes to Jesus. She doesn't come saying anything about herself. She says, 'Son of David, have mercy on me. O Lord, my daughter is grievously vexed with the devil.' It's all about her daughter. Now look at Matthew 15:25 which says *[25] But she came and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, help me."* Her prayer has shrunk. Some of our best prayers are our shortest prayers. They're the most pungent. They're the most earnest. They're the most urgent. God uses our trials not just to deliver us from the trial, first of all, but to deal with our souls.

Could it be that one big reason among many why God gives us children to begin with is to mature our faith? Is there any mother and for that matter, any father reading this who can say having children has never brought us into trials? Anyone can be a perfect parent, perfect father, perfect mother, no problems. Only perfect parents I know are those who haven't had kids yet for everyone who doesn't have children thinks they know how to do it. Then you have children and you're crying out almost every day, 'Lord, help me, Lord, show me, Lord, give me wisdom.' What is God doing? What is God doing right now with that prodigal son and that prodigal

daughter that you have that's far from the Lord that is an unbeliever? What is God doing with you through that trial? He is mature in your faith. Perhaps you have been praying for that prodigal maybe for 20, 30, 40 years. After I preached this sermon the first time a lady came up to me afterwards and said, "My son has been in prison and I could just identify 100% with what you said but now I realize more than ever God is using that son for the maturation of my own faith."

Where would you be without trials? You and I would be spoiled brats. We would take God for granted. We'd be in the spirit of worldly entitlement but God humbles us. God breaks us in order to use us. A.W. Tozer said "God will seldom use a man greatly till he's broken him deeply." So, God has periods of silence to bring us face to face with Himself and to bring us face down, crying out, groaning, agonizing by faith for His presence. Yes, God gives us children to keep us in the right posture, the right place before Him. Here the woman says "My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil."

Secondly, Jesus is testing this woman who not only responded to the first test rightly, but He's testing her through the second test, which is rejection, a parent rejection. Matthew 15:23b-24 says [23b] *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."* This is a double barrel rejection. She gets rejected, first of all, by the disciples, and that we can understand a little bit, at least because they're sinners, they're being too proud here for they said she cries after us but she wasn't crying after them. She was crying after Jesus. They were chased out of Jerusalem and now on the northern border of Israel. The religious enemies were trying to arrest Jesus and the disciples. They finally feel a breath of fresh air being in northern Israel, freedom from the enemies and now there's this woman filling the streets with her cries and they think, 'Oh, no, we're going to get arrested after all. Get rid of this woman. Jesus. We need a break.' They're being very indifferent, not good disciplers, but we understand they're sinners.

But what is Jesus doing here? He is rejecting her. Why would He reject her? A woman is crying and begging for help and He seems to be pushing her away. She's not a sheep. She's not of the house of Israel. She doesn't have the qualifications. Calvin actually explains this very well. He says something like this; 'Christ's priestly work as the promised Seed and Savior in whom all nations will be blessed, must be distinguished from His prophetic work during His ministry on Earth, which was primarily confined to the Jews. The day would come, the day of Pentecost, of course, when after he would suffer and die and be raised again and ascended to heaven and send forth his spirit to break down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, so that He would send out Peter and the Apostles to proclaim the message of Jesus to all the nations but that time is not yet. It appears that Jesus is warning this woman that she's acting out of turn by trying to raid the table, the Jewish table laid for God's chosen people too early.' To be rejected by disciples is hard, but to be rejected by God is harder. How difficult it is when we feel that God is pushing us away and rejecting us. Surely this woman is going to go back home now. Surely her neighbors were right when they said "He's only the Jewish Messiah." I just heard it from his own lips. No, faith never turns its back on Jesus. She passes the second test.

Then when she is rejected she worships Him for it says in Matthew 15:25, [25] *But she came and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, help me."* There are three great things to notice here. The first is the 'then' – Then when she's rejected, that's amazing, that's grace, then she came. The second great thing to notice is she worshiped. This showed that her faith was indeed true. The word *worship* in Greek is actually a compound word, *proskuneó*. Pros means *towards* and *kuneó* means *to kiss*, to kiss towards. The idea is that all my affections, not just my intellect, not just my

will but all my affections, my love – everything goes out to Jesus When I worship Him. I worship Him with my whole being. It's as if she casts herself before Him as the New Testament Jacob and says, "I will not let You go, except if Thou will bless me." Then came she and worshiped him. The third great thing here is her prayer. It's a beautiful, simple prayer. It's a prayer a three year old can pray. It's a prayer that a 95 year old mature believer never gets beyond – "Lord, help me." The Lord reaches up into the heavens. He reaches down into the hellishness and the depravity of my own soul and help is the word of mediation that brings Lord and me together. Help with a capital H, which is Jesus. The Psalmist says in 89:19, 'Thou hast laid help upon one who is mighty,' His own son.

My father read to us John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, every single Sunday night, all 20 years I was home for 30 to 45 minutes. We'd ask him questions. So we've been through it dozens of times and when we'd get to the end he'd start over, and one of the questions we asked him was, 'Who is help?' We knew he was the man in Pilgrim's Progress who took Christian out of the slew of despond and we knew that John Bunyan said in the margin that help is Jesus. But we asked our dad, 'Who is this help?' And he would talk to us about Jesus and about how he does everything for a sinner who can do nothing. You say, 'Lord, help me.' In my word I would say 'Lord Jesus me, bring Him in His power, His humiliation, His exaltation, His natures, His offices, His person in His all-ness. Lord, help me. I cannot go on without You.'

Notice in this moment the woman drops the messianic title, Son of David and just says, "Lord." She appeals to Him as Lord of Heaven and Earth. The Messianic title seemed too associated with the Jews. She just heard Jesus responded by saying, 'Yes, but I'm sent to the Jewish people, the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' But she cries out, "Lord of Heaven and Earth, Lord, over all things, whom all power and authority is given. Help me this Gentile." She passes the second test, in a wonderful way. Do you know what that means to worship God? That all within you goes out to Him and you cannot let him go. My dad used to say to us as children, 'never leave the Lord alone.' That's a mark of true faith. I need Him every day. I need Him every hour. I mentioned the Dutch Reformer Wilhelmus à Brakel earlier and he said "A hundred times a day, thousands of times in my life, I have needed Jesus. I cannot let Him go."

Then there's a third test. Jesus is maturing, maturing and now maturing her faith. What does He answer to this woman who just can't let him go? He says "It's not fitting to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." Say what? It's a terrible thing today when people say 'he's a pig.' Don't ever do that for that's an insult but that's what the Gentiles were called by the Jews in Jesus' day. They were called dogs because, dogs were always wild in the Old Testament times. In the New Testament time most dogs were wild. They were considered unclean, but people were just beginning to bring in little dogs into their home as pets and the little dogs would take the leftover crumbs after the meal was served. Jesus uses a very interesting construction of the word dogs in the Greek language. Greek has something similar to the Dutch language.

In the Dutch language if you add a 'je' at the end of any word, it means little. A child is a *kind*. A little child is a *kindje*. Greek has something similar to that and that's what Jesus says here – "it's not fitting to take the children's bread and to cast it to *little dogs*." The New King James version says 'little dogs.' So how does this woman respond? She responds by saying 'truth Lord, I am a dog. I am unclean, I admit my unworthiness. I'm out of the house of Israel. But now I admit my own cleanness, my sinfulness. Yet the little dogs eat of the crumbs from underneath the master's table so let me be Thy dog. I don't ask to be a Jew sitting at Thy table to get the whole loaf of bread. I only ask for a few crumbs. Lord, You're now in the northern boundary of Israel. You're at the very edge of the table of Israel. Just let a few crumbs that your Jewish

children don't want or leave on their plates, fall over the edge to this Gentile dog. Surely Thou art Lord of Lords that Thou will have a few crumbs for a sinner, an unclean sinner and unclean dog, even such as I am, and I will be satisfied.'

She's a beggar at the feet of Jesus. She knows she has no natural rights, no religious rights, no citizenship rights because she's a Syrophoenician. She's a Canaanite. She's a Gentile but she comes as a sinner. She comes as an unclean dog. Jesus isn't being cruel here. He's drawing her as He pushes away with one hand but drawing her with the other. She says "truth, Lord, I'm a dog yet the dogs eat to crumbs that fall from their master's table." Luther has an amazing statement about this. Luther says "She ensnared Christ in His own word. He who loves to soul be ensnared by sinners." God loves to draw sinners to Himself, to plead with Him, to take hold of Him, to bring Him holy arguments to the Savior. It's like Job says in Job 23:4; *[4] I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments.* There is such a thing as holy argumentation with the Lord. This woman is not angry here, but with open palms, 'Let me argue with you, O, Lord. Search me, O, Lord and know my heart and try my thoughts and heal me of every wicked way and lead me in the way everlasting.'

So how do you argue with God in a holy way? This woman does it in four ways. She argues, number one, by agreeing with Jesus – truth Lord, I'm a dog. Truth, Lord, no matter how bad you call me, I'm worse than that. Truth Lord, I'm nothing but a sinner. Truth, Lord, I have nothing to offer. Truth, Lord, whatever You say against me but I know that in Thee there is in all sufficiency.' She argues from Christ's all sufficiency.

Secondly, the dogs receive the crumbs from the master's table and if I'm your dog, Lord Jesus, I know You won't be harder than an earthly dog owner. I know that You're generous. Oh, that's the way to argue with God. Truth, Lord, I'm blind but Thou hast eyes for the blind. Truth Lord, I'm poor but did not You who were rich become poor that poor sinners may be made rich. Truth, Lord, I'm weak but You are strong and mighty to save. Truth, Lord among righteous, but are not You the Lord our righteousness. Truth, Lord, I'm a dog but don't You have crumbs for dogs? So you argue on His promises. You argue on His all sufficiency. This woman argues by agreeing, she argues from Christ's all sufficiency. She argues also from the truth. He does have crumbs for Gentiles. He had a crumb for the Gentile roof. He had a crumb for Gentile Job. He had a crumb for the Gentile Rahab. Even though it's not common until Pentecost she says she needs those crumbs and argues from the truth. Then she argues from her discouraging position. Truth Lord, I'm a dog, but You're merciful to dogs who need You.

That's the way to argue with the Lord – you become a spiritual beggar. You put your foot in the beggar's door and you won't let the Lord alone. When my dad was nine years old and my grandparents were extremely poor, they had a train track that went behind their house and sometimes beggars would jump off the train come to the front door and ask for something. One day my dad answered the door at nine years old. The beggar says, 'I need a sandwich.' So he goes to my grandma and says, "There's a beggar at the door and he needs a sandwich." My grandma says, 'You tell the beggar we're just as poor as he is.' So that's what my dad does and my dad closes the door the beggar sticks his foot in the door and says, 'Just one slice of bread.' My dad goes back to my grandma says, "The beggar won't go away. He wants just one slice of bread." My grandma said, "Oh, then he's a real beggar, give him a whole sandwich." That's the way God often deals with us.

Speaking of John Bunyan, he once made a list of the top ten sins of his life, and near the top of that was this sin; 'I only knock once too often at the throne of grace and then I go away.' It's just like if you have a salesman come to your door and he just rings the doorbell once but by

the time you get to the door, he's halfway across the lawn to the neighbor. You don't bother to call him back. You just turn to your wife and you say, "Well, must be a salesman. It just rang once." When God matures our faith, He brings us into a beggar's posture where we go again and again and again to the throne and dependency upon Him. We say, "I will not let Thee go, except You bless me." We put our foot in a beggar's door and we wait on Him. If you have an unconverted child, put your foot in the door. You have a spouse who maybe just had a heart attack or had a stroke, put your foot in the door. Do you wrestle with your own indwelling sin? Put your foot in the door. God wants to mature your faith.

What a masterstroke this was for this woman passed the third test with flying colors, and now Jesus cannot hold back. O woman great is your faith, mature is your faith for be it unto you, even as you will. It's like Jesus takes the keys for the storehouse of His grace, out of his pocket and He hands them to the woman and says, "You can take whatever you want" because when you have a poor beggar who knows Jesus Christ, who He is, wants to glorify Him and once their faith matured, Jesus knows He can trust that beggar to go in and take two full loaves of bread, so to speak. I'm speaking figuratively, of course, one for her daughter, one for herself and she returns home not with crumbs. God never gives us crumbs because even a crumb from Him is like a full loaf of bread. It's like everything when it comes from God. It's like when you're two-year-old child gives you something just scratched on a piece of paper, it's precious to you. Anything from God is precious.

The woman returns home and her daughter's made whole from that very hour. Can't you just picture that conversation? The first thing the mother talks about is Jesus, His generosity and how He matured her faith and taught her from one lesson to another and then opened the floodgates of the storehouse of His grace. What a Savior, hallelujah! Be it unto you, even as you will and at the same time, He's giving her the assurance that her faith is true. O woman mature is your faith. She hears it from Jesus' own mouth. Isn't that great? Some of you struggle with assurance of faith. What a beautiful thing this is. Great is thy faith.

Don't take this up in an Armenian way like it was her faith and it was all her doing. No, Jesus gives her the faith; gave her the grace to pass each one of these three tests and matured her faith in the process. She's involved, yes, by the exercise of grace, but it's the Holy Spirit who's the Initiator and the One who matures her. Why does He then call it thy faith? Whatever God gives to us, He gives it away to us and it becomes ours. It's sort of like when our kids were yet young, my wife would come up to me usually about two weeks before my birthday and say, 'The children want to give you something for your birthday.' I knew what that meant. My hand would instinctively go to my wallet and I would pull out some bills and say, "Here you are." Now what did I say when the children took *my* money and went out and bought a present for me? I said, 'Thank you so much for *your* gift.' I didn't say, 'Well, it doesn't mean anything to me because I gave you the money anyway.' No. This is their gift. God loves to receive His own gifts back to Himself, and He gives interest. He gives rewards, gracious rewards. O woman great is thy faith. God is no miser. He gives us everything. He gives us the best He had – His Own Son, for the worst He could find sinners like you and me and then He gives us thanks for giving our all back to Him. It's amazing.

As I close this study, I want to answer one more question. Perhaps you still have this question in your mind, but this woman didn't deserve it. She was a Gentile. She was a sinner. How could Jesus reward all these things upon her? At the beginning of this study my points were apparent silence, apparent rejection, apparent insult. The reason Jesus could unravel all of these, undo these and trump them with His grace, is because He's the One who endured the real silence,

the real rejection and the real insult so that we could be set free to believe in Him and have our faith matured in Jesus. When He cried out on the cross, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” the Father was pushing Him away with both hands. He was really being forsaken, so that when He seems to push us away with one hand, He can draw us for He has earned the right to draw us to Himself with the other.

We go through the apparent silence. He went through the deafening, real silence. With a loud voice the Bible says, He said “My God, My God why hast forsaken Me?” But He, the Father answered Him, The Son, not one word. He faced the real rejection, rejected by His Father in heaven, rejected by His disciples on Earth, rejected by the realm of nature, for the sun would not even shine upon Him, rejected by the demons of hell as he hung between Earth and heaven and hell, and suffered total rejection on all sides so that we only get apparently rejected.

Jesus was also insulted, as no man ever was. He was called Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, mocked and spat upon and taunted as people said “If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself.” He could have come down from that cross, vindicated Himself, destroyed all the markers under the cross, around the cross with one word from His mouth. He could have shown His power, but He stayed on the cross to drink to the very bottom, the dregs of His Father's wrath against your sin and my sin, so that He could be the substance of our salvation. Jesus endured the real silence, the real rejection, the real insult, so that we only have to endure the shadow, but even that works together for good, to mature our faith. So, He's never really silent to us. He's never really rejecting us. He never really insults us but He uses a parent's silences, a parent's rejections, and a parent's insults to mature our faith so that we grow in communion with Him, with whom we are in union by faith, and we learn to cry out. Lord, increase our faith.

Could it be that also as a congregation, God has suddenly snatched your pastor away to mature your faith, even in this interim period as you await another senior pastor that He's not rejecting you really, only apparently, not insulting you, but refining you, purifying you, maturing you, so that you learn to look above all men and rely on Christ alone as your Savior, your Lord and your Treasure. And you learn to say with Paul, ‘Christ is all and in all’ (Colossians 3:11). That's my wish for you. May God bless you, amen. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank You so much that You are a sovereign Father and Your way which are above our ways, both in death and life, are all designed since every hair of our head is numbered to mature our faith and ripen us to be ready for glory. Oh, God, please help us. Please be near to us. Be near to this congregation. Teach us, Lord, more and more to live by faith and not by sight, to glorify You in the tunnels of affliction. Grant that also to the Reeder family and to the leadership, the staff, the team, the flock, in their sorrow, in their need, in their waiting time, in the time of silences and bring them forth as gold, clinging to Jesus, finding their all in Him who endured the real thing so that we may have strength to go through the apparent things in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.