

## Wrestling with God 12.10.17 (Mark 7:24-30; Matt. 15:21-28)

This passage of Mark's Gospel contains a strange encounter between a Gentile woman and Jesus, in which He rebuffs her desperate plea for help and insults her, before finally giving in. What explains Jesus' initial refusal and rudeness?

### **“To the Jew First...”**

The answer to why Jesus initially refused the woman's request has to do with the focus of Jesus' **mission**. Jesus gives two reasons for refusing her request for help:

- He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of **Israel** (Matt. 15:24)
- It is not right to take the **children's** bread and throw it to the **dogs** (Mark 7:27)

These two statements speak to the privilege and priority of Israel in being the first to hear the preaching of the gospel of the **kingdom** and receive the ministry of the **Messiah** (cf. Matt. 10:5-6; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16).

### **A Matter of Infinite Importance**

The reason for Jesus' apparent rudeness has to do with the nature of true **faith**. By throwing these obstacles in the woman's way, Jesus is calling forth from her a true faith that **desperately**, **tenaciously**, **perseveringly** clings to Christ as the soul's only hope. This passage is immediately relevant, because the questions of what is true faith and whether or not I have it are matters of **infinite** importance.

### **“I Will Not Let You Go Unless You Bless Me”**

The story of Jacob in **Genesis 32** is the necessary background to understanding Jesus' interaction with the Syrophoenician woman. In that passage, God **wrestled** with Jacob in order call forth from him a desperate, tenacious, persevering faith that receives the divine **blessing**.

### **“O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!”**

Jesus' encounter with this woman is another wrestling match. She refuses to let go of Jesus unless He **blesses** her, thus displaying her great **faith**. That is what great faith does. It clings to Jesus as the only **hope**, and will not let Him go until He gives you the blessing of His **grace**. This is the kind of faith Jesus calls forth from you.