



"I BELIEVE..."

- Meekness and Surrender
in an Angry World
Matthew 15:21-31

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Matthew 15:21-31 Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the

region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." 23 But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." 24 But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." 27 And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. 29 Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. 30 Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. 31 So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

The ethnic group from whom this woman came certainly had a scandalous past in the historical context. The Old Testament records her people as having on occasions sold the people of Israel into slavery to other nations. Some of their cities could also claim fame *at least in name* for the judgment that God had made concerning them; as well as the *subsequent judgment that was delivered as promised*. Proudful Tyre and Sidon were ultimately conquered by the Babylonians (Jer. 27:2-8), and impenetrable Tyre would even eventually be so wiped out by Alexander the Great, that it would be abandoned and would lay vacant.

This woman, you see, came from a place that was despised by the Jewish people. Just to give us some idea of how the Jews felt about Tyre and Sidon, and that area and people, you might remember that Jesus once rebuked the unrepentant cities in which He had performed miracles and said,

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 11:21-24).

Jesus was saying that such cities as Tyre, and Sidon, and Sodom were closer to repentance, or at least the *possibility of repentance*, than the Jewish cities that He had ministered in. But all of them were being lifted up as examples of rebellion and pride. These cities, and by association therefore that area as a whole, had become adjectives. Descriptive words used when describing great wickedness and Godlessness. The average Jew therefore certainly would think it a place highly unlikely for the outpouring of God and supernatural works of His Spirit. She was a member of a condemned race. It was from this place, that this woman came.

One thing we can gather out of this story is that this woman was a mother in every way. She was not approaching a genie for her three wishes. She was not there for herself. This was about her daughter and the love of a mother. Sadly, we have seen people sacrifice the future and well-being of *their* children to get what *they* wanted. I can imagine little that is more despicable. We don't have details about the girl, or about her suffering. But we can certainly garner a picture of the situation by reading similar stories about demonic possession in scripture.

The whole idea of demonic possession has fallen by the wayside today...having become the stuff of late night 'B movie' flicks. No one really believes such really occurs anymore, or really ever did. It's not a reality or at least not in **their** neighborhood! To acknowledge such a fact is just too overwhelming for a lot of folks. We want to believe we are in control of our lives and firmly 'steering the ship.' Possession is considered so archaic and superstitious that it has been shelved for more palatable explanations with terminologies like "mental health issues" and "behavioral problems." But having seen such first hand...up close and personal you might say, I am a genuine believer!

Scripture records physical symptoms of not being able to speak, being thrown to the ground in uncontrollable fits, clamping of teeth, uncontrolled rigidity, throwing of oneself into fire or water, speaking in other unnatural voices, screaming and wailing, etc. There is of course the famous story about the man of the Gadarenes who lived amongst the tombs. No one could catch him or hold him and when occasionally he was so managed, he would just break any ropes or chains that were used to try to tie him up and would then simply return to the tombs. That man was under the possession of a whole host of demons. He wore no clothes and He screamed and howled day and night, cutting himself and causing terror to everyone in the area (Mark 5:1-5; Luke 8:26-30). To reject demonic possession, is to reject this story, which is to reject scripture as authentic and factual, which sets you outside the Christian faith.

One or more of these descriptive elements given here would be enough to bring a mother to her knees when it all is dealing with her child! So let's just say that this woman would have been greatly motivated! By this time she had tried everything, as was no doubt at the end of herself. Desperate times was calling for desperate measures!

The news of Jesus had no doubt reached this woman's ears. His fame had spread far and wide by this time, and even in the smallest towns, the people were finding ways to get to Jesus. For his reputation was preceding Him...stories of healing sicknesses and casting out demons. There were rumors of making the lame walk and even raising the dead back to life! This woman would have figured she had nothing to lose and if what they said about this Jesus was true, then she had everything to gain.

But not everyone was or is so willing to come to Jesus. For some, to do so would be a sign of weakness. It would require swallowing their pride, humbling themselves not just before God but before all men who would see them do so. It would mean *surrender*. It would mean the giving over of the control of your life and destiny. And all of that is very true. Rejection of that fact requires a different kind of "faith"...a faith that such would and will never be required of you...that you will never have to bow down...never have to surrender; that you are calling the shots...master of your own path. Such a stance as that requires a faith in yourself and the perceived power that you have over your own life.

Both of these paths require faith. But one must realize that faith is only as good as what it is placed upon! As death eventually comes for us all, seldom does it do so with a whimper. Few of us will go "with our boots on." So even if one would argue as to what awaits us on the 'other side,' we cannot deny that the exit is humbling, surrendering, and without control. Weakness will take us. Pride will not change a thing. We will all go on to the other side, sooner or later, willingly or unwillingly. All of us will come to know that "*every knee will bow...every tongue will confess that He IS Lord...*" (Romans 14:11). And all the denial in the world...all the fist shaking at God will not change anything. You see, we all will come to stand before whoever or whatever is waiting on that other side. Yours is only to decide *when*.

Mom was determined. Mark's account of this story points out that Jesus tried to get there without drawing attention to himself...He didn't want anyone to know. But never underestimate a mother's love. I have seen some people virtually climb the mountain on their knees to get to Christ. Some of us just finally got to a spot where we were really broken and when we surrendered, we *ran* to Jesus. Nothing held back. Nothing kept from Him. As it was for some of us, Jesus was not going to be hidden from this woman.

According to the account, this woman would not be appeased or swayed; nothing was going to deter her. Nothing was going to get her to shut up. She just kept coming and kept crying out to Him. And Jesus, as always, *responded to that kind of heart*.

Most of the world turns a blind eye to the reality of the world around us. To acknowledge the depth of our condition would again be to acknowledge that we are helpless. So we pretend everything is ok. We feign control and pretend all is well, but in the depth of our hearts we know it is not. There are old lyrics from a song by the band Supertramp that say it all...

Monday has come around again	Guess I'll always have to be
I'm in the same old place	Living in a fantasy
With the same old faces always watching me	That's the way it's got to be
Who knows how long I'll have to stay	From now on
Could be a hundred years	You think I'm crazy I can see
Of sweat and tears	It's you for you, and me for me
At the rate that I get paid	Living in a fantasy
	From now on

I know we had rather not accept it, but sin is the root of our problems. Homes, families, and individual lives are in ruin and lives are devastated today all because of sin. This is not what God intended for us. But this is the 'reality' that we chose and are still choosing as a species today. And it has brought us such misery and ultimate uncontrollable death. If we dare, we can look around in our society and see the effects of sin. It brings devastation to all it touches. And Christ is the only escape and the only way out of such a fantasy. But there is only one approach that is real...only one that is accepted. And this woman had found it...

When this woman first came to Jesus, He didn't answer her. That's another harsh reality for humanity; the one that thinks that God is listening when we pray if we do not know Him and are not part of Him. Psalms 66:18 says that "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.*" If I hold onto my sin, He will not hear me. That concept is difficult for many of us to accept and seems harsh and unfeeling. But there is a principle that we need to understand in this.

This woman recognized Jesus but as the Messiah of the Jews, a great miracle worker, someone to rescue her out of difficulty. Like much of today's humanity, she acknowledged His power and control, just not over *her*. She hadn't yet recognized Jesus as the Savior of *her* soul! She was, like much of mankind, just looking for Jesus to meet her immediate need, but she had no desire or maybe even the knowledge of the need to submit her life unto Him in salvation...the need to make Him Lord over her.

Our Lord is a God of mercy, but He knows those who belong to Him. And the only prayer that the Lord hears from sinners is a prayer of repentance which leads to salvation. She was scared, and in desperate need, and sought redemption out of her plight. We all deep down want that. But she hadn't acknowledged that she was ultimately lost without this 'god-man' which stood before her. That would require *surrender*. And so many of us are clinging to the echo of Churchill's WW2 speech; "...we will never surrender..."

"*Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.*" This was a woman with a desperate need. Her daughter was hurting and as a mother she just wanted her daughter freed of this dreadful condition. She needed a miracle and she believed He could help her. And He definitely could, but she failed to see the path before

her. It was not enough to know he was God, she had to know Him as *her* God. And therein lays the rub! To move from “I have a need” to “*I am the need...*” It is a road few will travel! Pride and self stand in the way like a glass brick wall keeping us not from seeing Him, but from *knowing Him!*

He answered and said, "*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel...It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.*" **Ouch!** I am certain that these were not the words that this mother expected to hear. Jesus was saying something we may not like but is a fact. There is a truth here that flies in the face of all anti-Semitism. Jesus had come to Israel first. It was in God's plan to reach out to the Jews prior to the Gentiles. He would open the door to the rest of us, but it was crucial to His ultimate plan to reach out to the Jews firstly.

The words of Jesus, despite their appearance, were not words of denial or rejection, nor were they meant to be cruel. When was Jesus ever cruel? So let us not add tone to his email or supposed purpose behind His choice of words. They were however words of maturity. He knew, and knows even now, what we need to hear to awaken us from our slumber! This woman had not yet realized just who in totality that Jesus was, or even who *she* was. She needed to see Him as the Son of God, Savior of the world, Savior of *her!* Jesus was working in her heart to increase her faith...to bring her to the end of herself. And that road would have to cover who she really was in the grand scheme of things. We have to take hold of the same in order to seek redemption.

Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "*Lord, help me!...Lord, even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*" Ahhh...there it is! She was ready to acknowledge who and what she was, and that she was indeed undeserving of His intervention. This was the crossroads of her life. This was the moment that her reality actual became real! She was at that place where she saw Jesus as more than just One who performed miracles. She saw herself clearly, and He as Lord of not just the Jews, and not just the universe at large. She wanted Him to be Lord of *her*. At this moment she saw Him for who He is!

At this crossroad...and I believe that we all will pass by here at least once in our life, we are without excuse. Romans 1:20-22 says "*For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools...*"

Yes...we know He is there. But most of us will never surrender. We will instead grow angry and shake our fists and plant our feet. Paul in Romans 10 stresses man's responsibility: "Those who do not believe fail to believe because they have rejected God." They have rejected not His deity, but rather His control and His sovereignty. He may be *the* boss, but He is not *my* boss. But this woman had accepted her truth. The king's crumbs were and *are* better than the world's feast. And she was happy and willing to just have the crumbs that fell from the king's table. **Are you?**

"*Dear woman,*" Jesus said to her, "***your faith is great. Your request is granted.***" And her daughter was instantly healed.

30-31 "*A vast crowd brought to him people who were lame, blind, crippled, those who couldn't speak, and many others. They laid them before Jesus, and he healed them all. The crowd was amazed! Those who hadn't been able to speak were talking, the crippled were made well, the lame were walking, and the blind could see again! And they praised the God of Israel.*"

"...and they praised the God of Israel." Funny how such surrender can bring us such victory...

*"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."*

Matthew 16:25