

The Canaanite Woman

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[0 : 00] Now, seeking God's help, let's turn to the passage we read earlier in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 15, and from verse 22 or 21.

Then 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, and so on.

The story of the Canaanite woman is one of the most remarkable and reassuring stories in the Gospels.

It's remarkable because she is one of the first non-Jewish persons that we see coming to Jesus. And it's reassuring because in this incident we are shown how the Lord answers her prayer on behalf of her daughter.

And that ought to give comfort and encouragement to any among ourselves who may be burdened for others before God.

[1 : 19] The first thing that I would like to consider with you from the narrative is this. The place where the incident occurs. Jesus departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

That was in northern Galilee, a community that was comprised largely of Gentiles. A community where lived people whom the Jews had little or no time for.

And yet we find Jesus has time for this place. Jesus goes into this community in order that there people might experience his blessing.

According to the Old Testament, Tyre and Sidon had introduced Baal worship to Israel. According to the scriptures, it is clear that they were expelled and banished by those who truly worshipped Jehovah.

And yet in this unlikely community, God has his own. Perhaps back in the days of the psalmist, we were encouraged to believe that God was going to bless from among the people of this area.

[2 : 53] Well now Jesus goes into this community.

And Jesus transcends the barriers erected by men in order to bring God's blessing to this place. He wasn't going to stay here for very long. But during his time in Tyre and in Sidon, an opportunity was presenting itself to the local people.

We can say, applying this to ourselves, that we are equally undeserving of God's presence.

And yet for many, many years now, God has favoured our land with the gospel. God has given us opportunity upon opportunity to get to know himself.

[4 : 02] Jesus of Nazareth has passed by more times than we can calculate. Jesus of Nazareth is passing by this congregation this morning.

And just as in Tyre and Sidon, so here in the free north, Jesus of Nazareth is willing to make himself known to sinners.

In spite of our indifference, in spite of our unbelief, in spite of the fact that we don't deserve it, he is here, just as surely as he was in Tyre and Sidon on this occasion.

But next we see the passion who approaches Jesus. We're told that she was a woman of Canaan. One of the cursed races, banned from Palestine in the days of Joshua, because they had corrupted the worship of Israel.

According to Mark, she was a Greek, maybe even speaking the language, coming from a community conquered by Alexander the Great.

[5 : 22] Here she comes, a passion whom the Jews had no time for, a passion whom they were regarded as a heathen, a passion who represents a hopeless class.

And yet she comes to Jesus Christ. This woman reminds us surely of the way things were with ourselves, of the way things may still be with some of us this morning.

If we're not in Christ, then just as surely as this woman was an alien from the Commonwealth of Israel, so are we.

A foreigner and a stranger, as far as God's people were concerned. That's the passion who comes. That's the passion whom Jesus is going to deal with. And if that is descriptive of you this morning, then Jesus is here for you.

[6 : 30] She hears of Jesus Christ. And she comes in her need to the Saviour. Her daughter is in a bad way.

She's demon-possessed. She's not able to help herself. And her mother can't do very much to help her either. And so her mother realises that there's only one thing for it.

And that is to bring her daughter in prayer to Jesus. She's heard of this Jesus. She's heard of his compassion.

She's heard that he's tearing. She's heard that he's committed to undertaking for the oppressed. And so she comes, showing that her trust is in him on behalf of her daughter.

Her daughter couldn't come, wouldn't come, to plead her own case. And so her mother comes and pleads in her stead.

[7 : 43] Maybe some of you this morning have loved ones who won't come to Christ and who won't make their needs known before him.

But you are bringing their needs before him. You are coming burdened for them. And you are encouraged to come just as surely as she was encouraged to come believing that Jesus is the Lord, the Messiah, the Son of David.

And so we've seen the place and we've seen the passion. Now let's listen to her plea as she approaches Christ. What does she say? She cried to him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.

My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. She'd heard of Jesus. According to Mark, she fell at his feet, showing her reverence, showing her humility, showing that she's prepared to submit, to her's will.

She cries, suggesting the urgency of the situation, suggesting her earnestness, and what she says is this, Have mercy on me.

[9 : 19] By using the word mercy, she shows that she realises that she doesn't deserve God's answer. she doesn't merit it.

If he's going to respond, then it will be solely on the grounds of his mercy. And that's the only basis on which we can plead for ourselves and for others before God.

the fact that he is merciful, that he is prepared to show favour to the undeserving. We come with no merits of our own to present.

We come pleading his mercy and his mercy alone. And we're encouraged to come this morning because our God is the Father of mercy.

He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is himself the very embodiment of the mercy of God.

[10 : 31] and she asks for mercy for herself. But I thought you said she was pleading for her daughter. Isn't it strange that she should say have mercy on me if really she's concerned for her daughter?

Well, no one who's been through this experience will consider her words strange. because when you're really burdened on behalf of others it's as if they become part of yourself and perhaps in some respects you feel their need more deeply than you would even feel your own need.

A parent will feel the need of his child of her child in many instances more than the child will be conscious of need and will plead for the child as if pleading for oneself.

And if you know anything of what intercession is about you can understand in your own soul what this woman of Canaan is going through.

Pleading for her daughter and identifying herself with her daughter in her request have mercy on me and what's her hope it's this oh lord son of David I am ready to acknowledge that you're lord that you have the right to do with me and my daughter as you please but I have this encouragement in calling on you lord that you are the son of David that you are messiah that you are the one who has come to help the helpless to give hope to the hopeless to bring men and women to god to show what god is like in all his love and in all his grace in all his mercy in all his compassion in all his concern and I am prepared to believe that you are that kind of lord gentile though I am stranger to

Israel though I be yet I believe who you are and I believe in what you're able to do just as surely as any

[13:06] Israelite does and I come and I plead for my nearest and dearest for this darling daughter of mine in her demon possession and I plead that you lord would have mercy upon us perhaps this morning there are some here who have loved ones who are in a similar state of spiritual darkness they're in the grip of the enemy and they don't even know it and if you try telling them they'll simply mock they don't believe for a moment that they're in such a perilous and precarious spiritual condition but you who have had your eyes opened by god you see them as they can't see themselves you see them in that lostness you see them in the very bosom of their father the devil and if you see your loved ones in that condition then you cannot but be constrained by the love of Christ to pray to Christ on their behalf and you will do all you can to bring them to Jesus you will plead their case before God you might not be able to speak to them about God but you can speak to God about them and if you're a Christian this morning then you have all the covenant promises of God's word to plead before him and you are responsible this morning before God as I am with you for your offspring if you've got little children today don't adopt the attitude that is so prevalent in our day let them choose for themselves when they get older they will choose but they'll make the wrong choice unless

God intervenes because by nature we're all prone to go our own way and not God's way we're not to push them coercion is counterproductive as many Christian parents know to their cost and yet on the other hand we have a responsibility concerning them that we dare and evade and we can pray for them even if we're unable to speak to them about God it may be that this woman wasn't able to talk to her daughter about Jesus but she's able to talk to Jesus about her daughter and so she pleads as if pleading for herself on behalf of her loved one but her pleading isn't without its problems see the problems she faces in verse 23

Jesus doesn't answer her and his disciples tell him to send her away in verse 24 Jesus says I'm not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and in verse 26 he says it's not fitting to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs there's not much there to encourage her Jesus to begin with says nothing he's turning a deaf ear to her so it would seem it seems as if he doesn't even notice her Jesus doesn't always answer our prayers straight away by his silence he's surging her soul yes she's been tested and tried but disciples like so many disciples before and since considered her a nuisance wanted to be rid of her sometimes the church

Christians may be more off putting as far as dealing with those who are coming to Christ as concerned than the world itself sometimes we're more apt to drive people away from Christ than be used to draw people to Christ it's all very well for us to find fault with the disciples but so often our own attitudes are so very alike their attitude and Christ is here allowing this woman to cry after him he's reminding her although she seems to have grasped it already that she has no inherent right to expect him to answer but he's under no real obligation to respond to what she's saying what he says appears to sound even harsh but he's really reminding this woman of her own unworthiness and he's reminding her of the fact that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy and in [19:10] Mark's account we're told that he says let the children first be filled again seems so strange that the loving saviour should speak like that but what's he doing I believe he's doing this he's testing this woman in order to see whether or not she understands that others are more worthy than she is and whether or not she's prepared to put others before herself that's of the essence of true spirituality that we put the interests of others before our own let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus he lays all interests aside in the interests of God and his people and here this woman has been tested by Christ been tried been searched been scrutinized and she proves her worth as a true believer in

Jesus by persevering in presenting her case before him for all the problems of Jesus not answering of the disciples wanting to get rid of her and of Christ's words concerning Israel she perseveres what does she do go off in the half what's the point he's got no time for me no that's the language of unbelief but she I believe demonstrates her faith by her response what does she do then she came and worshipped him saying Lord help me in the midst of all her problems she comes to the only one whom she is persuaded is able to help and she flings herself as it were on to his mercy in humility and in reverence yes and also in agony of soul because this woman cries out help me again praying for her daughter as if praying for herself and not not only that but she accepts everything that

Jesus says to her he answered and said it's not fitting or suitable that we take the children's bread and cast it to dogs the Jews regarded the Gentiles as dogs she's been searched so that she might show what she really thought of herself and she said that's true Lord I agree I endorse everything you say wholeheartedly that's true Lord yet even I find a crumb of comfort if you pardon the pun in what you say and the crumb of comfort is this that the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table against hope she perseveres believing in hope she takes the words of Jesus and uses them as an argument for him to bless her she takes his words and uses them to her own advantage and incidentally

I think that this incident shows that Christ was concerned for the Gentiles as he was for the Jew he's not turning her away but she has passed the test and her response is similar to the response of one after whom Israel is named I will not let you go till you bless me that was what Jacob said centuries before that's exactly what this woman is saying in our story today she prevails she's not given up and by faith she overcomes every obstacle and Jesus verse 28 answered and said to her oh woman great is your faith be it to you even as you wish she is given her heart's desire her prayer has not only been heard but answered

God's word tells us that if we delight ourselves in him he'll give our heart's desire to us the scriptures encourage us to come with our own concerns and with others and present all before him and at his word men and women are healed what an encouragement we have in this incident this morning for God's people to pray and not to faint as we pray for ourselves and for others God may seem to be silent the heavens may be as brass sometimes we think

[25 : 27] God is so slow in giving me what I've asked him for but God's delays are not necessarily God's denials why does God make us wait sometimes it's purely and simply in order to develop and deepen the grace of patience in our Christian experience we never had to wait for anything then we wouldn't know what patience was the scripture says to any Christian who's waiting this morning cast not away your confidence it will be richly rewarded for you have need of patience that after you have done the will of God you will receive the promise for yet a little while and he that shall come will come and will not tarry do you thank

God this morning that he's not slack concerning his promises us men couch slackness if we got everything we asked for straight away we wouldn't appreciate the things that God wants us to receive and thank him for and we would imagine then that we were sovereign and could tell God what he gave us when to give us for us we need to be reminded that he is sovereign and that he gives what he will when he will as he will and God's people's attitude truly ought to be similar to that of our Tainanite woman this morning not my will but thine be done well I hope that this incident has been an illuminating one for us on this mothering

Sunday and I hope that it's given inspiration to any and all of us who are concerned for others before God and particularly for our offspring not to cast away our confidence we saw the place that Jesus came to a place of great need this place in which we find ourselves this morning is also a place where the need is great we saw the person who came to Jesus a woman from afar he brings the sons and daughters from afar still we've seen her pleading for others we've looked at the problems which she encountered but we saw her prevailing and we saw God Christ giving her her heart's desire here we have an illustration of paternal love

God through a believing parent often blesses children and grandchildren God is encouraging us this morning not to give up but to continue coming to him casting our cares upon him that we might know that he cares for us and even when a father's love fails and a mother's love fails we're reminded often in the scripture that as the children's chorus puts it so well God's love never fails no never fails the Lord and I finish with this has comforted his people he will have mercy on his afflicted but Zion said the Lord has forsaken me my

Lord has forgotten me can a woman forget her second child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb yet they may forget yet will I not forget thee behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands thy walls are continually before me thy children shall make haste as that proved to be the case for our friend from Canaan may it prove to be the case in your experience and mine for Jesus sake amen let's pray what a friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer

[30 : 57] Lord we come today and we cast our cares upon thee knowing that thou carest for us we ask that we might have received a word of encouragement this morning that would enable us to go on pleading on behalf of ourselves and on behalf of others and continually presenting before

heaven the promises of scripture and asking for them to be fulfilled in thy way and in accordance with thy will Lord bless us all and our families and especially any of us who may have unbelieving offspring this day bring them into the kingdom that they with us might belong to the household of faith and to the fellowship of love which is the family of God hear these our prayers and answer them beyond our asking forgiving us for our every shortcoming in our meditation in Jesus name
Amen