

O woman great is thy faith

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Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev Murdo Alex Macleod

[0 : 00] Let us turn now to consider words we will find in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 15, reading at verse 21.

Matthew 15, verse 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.

But he answered her, Not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away. For she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Then came she and worshipped, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not me to take the children's bread and to cast her to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord. Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table.

[1 : 18] Then Jesus answered and said, O woman, Great is thy pay. Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt.

We are reminded constantly in the Bible that the Lord is our only source of hope and help, comfort and salvation and blessing.

And you know that there are many passages in the scriptures which emphasize this. For example, that great passage in the Old Testament, where the Lord was known in the history of his people Israel as their saviour in a time of trouble and their hope.

Now that relationship that exists between God and the sinner is very clearly illustrated for us in this remarkable incident recorded in both Matthew and Mark's gospel.

And it was a very distressing situation. This woman who was from the region of Tyre and Sidon, as Mark refers to her as a Syrophoenician woman.

[3 : 06] This woman from that region, who was in that respect, in the eyes of the Jews, a heathen from that part of Syria.

This woman had a very, very great problem. A distressing situation. Her daughter was devil-possessed.

And she came to the Lord for help. And the confession that she makes in the cry that she uttered gives us an insight into the faith that she possessed.

And though tonight I want to concentrate with you on the tactics that were employed by our Lord to bring to light the reality of her faith, I want first of all to look with you at the evidence of her faith in the confession that she made.

She cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

[4 : 38] Now here you have in this confession two things that are always connected in any confession of faith.

There is first of all the evidence of it itself in the reference that it makes to its object. Faith is non-existent without an object.

It must centre on someone. And then you have the second element that you always have present in faith.

And it is this. Faith believes that that person can do what is required. Now just for a minute let's stop here because this is of some importance.

The question has been asked. How could this woman from this region of Syria have come to the knowledge that faith requires?

[5 : 58] The knowledge that Jesus is Lord and the son of David? Well the simple answer to that question is that we are not told. We don't know how she came to know these things about the Lord.

Sufficient for us to recognise and to accept that she had the knowledge that was necessary.

And that raises another point that has to be emphasised. You cannot have faith without a knowledge communicated to you of the one in whom you are to believe.

You know that that forms one of the great bases of the teaching of Paul in Romans chapter 10.

When he is speaking about the need to send people with the gospel to those who have never heard the gospel. And he poses this question. You see he asks how can they go with the gospel unless they be sent?

[7 : 10] In other words God commissions men to go with the gospel. God calls people to go. Then he poses another question. How can the people believe unless they hear?

And this is what gives missionary enterprise its thrust. This is why people go with the gospel to the untouched, to the unchurched, to the un-evangelised.

Because if they are going to believe they must hear about the one in whom they will believe. So ordinarily no one can come to a knowledge of Christ as saviour unless they hear about that saviour.

There must be some knowledge before a person can believe. Now that doesn't explain to us, that doesn't tell us how much knowledge a person must have.

Sufficient for us to know that they must have some knowledge of the person whom they believe. They may not need to know all that much about them.

[8 : 25] We heard two weeks ago for example at the evangelistic services. Two different ministers speaking on the same text. The cry of the thief on the cross. Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

And we heard both ministers emphasising that that thief who cried for mercy and who cried that he may be remembered. Cried to one of whom he knew.

He knew him as a Lord who possessed a kingdom. And he wanted a place in that kingdom. And you remember that it was mentioned that the thief's knowledge was not all that extensive.

But it was sufficient for him to believe in the Lord. You see a person doesn't need to know the Bible from cover to cover before he can become a believer.

A person doesn't need to know all the doctrines of grace before he can become a believer. I believe that there was a case in this, I think it was in this island. Of a good woman who was, they were in Christian fellowship and they were talking about, as they tend to talk with great prophet about these things in Christian fellowship, talking about, and the young people in the Sunday school, who are in the Sunday school and who are present here tonight will know this, some of you have been doing this of late, the offices that Christ executes as our Redeemer.

[9 : 51] He executes the office of prophet, priest and king. And they were talking about this in Christian fellowship. And this woman was asked, they were talking about their knowledge in their conversion.

And she was, some people making the point that, and this is a very valid point, and a very true one, that before you can become a Christian, or rather a Christian is a person who accepts Jesus as prophet, priest and king.

And she was asked, was that the way that she read her own experience in conversion? And this is the answer she gave, when I was converted, she said, I didn't even know that Christ had an office.

You see, she was talking about, she didn't understand it at the time. Though, as a convert, she believed all that Jesus was saying, the prophet.

She accepted him in all that he did for her, as a saviour, the priest. And she submitted herself to all his authority, as a king. She did all that in conversion.

[11 : 01] Yet, you see, her understanding of these offers at the time was non-existent. So, you see, my point is this, you need to know about the Lord as your saviour before you can believe in him.

But, the extent of your knowledge, or your knowledge need not be all that extensive, but it must be sufficient to convince you that this is the one that you need.

You see my point? And here's this woman who had this knowledge. All she knew was this, as far as we can make out. That the person to whom she cried was in her view, the Lord.

The person to whom she cried was also the Lord, who had become man, thou son of David. And this is what the Bible tells about our saviour. He's the God-man. Perhaps some of you have heard what the revered Bishop Bryle used to say about this.

I thank God, he said, that my saviour was none other than God. If he weren't God, I couldn't, I couldn't trust him.

[12 : 17] And I thank God that my saviour was the God-man. If he weren't the God-man, I couldn't dare approach him. And here is this woman, approaching this God who became man, with this plea, and this was also included in her knowledge.

She knew that he was able to help her. Lord, have mercy upon me. No faith is not exist without that either. It believes, it focuses, it centres its attention upon the person of the Son of God.

And it believes that he is able to do what is claimed. This is just, you know, the way the writer to the Hebrews sums this up. Without faith, he says, it is impossible to please.

For, and this is the point, he that cometh unto God must, and he states two things, must believe that he is, that's the first thing. And secondly, he must believe that he is the rewarder of them who diligently seek him.

And if you have faith tonight, these two things are part and partial of your faith. You believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that's the object of your faith.

[13 : 36] And you also believe that that Christ can do for you what you ask him to do. Otherwise, there's no point in coming. No point in coming at all.

And here then is a picture of a person with faith, saving faith, lays hold of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord, the Son of David, and cries to him in the knowledge and with the conviction that he is able to give what is requested.

And all that she asks is mercy or help for her daughter. Particularly, I would like to look with you tonight at the way in which our Lord tests proves the reality of this woman's faith.

Now, as we look through these, trying to continue our series and looking at particular interviews that Jesus gave and advice and counsel that he addressed to the people who came to him, here we have a person tonight, with whom the Lord dealt in a most interesting way.

And the first thing he did was this, and this may seem a contradiction itself, he did nothing. He answered her, not a word.

[15 : 10] He was silent to a request. Now, as far as I know, there are only, well, there are only two types of people anyway, but the two types to whom our Lord was silent are two very different types in the New Testament.

One was this woman, a woman of faith, the other was Herod. When Herod tried to question Jesus, he answered him, not a word.

Now, the silence of Jesus in the life of an individual can be a most alarming thing and ought to be an alarming thing. There are people like Herod who have no time for Christ, whose life is full of sin and who are consequently alienated from the Lord Jesus Christ in whose experience never a word comes from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if you are here tonight, you should be alarmed if that is your spiritual state, if the word of the Lord has never been blessed to your heart, if your soul has never responded in that thrill of faith to the call of God and the gospel and the means of grace, that is a sad commentary on your spiritual plight.

But there's another sign to this. There are other people in whose life the Lord is silent. And he is silent not because they have no time for him, not because there is sin in their life.

[17 : 02] As David expressed, if I regard sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me and the Lord will not answer me. But he is silent because he is testing the genuineness of their faith, testing the reality of the cry that emanates from their lips.

And this is the way in which he dealt with this woman. when she cried, he didn't make any attempt at all to answer her.

And you know that we sang a verse here tonight that sheds light for us upon the meaning of this experience.

And you know it comes from the life and from the experience of Jesus Christ. And when you come across any in the Bible, that illustrates the experience of Jesus, you should stop at it because it is of profound importance.

Psalm 22 that we sang here tonight to the tunes at Kilda, the opening verse of the psalm, is all about the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Do you know there are some people who believe that the Lord repeated this psalm on the cross?

[18 : 23] There are two sayings on the psalm that we hear on the cross, the opening words and the closing words. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

And the closing words of the psalm are thou hast done it, which is, and this may interest you, more or less the same as the cry that Jesus uttered, it is finished.

And it's from that that people believe that he repeated this psalm on the cross. But notice what he says, My God, my God, why do you not hear me?

I cry to thee, and thou art silent to me. Our fathers hoped in thee, they cried, and you heard them.

But I cry, and I am not heard, I am like a worm, and not a man, and not surprised as a man. But what did the Lord say, you see, in the very midst of that cry, as he cried to God, why do you not hear?

[19 : 28] Listen to what he said. But thou art holy, thou that dost inhabit Israel's praise. Our fathers hoped in thee, they hoped, and thou didst hear the cry.

What's he saying? This is what he is saying, my Lord, I'm crying, and I'm not heard, but that doesn't alter my estimate of thee. Thou art holy, and therefore I will still cry to thee.

And that is why, for example, and perhaps this may be of help, and I know I wouldn't be surprised if it would be of help to one or two of you who are here tonight, who are seeking the Lord, who know that there's something missing in your life.

You know where you're going to get it, you've been looking for it now for a while. You've been crying to God, praying, maybe no one knows that you're praying but yourself. And as far as you can judge your prayers aren't being answered, the Lord is silent to you.

And you wonder if you're asking for the right thing, or are you asking in the right way? Are you doing the right thing? Are you saying the right thing? Do you have right views of God? But have you noticed this?

[20 : 41] You think that God hasn't answered you. But have you noticed this? You still persist in asking. You still come here to look.

And you're still longing for the Lord to speak peace to your heart and to give the assurance to your spirit that you are his.

And therefore, the silence of God in answer to your prayer is no evidence that you are not seeking. It is the evidence to you that you are seeking the right thing.

Because though he hasn't answered you, you are still crying to the Lord. And that is one way in which the Lord shows the genuineness and the reality of faith.

He keeps you as it were hanging on. Keeps you looking. Keeps you seeking. Keeps you ever aware of your need. So you know in a measure at least what Job said.

[21 : 53] Though he slay me, yet I will trust him. Put it another way. you would rather seek the Lord.

Though as far as you know you have not yet found him. You would rather seek him. We'll see that in a minute as well. You would rather seek him than be back in the condition that you were in once when you didn't seek him at all.

The silence of Christ to the request of this woman proving the genuineness and the reality of her faith. And then there was another way in which he tested her.

He tested her through the attitude of the disciples. His disciples came and besought him saying send her away. She's crying after us. You see they were I think they were rather embarrassed.

That's my reading of it anyway. They were annoyed that this woman was sort of hanging on. And they didn't want her. And the way to get rid of her was and there was an element of compassion in their requests.

[22 : 57] You see they didn't say to him don't bother with her just send her away. Mark makes it clear to us that they were quite willing that the Lord should give her what she asked for so she wouldn't be a nuisance to them.

Send her away. They didn't want her as part of their set up. Now you know that there are people who seek the Lord and this should be a word of warning to Christians to professing Christians there are people seeking the Lord to find Christian people instead of helping them being rather a hindrance to them.

I'm sure that we've all experienced what it is to be put off or to be disappointed by Christian people people to whom we looked and people maybe from whom we ought have expected more.

And it may be that you are here tonight and perhaps you thought that if you could encourage from this particular quarter of if that person spoke to you or if that person sort of a just gave you a word of encouragement along the way that this would make you feel a bit better about your condition tonight but maybe the people whom you expected so much are the very people perhaps whom you think have contributed so little to your searching for Christ but notice again not withstanding all that you are still seeking the Lord and the fact that you have been disappointed and some people hasn't put you off because you see you've made this discovery and it's good for you that you have made it your dealings are not with people but with the Lord and you know the devil will try to lower your eyes and lower your attention away from

Christ to people don't allow him to do it because people will always be a disappointment to you and the longer you go on in life you'll discover this the person who will be the greatest disappointment of all to you is yourself is yourself so don't you be put off by people you keep seeking the Lord she wasn't put off by them because she cried out Lord help me then thirdly she wasn't put off by the teachings that she heard he answered her and said when he did answer he said well he didn't answer her verse 24 he answered and said I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel now there are some people who maintain I think they're quite right that the Lord here didn't speak to this woman he spoke to the disciples you see the disciples said Lord give her what you want and send her away get rid of her you know seeing I'm on the subject of

[26 : 04] Christians and young seekers I needn't I know that I needn't say this to many of the experienced Christians here tonight if I know them alright I'm sure that most of them not all of them would only encourage every seeker to come to the Lord but I'm always reminded of an incident I witnessed once in Glasgow listening to a preacher preaching at Kuminase many years ago and he was I'm not going to mention the preacher or the congregation he was speaking the course of preaching about the day in which he himself lived and it's strange how each generation seems to think that the present generation is missing lacking something that the preceding one had and he was talking about young Christians and I happened to a young Christian at the time and this is probably why my attention was drawn to this he was speaking about young

Christians not wanting into the fellowship of older Christians and I noticed as he was speaking a person in the congregation nodding his head vigorously in obvious agreement with what the minister was saying and I couldn't help but look with an element of amazement at this particular man whom I knew and whom I knew at that time as a person who himself was not particularly welcoming towards young Christians and here he was agreeing with the minister who was faulting young Christians for not wanting into fellowship of old Christians now my friends it works both ways I would be the first and I plead again with the young

I would be the first to encourage you to get into the company of older Christians as much as you possibly can and at the same time remind the older Christians of their responsibility towards the young to welcome them encourage them and help them thirdly this woman wasn't put off by the teaching that she heard from Jesus it seems as though the Lord turned to the disciples and said to them look you remember this I am sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel so he was saying to them look you know full well I'm only sent to help the Jews these are the people that God sent me to minister to I am sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel now this must have come as a hammer blow to this woman because she wasn't a Jew she was a

Gentile and here is the Lord by his teaching seeming to exclude her from the very blessing that she most needed and you know how this works people who seek the Lord they come and they hear teaching they hear gospel preaching and they hear teaching which emphasizes the whole thrust of divine revelation teaching which speaks about election foreordination about divine sovereignty human responsibility and they hear a teaching which emphasizes all this now there is no point in adopting this attitude that we shouldn't refer to these things in case we put people off that is taking the work of blessing the gospel out of God's hand and putting it on our own trying to chop and change and say well really you shouldn't deal with that because there are people present and they may hear the word election or foreordination or divine sovereignty they'll think at once oh well that's it I can shut off because it's

God's responsibility not mine you see my friend where you have faith it isn't put off by a full orbed gospel ministry or biblical teaching it only impels that faith to seek for what it wants sin it put it off it doesn't say oh well if the gospel is only for those if only those who have been chosen by God are going to be blessed well what's the point of seeking the blessing if it's only the person who has been foreordained who will be called and who will respond to the call there's no point in listening I'll come but that's about it I'll come for the sake of coming giving an example to other people and honouring my parents perhaps setting an example to my children or so and I'll come but there's no point in thinking that

[31 : 30] I'll be saved if that's the case no my friend that teaching doesn't militate against faith it only feeds faith and though these teachings I agree cause problems the greatest problem to the seeking soul is this not the election or the foreordination of God not God's choice of our people for himself that's not the problem for the seeking soul the problem for the seeking soul is this I'm a lost sinner who needs what I don't have I cannot understand these teachings that may be so but I will not be put off by them and there you are here tonight still seeking still wanting still crying still praying still without the thing that you want most that all that you're hearing hasn't put you off you are still seeking so did she she came and worshipped him and said

Lord help me she wasn't put off by the fact that he had a chosen people and notice this as I said earlier faith is never discouraged by the election or the foreordination of God faith is encouraged by the word of God faith is fed by the truth she wasn't put off by the teaching that she heard then fourthly she wasn't put off by the unworthiness that she admitted he answered and said Jesus it isn't right to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs she wasn't put off by the unworthiness that she admitted by the character that was given to her these as far as we know were the first words that Jesus used to this woman now the illustration that he uses is very very interesting indeed you know you probably know this dogs in the

Jewish society community dogs weren't what they are in our community in our society in Jewish society dogs tended to roam wild they weren't the household pets that they are nowadays and the word that Jesus used is exactly that word it isn't right he said or meat that the children's bread should be cast to the little dogs you see he didn't speak about the dog roaming wild on the street he spoke about the few instances in Jewish society in which there were dogs as household pets and you can picture the scene there the picture before his mind is this a family sitting at the table and as again we heard from Professor Donnelly a 40 ago speaking about the look of the dog remember that here's this dog sitting under the table looking up and the little girl or the boy as you know yourselves many of you probably from your own households the little boy from time to time slipping a titbit to the dog that he shouldn't be giving to the dog at all and you'll find very often that the dog takes up his position at the table beside the person is usually best to at the table that's a picture that

Jesus has here it isn't right he said that children should throw or give titbits to the dog under the table and she grasped that she said yes Lord true I know that yet the dogs eat the crumbs of the titbits that fall from the children's table I accept she says in other words I accept my character I accept my condition I accept my state I know that I'm nothing better than a dog I accept it whole heartily and this is true about the seeking soul this is true tonight about you if you're really looking for the Lord Jesus Christ you will be the last person on earth to say that you're worthy of any blessing from his hand true Lord I am not worthy true Lord it isn't right true

Lord I'm not fit for it true Lord I'm not better anybody as matter of fact I am worth the most if not all I accept my unworthiness I know that the blessings of peace and forgiveness and salvation and assurance I know that these things belong to the children these things belong to them people who are far better than me but all I want is a little of what they have the crumbs from the table I wouldn't want to keep anything back from any of them all I want is a little of what they have and this is not the way that you see things yourself as you consider Christians that you know in your own home Christians in this church and other areas you know that something that you don't have yourself and you want what they have you wouldn't deprive them of anything that they have just give me a little of it a little of it and you know

[37:11] I wouldn't be surprised if there are Christians here tonight who themselves feel that other Christians have more than they have themselves and they wouldn't want to deprive these Christians of anything that they have that they wouldn't mind maybe a little bit more of that themselves she says she said Lord I accept that fact I accept that truth I am not worthy of their blessings I am not fit for them I am not better than them but I need what you have to give me and so she cried she wasn't put off by the character that was brought before her and just now word finally here faith again accepted the truth that was brought before her you see this was this was again a crushing blow to her to be told that she wasn't better than anybody to be told that she wasn't as good as other people well as

I said earlier whatever the teaching may be it will not put faith off as someone put it if you feel yourself to be the only sinner out of hell still pray and still cry whatever your sense of unworthiness of self loathing of self emptiness whatever it may be you still need mercy and you still comfort and you still cry for it and whatever teaching comes to you if it be the truth of God you accept it and if you are a seeker here tonight I know that you are accepting it I remember once a young convert a girl in Glasgow shortly after conversion she came to hear a minister preaching and he was preaching on Balaam in the Old Testament and Balaam's history in the Old Testament is a very very sad and searching experience and as she heard the minister unfold the teaching of

Balaam's character and preach a most searching sermon she felt as though she had nothing herself and she went away she went off to another church in the afternoon but she came back in the evening and the minister must have seen that as he preached in the morning she was under considerable concern and distress and he spoke to her outside and he said to her oh he said I see that you've come back oh yes she said when I heard you preach this morning I said to myself I never come to hear that man again but I had to come back you see she had to come back for what she wanted and she knew that she could only get it like I am sure you have heard sermons that searched you through and through exposed you found it difficult to listen perhaps you almost screamed out wanting this minister to stop but what did that do for you if you had faith it only fed your faith and you came back for more probably and I am sure that there are some people here who may agree with me the most searching preacher

I ever heard was my own predecessor in Greyfriars in Vernet and I remember a sermon preached by that minister one night in Glasgow on a Saturday night of the communion season in a congregation preaching on the text where he hath begun the good work he will continue it to the day of Jesus Christ and as he preached I was absolute convinced that he knew my history inside out and my spiritual condition and was the first though not the only occasion in my life when as I listened to him I felt like standing up in the congregation pleading with him to stop because of the way he was exposing my inner being in the light of the truth to myself and remember at one stage saying one thing certain

I'm not coming to the Lord's table here tomorrow and the next words I heard from his lips were these you're here tonight and you're saying you are not coming to the Lord's table tomorrow you see the word of God can search you strike through to you like a knife like a lance but what does it do does it kill faith stone dead oh no my friend it only animates it it only quickens it gives it impels it to come for more and more and more and this woman wasn't put off by the truth that she heard Jesus saying to her you're not worthy there are people far more worthy than you I can't give you what I came to give them I know Lord I know don't hold it back from them just let me get a little of what they allow to fall from you is that not what you want tonight just a little of the children's me and one other point here look at where she was at least there was this encouragement for her you know she pictured herself as it were like the dog under the table

[43 : 28] Lord she said the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table look at where she was remember she it was Jesus wasn't used in the station of a dog roaming wild outside it's a little household pet sitting under the table and at least she knew that she was there she was from Tyre and cedar but now she was under his umbrella he had come he had come he had called her he had won her to himself and she was there in his presence maybe you like that tonight he used to roam if not literally the streets at least certainly not frequent this house on a Sunday night but here you are here you are in that sense you're under the master's table you're within the sound of the gospel in the place where blessings are dispensed by his gracious hand in the company of his people you're not one of them but at least you're with them and you're in the company where blessings are given blessings are bestowed privileges granted to those in your estimate who are worthy of them that's not where you used to be and that's not where you wanted to be at one time but this is now where the

Lord has brought you as well under the table you're not yet at the table oh you would love to be you would love to be one of them if only you could get a little of what they have and you see faith again being strengthened she's coming closer and closer and closer master at the master's table the one whom she would like to say to be associated with if only she could take the step of addressing him as her Lord her father and her friend but you see that's what faith wants to get to faith wants to get closer and closer to the Lord and if you are a seeker here tonight that's what you want as well it's great that the

Lord has brought you thus far it's great that you're in this house of prayer tonight it's wonderful that you want now to come to hear the gospel it's wonderful that your mind and your heart has been opened for the things and the blessings of God you still don't have what you're looking for but at least he has brought you to that place where he can dispense his blessing oh if only if only if only how often have you said it oh if only I could get what I know they have and who my friend may I ask you who has given you that desire but himself as he said to this woman oh woman great is thy faith be it unto thee according to thy faith and all I'm going to say about that is this he acknowledged that he was the author of what she had he acknowledged that he himself strengthened what she had and the more she sought the more she would get from it is that you tonight in this vast company of people how many of you are seeking the Lord

Jesus Christ and how many of you are prepared to admit that your seeking has been strengthened and encouraged by what he has done for you and said to you and perhaps even hasn't said to you at all here you are still looking for what he alone can give you my friend he has never yet turned the seeking soul away he has never done it and he never will may it be unto you according to your faith let us pray have mercy upon us and bless to us the word of thy grace do thou strengthen thy work where thou hast begun it and continue what we pray thee to the day of Jesus Christ part us with thy blessing this night and forgive our sins for Jesus sake Amen