

# Homily 52 on Matthew

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's Homily 52 on Matthew emphasizes the importance of faith, persistence in prayer, and humility through the story of the Canaanite woman seeking healing for her daughter.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:3, Matthew 15:21, Matthew 15:23-28, Mark 7:24, John 9:32

**Topics:** "Faith And Humility", "Persevering Prayer"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the powerful encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman, highlighting her unwavering faith, humility, and persistence in seeking mercy for her daughter. Despite initial silence and apparent rejection, the woman's faith and wisdom lead to her daughter's healing, showcasing the importance of perseverance in prayer and trust in God's compassion. Chrysostom emphasizes the contrast between the woman's faith and the disbelief of the Jews, illustrating how humility and steadfast faith can move the heart of Jesus and bring about miraculous healing. The sermon also delves into the significance of almsgiving as a divine art that surpasses all other human arts, emphasizing its eternal impact and the importance of generosity and compassion towards others.

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## Transcript

Matthew 15:21-22.

And Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

But Mark says, that He could not be hid, Mark 7:24 though He had entered into the house. And why did He go at all into these parts? When He had set them free from the observance of meats, then to the Gentiles also He goes on to open a door, proceeding in due course; even as Peter, having been first directed to annul this law, is sent to Cornelius.

But if any one should say, How then, while saying to His disciples, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, does He Himself admit her? first, this would be our reply, that what He enjoined upon His disciples, He was not Himself also tied to; secondly, that not in order to preach did He depart; which indeed Mark likewise intimating said, He even hid Himself, yet was not concealed.

For as His not hastening to them first was a part of the regular course of His proceedings, so to drive them away when coming to Him was unworthy of His love to man. For if the flying ought to be pursued, much more ought the pursuing not to be avoided.

See at any rate how worthy this woman is of every benefit. For she dared not even come to Jerusalem, fearing, and accounting herself unworthy. For were it not for this, she would have come there, as is evident both from her present earnestness, and from her coming out of her own coasts.

And some also taking it as an allegory say, that when Christ came out of Judea, then the church ventured to approach Him, coming out herself also from her own coasts. For it is said, Forget your own people and your father's house. For both Christ went out of His borders, and the woman out of her borders, and so it became possible for them to fall in with each other: thus He says, Behold a woman of Canaan coming out of her own coasts.

The evangelist speaks against the woman, that he may show forth her marvellous act, and celebrate her praise the more. For when you hear of a Canaanitish woman, you should call to mind those wicked nations, who overset from their foundations the very laws of nature. And being reminded of these, consider also the power of Christ's advent. For they who were cast out, that they might not pervert any Jews, these appeared so much better disposed than the Jews, as even to come out of their coasts, and approach Christ; while those were driving Him away, even on His coming unto them.

2. Having then come unto Him, she says nothing else, but Have mercy on me, and by her cry brings about them many spectators. For indeed it was a pitiful spectacle to see a woman crying aloud in so great affliction, and that woman a mother, and entreating for a daughter, and for a daughter in such evil case: she not even venturing to bring into the Master's sight her that was possessed, but leaving her to lie at home, and herself making the entreaty.

And she tells her affliction only, and adds nothing more; neither does she drag the physician to her house, like that nobleman, saying, Come and lay your hand upon her, and, Come down ere my child die.

But having described both her calamity, and the intensity of the disease, she pleads the Lord's mercy, and cries aloud; and she says not, Have mercy on my daughter, but, Have mercy on me. For she indeed is insensible of her disease, but it is I that suffer her innumerable woes; my disease is with consciousness, my madness with perception of itself.

2. But He answered her not a word. Matthew 15:23

What is this new and strange thing? The Jews in their perverseness He leads on, and blaspheming He entreats them, and tempting Him He dismisses them not; but to her, running unto Him, and entreating, and beseeching Him, to her who had been educated neither in the law, nor in the prophets, and was exhibiting so great reverence; to her He does not vouchsafe so much as an answer.

Whom would not this have offended, seeing the facts so opposite to the report? For whereas they had heard, that He went about the villages healing, her, when she had come to Him, He utterly repels. And who would not have been moved by her affliction, and by the supplication she made for her daughter in such evil case? For not as one worthy, nor as demanding a due, not so did she approach Him, but she entreated that she might find mercy, and merely gave a lamentable account of her own affliction; yet is she not counted worthy of so much as an answer.

Perhaps many of the hearers were offended, but she was not offended. And why say I, of the hearers? For I suppose that even the very disciples must have been in some degree affected at the woman's affliction, and have been greatly troubled, and out of heart.

Nevertheless not even in this trouble did they venture to say, Grant her this favor, but, His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away, for she cries after us. For we too, when we wish to persuade any one, oftentimes say the contrary.

But Christ says, I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Matthew 15:24

What then did the woman, after she heard this? Was she silent, and did she desist? Or did she relax her earnestness? By no means, but she was the more instant. But it is not so with us; rather, when we fail to obtain, we desist; whereas it ought to make us the more urgent.

And yet, who would not have been driven to perplexity by the word which was then spoken? Why His silence were enough to drive her to despair, but His answer did so very much more. For together with herself, to see them also in utter perplexity that were pleading with her, and to hear that the thing is even impossible to be done, was enough to cast her into unspeakable perplexity.

Yet nevertheless the woman was not perplexed, but on seeing her advocates prevail nothing, she made herself shameless with a goodly shamelessness.

For whereas before this she had not ventured so much as to come in sight (for she cries, it is said, after us), when one might expect that she should rather depart further off in utter despair, at that very time she comes nearer, and worships, saying, Lord, help me. Matthew 15:25

What is this, O woman? Have you then greater confidence than the apostles? More abundant strength? Confidence and strength, says she, by no means; nay, I am even full of shame. Yet nevertheless my very shamelessness do I put forward for entreaty; He will respect my confidence. And what is this? Heardest thou not Him saying, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel? I heard, says she, but He Himself is Lord. Wherefore neither did she say, Entreat and beseech, but, Help me.

3. What then says Christ? Not even with all this was He satisfied, but He makes her perplexity yet more intense again, saying,

It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs. Matthew 15:26

And when He vouchsafed her a word, then He smote her more sharply than by His silence. And no longer does He refer the cause to another, nor say, I am not sent, but the more urgent she makes her entreaty, so much the more does He also urge His denial. And He calls them no longer sheep, but children, and her a dog.

What then says the woman? Out of His own very words she frames her plea. Why, though I be a dog, said she, I am not an alien.

Justly did Christ say, For judgment am I come. John 9:32 The woman practises high self-command, and shows forth all endurance and faith, and this, receiving insult; but they, courted and honored, requite it with the contrary.

For, that food is necessary for the children, says she, I also know; yet neither am I forbidden, being a dog. For were it unlawful to receive, neither would it be lawful to partake of the crumbs; but if, though in scanty measure, they ought to be partakers, neither am I forbidden, though I be a dog; nay, rather on this ground am I most surely a partaker, if I am a dog.

With this intent did Christ put her off, for He knew she would say this; for this did He deny the grant, that He might exhibit her high self-command.

For if He had not meant to give, neither would He have given afterwards, nor would He have stopped her mouth again. But as He does in the case of the centurion, saying, I will come and heal him, Matthew 8:7 that we might learn the godly fear of that man, and might hear him say, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof; Matthew 8:8 and as He does in the case of her that had the issue of blood, saying, I perceive that virtue has gone out of me, Luke 8:46 that He might make her faith manifest; and as in the case of the Samaritan woman, that He might show how not even upon reproof she desists: John 4:18 so also here, He would not that so great virtue in the woman should be hid. Not in insult then were His words spoken, but calling her forth, and revealing the treasure laid up in her.

But do thou, I pray you, together with her faith see also her humility. For He had called the Jews children, but she was not satisfied with this, but even called them masters; so far was she from grieving at the praises of others.

Why, the dogs also, says she, eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Matthew 15:27

Do you see the woman's wisdom, how she did not venture so much as to say a word against it, nor was stung by other men's praises, nor was indignant at the reproach? Do you see her constancy? He said, It is not meet, and she said, Truth, Lord; He called them children, but she masters; He used the name of a dog, but she added also the dog's act. Do you see this woman's humility?

Hear the proud language of the Jews. We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man; John 8:33 and, We be born of God. John 8:41 But not so this woman, rather she calls herself a dog, and them masters; so for this she became a child. What then says Christ? O woman, great is your faith. Matthew 15:28

Yea, therefore did He put her off, that He might proclaim aloud this saying, that He might crown the woman.

Be it unto you even as you will. Now what He says is like this: Your faith indeed is able to effect even greater things than these; nevertheless, Be it unto you even as you will.

This was akin to that voice that said, Let the Heaven be, and it was. Genesis 1:3

And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Do you see how this woman too contributed not a little to the healing of her daughter? For to this purpose neither did Christ say, Let your little daughter be made whole, but, Great is your faith, be it unto you even as you will; to teach you that the words were not used at random, nor were they flattering words, but great was the power of her faith.

The certain test, however, and demonstration thereof, He left to the issue of events. Her daughter accordingly was straightway healed.

But mark thou, I pray you, how when the apostles had failed, and had not succeeded, this woman had success. So great a thing is assiduity in prayer. Yea, He had even rather be solicited by us, guilty as we are, for those who belong to us, than by others in our behalf. And yet they had more liberty to speak; but she exhibited much endurance.

And by the issue He also excused Himself to His disciples for the delay, and showed that with reason He had not assented to their request.

4. And Jesus departed from thence, and came near unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into the mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto Him, having with them those that were lame, blind, maimed, dumb; and cast them at His feet; and He healed them, insomuch that the multitudes wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see, and they glorified the God of Israel.

Now He goes about Himself, now sits awaiting the diseased, and has the lame brought up unto the mountain. And no longer do they touch so much as His garment, but advance a higher step, being cast at His feet: and they showed their faith doubly, first, by going up into the mountain though lame, then by wanting nothing else but to be cast at His feet only.

And great was the marvel and strange, to see them that were carried walking, the blind needing not any to lead them by the hand. Yea, both the multitude of the healed, and the facility of their cure amazed them.

Do you see, how the woman indeed He healed with so much delay, but these immediately? Not because these are better than she is, but because she is more faithful than they. Therefore, while in her case He defers and delays, to manifest her constancy; on these He bestows the gift immediately, stopping the mouths of the unbelieving Jews, and cutting away from them every plea. For the greater favors one has received, so much the more is he liable to punishment, if he be insensible, and the very honor make him no better. Therefore you see the rich also proving wicked, are more punished than the poor, for not being softened even by their prosperity. For tell me not that they gave alms. Since if they gave not in proportion to their substance, not even so shall they escape; our alms being judged not by the measure of our gifts, but by the largeness of our mind. But if these suffer punishment, much more they that are eager about unnecessary things; who build houses of two and three stories, but despise the hungry; who give heed to covetousness, but neglect almsgiving.

5. But since the discourse has fallen on almsgiving, come then, let us resume again today that argument, which I was making three days ago concerning benevolence, and left unfinished. You remember, when lately I was speaking of vanity about your shoes, and of that empty trouble, and the luxury of the young, that it was from almsgiving that our discourse passed on to those charges against you. What were the matters then at that time brought forward? That almsgiving is a kind of art, having its workshop in Heaven, and for its teacher, not man, but God. Then inquiring what is an art, and what not an art, we came upon fruitless labors, and evil devices, among which we made mention also of this art concerning men's shoes.

Have ye then recalled it to mind? Come now, let us today also resume what we then said, and let us show how almsgiving is an art, and better than all arts. For if the peculiarity of art is to issue in something useful, and nothing is more useful than almsgiving, very evidently this is both an art, and better than all arts. For it

makes for us not shoes, nor does it weave garments, nor build houses that are of clay; but it procures life everlasting, and snatches us from the hands of death, and in either life shows us glorious, and builds the mansions that are in Heaven, and those eternal tabernacles.

This suffers not our lamps to go out, nor that we should appear at the marriage having filthy garments, but washes them, and renders them purer than snow. For though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as snow. not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-52-on-matthew/>

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