

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

15:21-28

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

Another of our Lord's miracles is recorded in these verses: the circumstances which attend it are peculiarly full of interest; let us take them in order, and see what they are. Every word in these narratives is rich in instruction. We see in the first place, that true faith may sometimes be found where it might have been least expected. A Canaanite woman cries to our Lord for help, on behalf of her daughter. "Have mercy on me," she says "O Lord thou son of David!" she says. Such a prayer would have showed great faith had she lived in Bethany or Jerusalem; but when we find that she came from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, such a prayer may well fill us with surprise. It ought to teach us that it is grace, not place, which makes people believers. We may live in a prophet's family, like Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and yet continue impenitent, unbelieving and fond of the world. We may dwell in the midst of superstition and dark idolatry, like the little maid in Naaman's house, and yet be faithful witnesses for God and his Christ. Let us not despair of anyone's soul merely because his lot is cast in an unfavorable position. It is possible to dwell in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and yet sit down in the kingdom of God. We see in the second place, that affliction sometimes proves a blessing to a person's soul. The Canaanite mother, no doubt, had been sorely tried. She had seen her darling child vexed with a devil, and been unable to relieve her; but yet that trouble brought her to Christ, and taught her to pray. Without it she might have lived and died in careless ignorance, and never seen Jesus at all. Surely it was good for her that she was afflicted (i.e. Psalm 119:71). Let us mark this well. There is nothing which shows our ignorance so much as our impatience under trouble. We forget that every cross is a message from God, and intended to do us good in the end. Trials are intended to make us think "to wean us from the world" to send us to the Bible "to drive us to our knees. Health is a good thing; but sickness is far better, if it leads us to God. Prosperity is a great mercy; but adversity is a greater one if it brings us to Christ. Anything, anything is better than living in carelessness and dying in sin. Better a thousand times be afflicted like the Canaanite mother and, like her, flee to Christ, than live at ease like the rich fool and die at last without Christ and without hope. (Luke 12:20) We see in the third place, that Christ's people are often less gracious and compassionate than Christ himself. The woman about whom we are reading found small favor with our Lord's disciples. Perhaps they regarded an inhabitant of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon as unworthy of their Master's help. At any rate they said, "Send her away." There is only too much of this spirit among many who profess and call themselves believers. They are apt to discourage inquirers after Christ, instead of helping them forward. They are too ready to doubt the reality of a beginner's grace because it is small, and to treat him as the disciples treated Saul when he first came to Jerusalem after his conversion, they believed not

that he was a disciple. (Acts 9:26). Let us beware of giving way to this spirit: let us seek to have more of the mind that was in Christ. Like him, let us be gentle and kind and encouraging in all our treatment of those who are seeking to be saved: above all, let us tell men continually that they must not judge Christ by Christians. Let us assure them that there is far more in that gracious Master than there is in the best of his servants. Peter and James and John may say to the afflicted soul, "Send her away," but such a word never came from the lips of Christ. He may sometimes keep us long waiting, as he did this woman, but he will never send us empty away. We see in the last place, what encouragement there is to persevere in prayer, both for ourselves and others. It is hard to conceive a more striking illustration of this truth than we have in this passage. The prayer of this afflicted mother at first seemed entirely unnoticed: Jesus answered her not a word on. The saying which by and by fell from our Lord's lips sounded discouraging: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet she prayed on: "Lord, help me!" The second saying of our Lord was even less encouraging than the first: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." Her prayer was deferred, but it did not make her heart sick (Proverbs 13:12). Even then she was not silenced: even then she finds a plea for some crumbs of mercy to be granted to her. And her importunity obtained at length a gracious reward: "O Woman, great is thy faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." That promise never yet was broken: "Seek and ye will find" (Matthew 7:7). Let us remember this history when we pray for ourselves. We are sometimes tempted to think that we get no good by our prayers, and that we may as well give them up altogether. Let us resist the temptation: it comes from the devil. Let us believe, and pray on. Against our besetting sins, against the spirit of the world, against the wiles of the devil, let us pray on and not faint. For strength to do duty, for grace to bear our trials, for comfort in every trouble, let us continue in prayer. Let us be sure that no time is so well spent in every day as that which we spend upon our knees. Jesus hears us, and in his own good time will give an answer. Let us remember this history when we intercede for others. Have we children whose conversion we desire? Have we relations and friends about whose salvation we are anxious? Let us follow the example of this Canaanite woman, and lay the state of their souls before Christ. Let us name their names before him night and day, and never rest till we have an answer. We may have to wait many a long year: we may seem to pray in vain, and intercede without profit; but let us never give up while life lasts. Let us believe that Jesus has not changed, and that he who heard the Canaanite mother, and granted her request will also hear us, and one day give us an answer of peace.

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