

O blessed Savior, you are full of mercy and compassion, and will not cast out any that come to You: Help us, we beseech You, who are grievously vexed with the burden of our sins; and so increase in us the power of the Holy Spirit that we may prevail against the enemy of our souls; for Your name's sake. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 59)

Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 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." 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." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, help me." And He answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

In Christ Jesus' whose motives have always been and always will be pure and holy, dear fellow redeemed:

Luther instructs us in the Catechism how we are to fulfill the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment toward our neighbor: "*excuse him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.*" As sinners we know how easy it is to destroy our neighbor's name for ourselves and before others by assigning ill motives to what he/she says or does. The Gentile woman in our text fulfilled this command toward our Lord Jesus. However, we can well imagine how this woman, a sinner like us, could have easily twisted things about and have been filled with contempt for Jesus' responses to her or lack thereof.

Obviously, this woman trusted in all the promises of our Lord's gracious and merciful attitude toward her, so that she was able to resist all such temptation to misinterpret what would be hidden from her sight and

hearing. We, by God's gracious working in us, need always to do the same, that is, **Interpret Jesus' Words and Actions Always with the Best Construction.**

## I

You have been tempted, no doubt, at times to question God's will for you. If you have fervently prayed about some matter in your life repeatedly and nothing changes, very likely you have been tempted to put the worst construction on God's attitude toward you. Or if the apparent answer is "No" coming from your Lord, you may have lost all hope and have been filled with despair. Perhaps you prayed that a loved one live, but he died.

The Canaanite woman in our text certainly faced such temptations as she approached Jesus with her request to help her demon possessed daughter. First, in response to her plea for mercy, Jesus completely ignored her – the apparent silent treatment. Certainly we would characterize this as turning away from her. Then secondly, when she persists and the disciples beg Jesus to send her away, not to help her, but to command her to leave them alone, our Lord responded to the disciples by apparently turning against her. Jesus pointed out that He was only sent to minister among the lost house of Israel, not a Gentile like this woman. Then finally, in response to her plea for mercy again, Jesus, still apparently addressing the disciples implied that any help is meant for children like them, not Gentile dogs!

So how would you hold up under such apparent rejection and hostility coming from your Lord Jesus? Again, there are times in our lives when our petitions seem to fall on deaf ears or are dismissed on account of who we are or we receive a flat-out refusal to help. There are what we call Psalms of lament inspired by God from believers like ourselves. In Ps. 10 we read: “Why, O Lord, do You stand far away? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?” Again in Ps. 44: “Awake! Why are You sleeping, O Lord? Rouse Yourself! Do not reject us forever! Why do You hide Your face? Why do You forget our affliction and oppression?” Accusation: God, You do not care!

It is nothing new for believers to be tempted and even to accuse God of ill motive on His part. David began Psalm 13: “How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”

This faithful woman did not stop crying out for Jesus’ mercy. Even though He seemed to disregard, dismiss, and even demean her, she still begged for the crumbs of His mercy, which would be more than enough to save her daughter. That was truly putting the best construction on His responses she could observe. Knowing yourself, how would you have responded? Perhaps not so well? Would you have been tempted to stomp away like I know I would have been?

## II

Now, when it comes to our neighbor, even though we should put the best construction on everything he/she says or does, we know their motives are not always pure and clean. We know that this is the case especially since our own hidden motives are all too often evil. But unless and until ill motives are made clear to us, we are commanded by our Lord to put the best construction on everything.

As believers, however, we know that God only has good, gracious and merciful motives toward us. We do not deserve such an attitude from our Lord. Nevertheless, we trust His promises. Here are just a few: “I know the plans I have for you, ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you plans to give you hope and a future.” “Whoever comes to Me, I will never cast out.” “In all things God works for the good of those who love Him.”

Obviously, these are the kinds of promises which this faithful woman trusted and enabled her to put the best construction on Jesus’ apparent disregard in His ignoring, dismissal in response to the disciples and demeaning words implying contempt. Only God the Holy Spirit could enable a sinner like you and me to continue trusting in Jesus’ merciful love under those circumstances.

The way this account concludes, there are some false teaching TV preachers who imagine this proves that if someone has enough faith, his/her

prayers will all be granted in the end as the petitioner desires. In response to Jesus statement: "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." believing His everlasting mercy, the woman responded by saying: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Jesus answered, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly. See? Her faith was rewarded, her daughter was healed, right?

No, this is **NOT** how it works. Otherwise we would have to say that John the Baptizer, Stephen the deacon, the Apostle James or Jesus Himself, and all Christian martyrs since had inadequate faith since man's wickedness carried through with their plans of execution for them all!

While as a Christian today you may join the psalmists in their laments even going so far as to charge God with ill motives toward you, you in your God-given faith, hold on to His promises to the sweet or even the bitter end. All the believing Psalmists we have mentioned resolve their sinful charges against the Lord by reminding themselves and us, their readers, that the Lord is ever merciful no matter the outcome. For example, David in Psalm 38 concludes his lament with these words: "for you, O LORD, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer. ... Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!"

You trust that God in Christ is for you, not against you my fellow redeemed. You believe even when you must endure difficult tribulations in this life and by all outward appearance the Lord is disregarding and dismissing your many petitions calling out for His mercy. So, it is even when you hear Him in His word appearing to put you off as an abomination in His convicting words of the Law. So much does He love you and desires to keep you close to Him that when you fail and strike out at Him with false accusations, in Christ Jesus your Savior, He forgives you. Through faith in Jesus you are dressed in His righteousness, for He always put the best construction on everything, even when His Father cast Him off, charging Him with all your sin. Jesus always trusted His Father's will was good and right – this righteous fulfillment of the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment is now yours.

Any interpretation of God's motives toward you other than that He is eternally merciful and gracious is completely fabricated by the devil, the unbelieving world and your own sinful flesh. The Lord preserve you in His grace from drawing such false conclusions, which would cause you to turn against Him in everlasting contempt and torment. Pray that He preserve in you the faith of this Canaanite woman, but be prepared for the same testing she endured. However, in His great love for you, He will always provide a way of escape even in the apparent crumbs of His grace that fall from His table, which are more than able to grant you everlasting life. Amen.