Text: Matthew 15:21-28
Title: "The Power of Praying Mom"

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – John Ortberg, in one of his books, tells about a stay-at-home mom who has an unusual way of answering when people ask about her profession. When someone asks, "And what is it that you do, my dear?" she would respond, "I am socializing two Homo sapiens into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might be instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia that God willed from the beginning of creation."

> Then the mom would ask the other person, "And what do you do?"

Well, there are a lot of things that moms do.

INTERVIEW - Well some of the most important work a mother does is to pray for her children. I know that we have some remarkable praying women in our church, and I could have called on any number of them to do what I'm about to ask these women to do. Joining me on the platform this morning are four very important ladies in my life. This is Doris Cranford, my mother-in-law … her daughter (my wife) Nan, and her daughter (and mine) Ashley, and her daughter (and my granddaughter Caroline). There's a remarkable legacy woven through the lives of these ladies.

> Doris, Nan is just one of your four kids, but as she came along and grew up, how do you recall praying for her? Nan, you were blessed to grow up with a praying mom. And through the years we have prayed for both of our two daughters, but as a mom, how did you pray Ashley and Allison. Ashley, this is all very new to you still. Praying as a young mom, how do you pray for your daughter Caroline? Thank you so much sharing this morning.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 15:21. You know there are many remarkable women in the Bible. Today, I want us to study the life of a woman who may seem a rather unlikely role model of a praying mother. After all, she isn't one of the godly Jewish women with a heritage of faith. She's actually a Canaanite woman, a descendent of the pagans who inhabited this region all the way back when Joshua led the people in to possess the Promised Land. So she doesn't have the advantage of a legacy of faith … but an encounter with Jesus Christ would change all of that for her. Let's read Matthew 15:21-28.

Let's see what we can learn from this encounter between the Lord Jesus and a praying mom.

1. A DIVINE <u>PRESENCE</u> (v.21)

Matthew 15:21 (NIV) - Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Let's focus on the star of the story. We learn from the woman, but the hero is Jesus. It's His divine presence that makes the difference in her family, and for her daughter.

Mark, in His Gospel, says that Jesus had gone up along the Mediterranean Sea and into a certain house to escape the crowds; but it states specifically that Jesus "could not keep his presence a secret" (Mark 7:24).

And as we think today about prayer, and specifically the power of praying mom, we know that the power is not in the mom, but in the personal presence of the Savior. That's what prayer is … it is deliberately going into the presence of the Lord and having a conversation with Him. What a privilege!

ILLUSTRATION – Occasionally I go out to breakfast or lunch with a group of people and when the food arrives there's a little ritual that takes place. You start seeing thumbs pop up round the table. There's one of us though that is engrossed in our food, and whether or not the server got our order right, that we forget the ritual. You see, the last one to put their thumb up has to lead in prayer. Did you hear what I said? The last one to put their thumb up *has* to lead in prayer … as though the punishment for not being as quick as the others is that you have to pray.

No, prayer is a great privilege where the personal presence of Jesus Christ is so real to you, and you begin to carry on a conversation with Him.

Now, this woman, hearing that Jesus was near, left her home and went into the presence of Jesus about an extremely urgent matter. And that's the next thing I want you to see…

2. A DESPERATE <u>SITUATION</u> (vv.22-25)

Matthew 15:22 (NIV) - A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."

"Suffering terribly from demon-possession…" – translates two words that literally mean "badly demonized."

Now many of us are not all that familiar with this kind of demonic activity, and some biblical scholars explain it away as just being the superstitious explanations of ignorant people. But I take seriously the biblical description of what was going on, and it says there was a spiritual battle raging in the soul of this little girl. We're not told exactly what the symptoms were for this little girl, but there could have been any number of symptoms that we see elsewhere in the Gospels: uncontrolled behavior, violent outbursts, self-destructive actions, convulsions, screaming, and more.

You know it must have ripped apart the heart of this mother to watch her little girl be tormented in such a way. The situation was desperate … and so was the mother as she came into the presence of Jesus.

The mother's desperation is seen in:

- **Her <u>plea</u> (v.22)** – "crying out" means literally to scream. She prayed "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me…"

She addressed Him as Lord, Son of David, which was a messianic title. She understood that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and she cried out in His presence.

- **Her <u>persistence</u>** – the imperfect tense of "crying out" (v.22) indicates it was ongoing action. This is confirmed by the disciples who insist in v.23 that "she keeps crying out after us" (present tense verb).

- **Her <u>posture</u> (v.25)** – "knelt before him." In an act of reverent awe and worship she got on her knees before the Lord.

The mother threw her inhibitions aside when her desperation took over. You see, for many of us, our situation is desperate, but we aren't. We worry, we fret, we fuss, we nag … but do we pray?

There's something else we learn from this encounter. We see …

3. A DETERMINED <u>FAITH</u> (vv.26-28)

Now the immediate response of Jesus must have been disappointing to the mother.

v.23 – "Jesus did not answer a word…" Why? Well, we see as we move through the text that is was a matter of timing. Jesus was working according to a divine timetable.

Matthew 15:24 (NIV) - He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

And that's exactly true. Jesus had come to offer to His own people the kingdom promised through David centuries before. So it was inappropriate for Him to bring blessings on Gentiles before blessings fell on Israel. One day, the blessings would turn to the Gentiles. But presently, that was not the plan.

So this momentary delay was a matter of timing for Jesus who was working according to the Father's timetable.

Sometimes there are delays to God's intervention because God's timing isn't right. He is working in time and space; and God is waiting for other things to unfold. It's not that God can't do more than one thing at a time. He isn't limited by time and space, but that's the realm we live in. So timing is important.

But she is undeterred, according to v.25. She saw in Jesus the only chance for help for her child. On her knees she pleaded, "Lord, help me!"

Now listen carefully. Many people misunderstand this episode because they don't realize that Jesus already knows where this conversation is going. He's knows the faith that is taking root in this woman's heart, and He wants to give it a chance to come to full flower. So he replies to her…

Matthew 15:26 (NIV) - He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

Jesus was not being disrespectful to the woman, in spite of the fact that sometimes Jews would call Gentiles, like this woman, dogs.

> No, Jesus was picturing a family gathered at mealtime around a table, eating food provided by the head of the household. Jesus' mission was to feed the family (God's chosen people) first.

But the faith of the desperate mom bursts forth:

Matthew 15:27 (NIV) - "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Now this desperate mom was listening carefully, and saw herself in this picture. She was not a child in the family (as Jews were). She knew she wasn't worthy of the choicest morsels of food. But even she knew that the master would let the dogs enjoy the crumbs that dropped under the table.

> She was not wanting to deprive Israel of God's blessings. She was simply asking that some of the blessing be extended to her in her need.

And Jesus affirmed the woman…

Matthew 15:28 (NIV) - Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith!

Do you know that there are different degrees of faith? The Bible talks about people who have little faith. And it talks about people, like this praying mom, who had great faith. Remember, she's come, not from a heritage of faith, but from a pagan family background. But Jesus saw in her, amazingly great faith!

Everything that Jesus observed in this mother had faith written all over it. And that's what unleashes the power of God in a situation … our absolute confidence that God, and God alone is the answer to our need.

And gloriously, we see something else in the story…

4. A DELIVERED <u>CHILD</u> (v.28b)

Matthew 15:28 (NIV) - Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

CONCLUSION

So what is it that connected a powerful Savior with demonized child? A praying mom. Someone was praying. Just think of the dramatic change that came over this little girl. The entire trajectory of

her life was changed because she had a praying mom … a mom who got into the presence of the Savior in behalf of her child.

And this is just one example of the amazing difference that can be made in someone's life … a child, a neighbor, a mate, a co-worker. Think of how the trajectory of someone's life can be changed.