

“The Children's Bread” (Part 1 of 2)
Matthew 15:21-28
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Today we are going to be looking at a passage of scripture that at first glance seems rather harsh in its application by Jesus. The manner in which this Canaanite woman is treated, or appears to be treated by Jesus and His disciples seems, at first reading, to be rather rude and unfriendly.

But if God has Jesus doing something there has to be a valid reason for it, even if we don't understand. Jesus said, several times in scripture, “I do nothing unless I see my Father doing it and I say nothing unless I hear My Father saying it.”

We are going to look for that reason in this lesson and see at least one way that God draws people to Himself, extending mercy at every opportunity, so that none would be lost, while still remaining obedient to the Father.

Matthew 15:21-28

Vs. 21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. (Tyre and Sidon are North and slightly West of Jerusalem, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.)

Vs. 22 And behold, a Canaanite woman (Canaanites were a notoriously wicked and evil people)

It says a Canaanite woman came out from that region and began to cry out to Jesus saying, “have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; My daughter is cruelly (grievously vexed in the King James Version) tormented by demons. The word grievously means she was tormented day and night and was downright miserable and utterly possessed by the demons.

At this point we need to ask a few questions of this text to establish some things.

1. How did they know she was a Canaanite woman and not some woman from another culture just living in the area?
 - a. They were in her country.
 - b. She was dressed like a Canaanite woman would dress
 - c. She spoke the Canaanite language
 - d. They listened and observed her speech and actions.

Vs. 23 But He (Jesus) did not answer her a word. And His disciples kept coming to Him and kept asking, "Send her away, for she is shouting out after us."

1. Why was she not responded to? Why did Jesus not answer her even one word, especially when she cried out to Him for mercy? To understand the answer to this part of the passage we will have to go all the way back to Genesis 9:18. "Now the sons of Noah who came out of the Ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan. Way back here in Genesis, Ham, the son of Noah, the father of Canaan, walked in on his father lying in a drunken stupor and instead of protecting his father and covering his sin, he went outside and told his brothers about their naked father lying drunk inside. He mocked his father and made fun of him. When he did so, openly displaying his fathers sins to the others, he removed the protective covering of God's protection from himself and his descendents. Of course somebody snitched to Noah and upon hearing of this mocking of by his son Ham, he lays a curse upon Ham's son and all of his descendents. "The sins of the fathers will be visited upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation."

Out of the loins of Hams' son, Canaan came all the tribes that would eventually be conquered by the Israelites when they came into the Promised Land, after wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. The tribes that came from the loins of Seth and Japheth conquered the "sons of Ham," causing them to be their servants, just as Noah prophesied here in Genesis. "God's Word comes to pass."

The region around Tyre and Sidon is where the descendents of Ham settled and they were knows as Canaanites. These were also the people whom God referred to when He told the Israelites to utterly destroy them from the land. Of course the Israelites disobeyed god, allowing some of the Canaanites to live. As a result they became a "thorn in the side" of the Israelites forever.

This being the historical background of this scenario in Matthew 15, we can not return to the moment in time when this Canaanite woman came to Jesus, asking for His help. Jesus had gone out from His own country and was coming into her country. And because His presence was there, because the anointing of God was present upon His life, it drew her to Him. It says she came out to meet Him. Isn't this a beautiful picture of Jesus leaving Heaven, His own country, and journeying to our country, a nation of people with the curse of sin upon them?

Here comes this woman, a Gentile, a Canaanite woman, a stranger to this band of traveling Israelites, standing a ways off evidently, for it says she cried out in a loud voice to them. You don't cry out in a loud voice when you are standing close to someone, do you? You only do so when you are a ways off from them and are trying to get their attention.

Why would she stay a ways off from them? Why wouldn't she come closer to them? We are dealing with cultural differences here.

1. She was a woman, addressing a man, in fact, a group of men. Women in those days were definitely second-class citizens and in some cultures, property, especially in the idolatrous cultures, which the Canaanites were considered to be. Israel was the only nation at that time that gave women any semblance of freedom or the right to own property, to inherit, etc. Even amongst the Jews we hear of the Pharisee praying in the temple, "Lord, I am grateful that I am not a woman, a tax gatherer, etc." Being a woman in those days was not exactly the

highest rung on the social ladder. So she approached cautiously, crying out from afar off in case she was rejected. Sometimes stones were thrown and she didn't want to be hurt, I'm sure.

2. Jesus was traveling in the company of many men, another obstacle to overcome.

3. She was a Gentile, addressing a Jew. Every culture in the world at that time knew that the Jews did not mix with other cultures, let alone a woman to a man.

4. She was a Canaanite woman! She was an object of hatred to the Jews, an object to be pitied and scorned. The Jews knew there was a curse on the Canaanites. They were a conquered people, an idolatrous people, and a spiritually unclean people. She did not want to give offense by coming to close because the Jews were in the habit of drawing up their garments or robes and drawing back and aside. They believed they would become ceremonially unclean if they were to be touched by a Canaanite, let alone a woman! She expected to be rejected! And, possibly find some stones coming her way if she was too close.

This lady has chutzpah, as the Jews say. She had "guts." She has to be desperate on behalf of her daughter to do this. She's a mother with a demon-possessed child. Not mildly possessed like we think some of ours are, sometimes, but a genuinely demon-possessed child who is in torment and agony all the time. The King James Bible says she was grievously vexed, the worst possible kind of torment. Desperation and love for her child are driving this mother. She does not care what they think or what they might do. She is reaching out to someone she has heard of that she believes can help this child.

Vs. 22 She calls upon Him, saying, "Oh Lord, Son of David." Why would she address Him in this manner when she doesn't know Him? Obviously she has heard of the miracle working power in Jesus or she would never have bothered to come out to see Him. There were many local "shamans" and witch doctors in the area and obviously they had been of no help to her. So she is coming out to meet the "man of God." She is going where she knows she can get help.

She is not calling Him her Lord and master, she is saying, according to the manners and culture of her times, "Sir, Mister, you who have authority and power over the demons! Son of David, descendent of David, Hebrew one! These are all terms of respect given to anyone in a position of authority and she is respecting His authority in the area of demon possession. She is simply showing good manners in her manner of requesting. This woman is crying out for mercy! She is putting a demand upon the anointing that is on Jesus that she has no right to ask for, and she knows it! She was not an Israelite and not entitled to the blessings of their God, but she is asking anyway! I like this woman!!

Vs. 23 But Jesus does not answer her a word. Why? Especially when she is crying out for mercy! This seems so out of character for Jesus, whose very nature is mercy. Why does He not respond to her cry for mercy for her daughter? We must remember that Jesus lived under the Old Testament and the Old Covenant teachings. He lived under the law, fulfilling it for us. But why wouldn't He at least answer her?

The answer to this question can be found in Deuteronomy 7:1-2.

Vs. 1 “When the Lord your God shall bring you into the land that you are entering to possess it, and shall clear away many nations before you. The Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you. (7 being the number of completion, meaning anything, any power the enemy of God can send against you.)

Vs. 2 And when the Lord your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor (no mercy) to them.

So Jesus, in obedience to the Word of God, was turning a deaf ear to her plea for mercy. She could get neither alms nor an answer from Him. He knew the scripture and was obedient to it. Even the disciples, knowing that she was a hated Canaanite, implored Jesus to tell her to go away. Can't you just hear the disciples whispering to one another, saying, “Who is this bothersome Canaanite woman? How dare she call out to the Lord! She isn't even a Jewess. She is embarrassing the master, not to mention us! But this little Canaanite woman had courage. She was following after them, crying out in a loud voice, imploring Jesus to help her daughter. She would not allow herself to be offended because her need was too great and too urgent. She swallowed her pride and just kept on coming! This is how Jesus wants us to come after Him.

If you are sincere in your request, keep on pursuing the Lord. Put Him in remembrance of His Word. Don't let the enemy rob you by causing you to take offense. Don't allow him to be a dream killer and a vision stomper, pursue the Lord! Keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. This woman continued to pursue and call out for help. The words spoken against her did not stop her. The stronger the burden or need, the more we need to pray for it. It is the will of the Lord that we continue in prayer, that we be insistent in prayer by praying always and fainting not (Luke 18:1-8).

This woman didn't become angry with Jesus or even blame him. She didn't charge him with unkindness, ethnic harassment or even the male-female agenda. She understood His culture and didn't blame Him for living up to it. Rather, she looked to herself, thinking that perhaps she hadn't been reverent enough or humble enough and now she comes to plead even more humbly.

When the answers to our prayers are deferred, that is the time to pray and pursue even more fervently. Disappointments in life should drive us to our knees even more. Christ, in his agony in the garden didn't become angry with God when His request to have the “cup of death” removed from Him. Instead, He prayed more and more urgently that He would be able to withstand the temptation to run away from the cross. He submitted His will to the will of the Father. He prayed fervently until He knew what the will of the Father was and then He submitted to it.

This Canaanite woman continues on after them, in spite of being snubbed and the admonitions of the disciples to leave them alone. According to the text she must have been physically pursuing them, because it says, “they kept on asking Jesus to send her away.” She had to have been around for awhile to have this response. They were sick of her following them and crying out to the Lord for help.

God loves it when we won't give up. He loves it when we pursue Him, when it seems He is not answering or hearing us. "If you seek Me, you will find Me; If you will look for Me with your whole heart, I will make myself known to you." God woos us, always staying just a little bit ahead, so as to draw us into the depths of Himself so that we will not always stay in the shallow waters of self. Jesus is not responding to need here, is He? The point being made here is this. Jesus knows the heart of this woman and sees beyond what she can see of herself. Her entire focus is the need of her daughter, while Jesus sees that her need is even greater. He is not responding to her in order to cause her to pursue after Him, bring her face to face with her creator.

Remember, earlier I told you that she was not calling Him Lord, meaning God? She was simply addressing Him in a respectful manner, just as she would approach anyone who was in the position of offering her help. She didn't understand what her real need was, which was the salvation of her soul. Jesus knows each of our hearts. Even as believers we can be standing afar off from Him, crying out for what we want or need. In reality God is using the situations in our lives to bring us face to face with Him so we will understand what HE is saying our need is. He is just waiting for us to ask for His help in meeting that need. The question we need to ask ourselves is this: "are we afar off from Him, or are we of the inner household? We may be His children, as all humans are the offspring of His creation, but are we of His household? Are we the sons and daughters who remain in His house or are we like the prodigal who goes off into the world to "do our own thing?"

Even if we are of His household, we may still be living life according to the ways of the world and as such do not have the fullness of the blessings of being at the banqueting table He has provided for us. We might even be sitting at that table, but perhaps we doubt His ability in a particular area of our lives. We might doubt His desire for us nor choose not to walk in obedience. We may be in the house, possibly even standing in the kitchen, but we go to bed each night because we do not have the intimacy with Him that we are "starving for."

**Blessings & Love,
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