

“Your Just Deserts”

Matthew 15:21-28

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

An old-timey phrase that I don't hear all that often anymore these days is when you describe someone as getting their “just deserts.” No, it's not about cheesecake, cookies, ice cream, or candy. It's about someone getting what they deserve, whether that be a reward or a punishment. Do something exceptional at work? Get your just deserts of promotion or a pay increase. Break the law? Get sentenced to time in prison or pay a fine for your transgression. Sometimes your just deserts are even pre-defined for you based upon who you are or are not. Which is precisely what is described in our text this morning.

Jesus is walking with His disciples and He is approached by a woman, a Canaanite Gentile, who seeks His help for her daughter who is severely oppressed by a demon. One might expect Jesus to respond with compassion and answer her plea with mercy. After all, He's been casting out demons and healing people all over the countryside. But instead, He remains silent. Not a word is spoken to this woman that cries out after Jesus and His followers, until the disciples beg Him to send her away. And His response is intriguing. He says that He has only been sent to the lost sheep of Israel. He didn't tell her to “get lost,” as the disciples wanted Him to do, but He tells her “No.” She is not of the house of Israel, and thus she is little more than a dog that roams around under the table. Despite the station she has in life, she persists in acknowledging the Lord as the Son of David and the only one who can bring relief for her and her daughter. Her just deserts are to be cast out of the promised land, just as her ancestors were by Joshua and the armies of Israel. And yet, in the end, she receives her desire and her daughter was healed instantly. Her just deserts have now become the blessings of faith in Christ.

And that is the truth of who each and every one of you are as well. You are those who deserve to be cast out of the Lord's presence as those who deserve death and condemnation for your sins. The lot of every man, woman, and child since the fall into sin should be nothing but anguish, fear, and hopelessness because of the sin of Adam that dwells in all of mankind. If left to stand on your own and face the consequences of that sin that has been handed down to you, you would fall every time, and there is no overcoming sin on your own. Because your sinful flesh desires nothing but more sin. It doesn't seek out the Lord when you need His healing hand as the woman does in our text. It seeks out worldly answers to your worldly problems—fleshly answers to things of the flesh—and “those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom 8:8).” Yet it persists and

never gives up in its endeavor to turn you inward to yourself and away from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

In the face of your sin, it's very easy to get offended and defensive when they are called to account. Your sinful flesh is very good at making you think that you are justified in doing whatever it is you have done. But the Law leaves no room for defensiveness. It shows you your sin and the knowledge of that sin brings shame upon your head when you have to look into that mirror and see the depravity that you cannot escape. That shame and despair over sin is what moves you to repent, to accept that you are not worthy to stand before God in your sinful nature. The answer to that though is not to retreat into yourself and seek the guidance of others, but to fall at the feet of your Savior and persist in asking His healing hand of forgiveness to be upon you.

It would have been very easy for this woman in her sinful flesh to take the harsh words of Jesus and play the victim. "How dare He speak to me that way and call me a dog!" No one likes to be downtrodden and told that they are less than others. The shock of such a statement to her from One she believed could help her daughter must have been difficult, but still, she persisted. Because she was not coming to the Lord as one who sought relief for her flesh, or the flesh of her daughter. They were troubled in spirit because of sin, and sin can only be relieved by the one true God. She comes to Son of David in repentance, in humility, knowing that her sin makes her unworthy to be in the presence of His righteousness. She acknowledges that she is indeed a dog at the feet of her Master, and is willing to take the lowliest crumbs that she can get.

She comes to the Lord as one who lives according to the Spirit who lives in her. She is renewed as one who has faith, which Jesus acknowledges in her as the source of her hope in Him. "O woman, great is your faith!" Faith is the doer. It is the thing that sustains the troubled heart of the believer, and it is the only reason you can beseech the Lord for His mercy. The woman in her flesh was indeed not worthy of Jesus' help. That is the point of the Lord calling out her lineage as a Canaanite. The flesh she bears is not what will save her, though. It is her faith that has saved her and made her daughter well. Christ granted her request because of His love for her and for her daughter. He grants the same to you for the exact same reason. You are forgiven because He seeks to show you His great love for you. Not because of your great faith, or because of your ability to keep asking, or your ability to be sorrowful. Only through His love and grace are you reconciled to God despite your sinful flesh.

The love of God for you is why you are made righteous. Your love for God is a fruit of faith, and never the source of why He does what He does. The woman that

follows Jesus incessantly indeed loved her Savior, acknowledging Him to be the Son of God and the Lord of all, but that was only because she had faith. Her daughter was relieved of the demon because of His love for His children. As one who dwells in the faith, she deserved His mercy not because of her doing, but because of what Christ has done already. Even then, before the darkness of Calvary had come, she was granted her request for the sake of the One who was crucified for her sins. For Christ was slain before the foundation of the world, that all those who believe in Him would be holy and blameless before the Father in heaven.

You don't have to try and try and try to be worthy of His gifts. You are made to be worthy of His gifts even though your flesh makes you unworthy. Because of His great love for you, He has imputed His righteousness to you, and thus made you righteous as a precious gift. It is not something you earn or eventually reach a state of being closer to it as you do your good works and stack up a bank of righteous deeds. The only deed that matters is the work of Jesus at the cross, where He died the death that you deserve in order that you would be given nothing but the love of God instead of His wrath. And His love is shown to you in that He takes the wrath upon Himself willingly, heaps it all upon His own Son in your place.

All too often Christians forget that your just deserts are the opposite of what you receive so freely from your Lord. As one who bears the sinful flesh, you deserve nothing but death and condemnation, and yet, you receive only God's grace and mercy for the sake of Jesus. The Canaanite woman in our text didn't receive the grace of Jesus Christ because she had great faith, as if she earned the right to receive the crumbs that fall from the master's table. She was given relief, and her daughter given relief, because of the love of God in Christ Jesus. For the sake of His only begotten Son, who would go to the cross to redeem the world, He imparted pardon and peace to this woman. Jesus acknowledges her great faith, thus negating her status as a dog, and instead showing her to be a child who receives the good bread from the table.

In your sinful flesh, you are nothing more than a Canaanite Gentile—a dog that must pick up the crumbs that fall from the table. But you are a baptized child of God, one whom He has claimed as His own because of His divine love and mercy. Because you have been claimed as His adopted sons, you are members of the house of Israel, the true Israel which is all believers of all times and places. That is who you have been made to be, despite the reality that you still battle and bear the sinful flesh that would seek to make you otherwise. The bread of your Master's table is given to you because you are His beloved son with whom He is well-pleased. He gives you the bread of life in the Supper you come here to receive today, as He gives you the very body and blood of Jesus

for the forgiveness of all your sins. The promise of everlasting life is yours as you are clothed in the white robe of Christ's righteousness.

Your just deserts have become what Christ deserves as one who has been received into His Kingdom as a son of God. The inheritance of Jesus is your inheritance according to the Lord's great mercy upon you. No matter what you deserve in the flesh, you now walk according to the Spirit, as Paul says in Romans 8. You are made new—made to be perfect in the sight of your Heavenly Father. That is the treasure of each and every one of you. You know without a doubt, because of the promises of Christ, that you will dwell in His eternal presence. You will be called home to the heavenly mansion of the Lord, where you will live in the light of His glory with the whole host of saints and angels forevermore. Amen.