

The Feet of Jesus-the Place for Personal Necessity - Part 2

by Philip Bennett Power

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being in the right place, persevering and having faith, and approaching God with a hopeful spirit in order to receive blessings from Him.

Scripture: Psalm 34:17, Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 55:6, Matthew 15:21, Mark 7:25, John 6:67, James 1:12

Topics: "Faith And Perseverance", "Divine Mercy"

Description

Philip Bennett Power preaches on the story of the Syrophenician woman who persisted and argued at the feet of Jesus for the healing of her daughter. This woman's journey to Jesus' feet teaches us about the importance of perseverance, enduring apparent repulses, and recognizing blessings even in the midst of trials. It highlights the need to remain in the right place for certain blessings, to have faith in possibilities, and to seek hope and encouragement even in the smallest signs. The story reveals that there is mercy and blessings available at the feet of Jesus for all who come seeking, even those who may seem unworthy or outside the circle of blessing.

Transcript

"A woman whose little daughter had an evil spirit came and fell at His feet. Now the woman was Greek, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged Him to drive the demon out of her daughter!" Mark 7:25-26

The first position which this woman took up does not appear to have been at the feet of Jesus. According to the account given us in Matthew, she seems to have followed Christ for some little time, probably at somewhat of a distance, crying after Him, and begging for mercy at once upon herself and her child. She was apparently within hearing distance--but that availed her nothing, for Jesus had not answered her a word. And if she heard the answer which the Lord gave to the disciples, when they asked that she should be given what she wanted and sent away, her chances of help seemed about utterly to perish.

But "the feet of Jesus" had yet to be tried. Neither had the mother's perseverance, nor His grace--been tested as yet to the uttermost. That saying, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," which to some might have seemed a hurricane blast, enough to sweep her beyond all reach of hope forever, was in truth intended to catch her in eddies, which swift circling would soon sweep her into the center, and that center was "the feet of Jesus."

Here, on the very threshold of the story, we are met by our first teaching. We have here one brought to the feet of Jesus. It may seem to us that, so as the mother's heart were eased and the afflicted child were healed, it would have been all one whether this were accomplished by speaking to the woman at a distance--or at the very feet; but we may rest assured it is not so. Whether we see it or not, there are reasons in all the diversities of circumstances attending each particular act of Jesus' mercy.

And, first, let us observe that there are often preliminaries, and those not of a formal--but of a very important character, to our being found at the feet of Jesus. There are often preparations and exercisings of heart, before the knee of man bends at the foot of Christ. And they are all for this very purpose--that we may be brought there, and receive what is to be had there; and get that particular fullness of blessing which can only be obtained from close contact with Him.

"Why is it thus with me?" cries many a weary waiting soul, many a one knowing, as it thinks, the fullness of its need. Why but to learn, by an apparent prospect of failure in having that need supplied--that it really did not know how deep it was before? Why is it thus? Because you must know yet more the depth of what you do want, and the depth of what only Christ can give.

At times we think we are close enough to Christ, within reach of Him to get what we want; but He means to bring us closer still, because He intends to give us more.

The preliminaries of blessing are sometimes very wonderful; the way in which great blessings are prepared for, and come about--are among the deep things of God.

Although it is crowded into a short space as to time, and a few words as to the chronicling of it, yet was there much here required, before this woman was brought into what was to be to her--the place and posture of great blessing. There was the frequent repetition of those cries of anguish, when we would have said that one request would have been enough--the indifference to them, and that no ordinary indifference, seeing that she cried to One who could help her (for He who can heal has, from that very power, a certain relationship to the one who requires that healing); and the natural uprising of hard thoughts about One who seemed so harsh to her--all this she had to undergo--but all to bring her nearer to the Lord.

Often we are inclined to say, "Why have I to bear this? What has this to say to the blessing I need? Is not this rather leading away from that blessing?" But each trial is a link in the chain of blessing, inexplicable in itself--yet beautifully harmonious as part of a whole.

All is thus done to bring us to the feet of Jesus. We must be in the right place--for certain blessings. We think we can place ourselves; the Syrophenician woman, no doubt, thought that to cry after Jesus was enough. And so it might have been, did God design no more for her, than the bare healing of her child; but she needed to be particularly placed for what she was particularly to receive. The "ten lepers, who stood afar off, lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said, Go show yourselves to the priests." They received their measure of blessing thus; but she hers--and that a greater one--at His very feet.

Once at Jesus' feet, there was much to follow. And it is important simply to note this, because we are apt to have very mistaken views as to finality. We are continually thinking that the end has come, before it really has. We make a part of a Divine process the end, and seem surprised when it does not answer our expectation. We are seeking the blessing before it is due; we have only gone once or twice; whereas,

perhaps, seven times are appointed before we see even a cloud no bigger than a man's hand.

And this is how many of God's people have been discouraged when seeking blessing. They expected too much from early stages; they never surmised that they had been brought to a certain point--just in order to be led on farther.

And others are ignorant in this matter, as well as we. Their kind wishes for us are often mistaken. It is not in earthly relationships alone, that we find mistaken kindness; it abounds in spiritual relationships also, so far as they exist between man and man.

It is well that we have one who has deeper thoughts for us than our friends have--thoughts which reach farther, which are fuller of blessing, which in the long run will come out with larger profit--but it must be in the long run--it is of their very nature that they must mature.

The disciples appear in this case to have been actuated by simply selfish motives. They did not want to be cried after, and therefore wished the woman to be given what she wanted, and sent away. Their idea was that in getting that, she would have received all; they did not know of anything beyond what just met the hearing of the ear--the need of the woman's child. As to any close contact with their Lord, and peculiar blessing in store for the woman therefrom--of that they knew nothing; as indeed, how could they.

Christ had deeper views for blessing this woman, than she had for herself--and so He has for us. It would have been easy for Him to have spoken a healing word, and so have ended up this matter with but little trouble to Himself, and with much satisfaction both to the disciples and the woman; but He had deeper thoughts of blessing for her than that. And so, when we do not receive all at once the good thing we desire--but are left to cry still more vehemently for it; and it may be even to be much exercised in apparent repulses with reference to it, ever let us remember that this is because God designs more for us than in this matter, than we have planned for ourselves. We are now in the midst of the thoughts of God--as well as of our own; of His ways--as well as ours; and we have to experience that His ways are not as our ways, neither are His thoughts like our thoughts.

We now have this Syrophoenician woman brought to the feet of Jesus--brought there by the apparent neglect of the One from whom she had hoped everything. Having not been answered a word, she does not, after the fashion of ordinary mendicants, go away, believing that it is but lost time to ask any more; on the other hand, she comes yet closer to Christ--closer to the One who had to all appearance practically refused her; and falling at His feet, she now bars the way, and He can proceed no further until He hears--and she knows that He hears her request; and until He answer her after some fashion.

Here, then, we have her; and seeing what sort of place is the ground immediately at the feet of Jesus, how tremendous was the need of this woman, and what a vantage ground she occupied--we may expect to hear of some very earnest travail--hard conflict, if need be--before she will give up her point and go away unblest.

The expectation is fully realized. Here we have the woman:

- (1) remaining,
- (2) arguing,
- (3) enduring,

(4) persevering, and

(5) conquering--

and all at the feet of Jesus.

There she remained. And it will be well for us to note this; for this "remaining" has more teaching for us than we think. It is not always so easy a thing to remain quiet at the feet of Jesus; to carry on much and varied effort there; to be calm and still within the one sphere. We find it very hard to harmonize energy and calmness--to make them work together. We are for shifting the scene of operations; we are, so to speak, up and down continually; we don't like to remain in the one necessary place. We would be much more calm--if we realized where we were. Our power lies not so much in what we are--as in where we are. Let the feet of Jesus be to us a place of continuance.

We trouble ourselves about the amount of effort we are making, whether we are earnest enough, and so forth. But in the truest need--the hardest work of the soul--there is no thought of SELF at all--all the eye, and ear, and thought are upon the LORD.

We never can be quiet, or put forth the power of quiet energy, unless we have well fixed before our minds the One from whom we are expecting help. Some rush hither and thither, like Balak--but they get no nearer blessing. We are to know where we are, and what is to be, and what can be done there. We have the advantage of having our field of action circumscribed, and marked out for us; now let us see what victories can be won there.

It may be that the intellectual think this position at the feet of Christ, is beneath them--that this sphere is too small for their energies. They say, "Talk to us about the head of Jesus, and not about His feet." But she who thus supplicated at Jesus' feet, was thought worthy of being argued with--nay, was herself allowed to argue with the Lord, and to win in argument a victory--the like of which no lawyer has ever won in the courts, no orator in the tribune, no disputant in the schools. It was from the feet of Jesus that there was carried away the highest triumph of argument that was ever won. No excited crowds applauded; none crowned the victor; no one but her adversary in the argument, gave testimony to her skill; and when it is said that He did, then all is said which can be said; yes, far more than could be in all other ways beside.

Down at His feet--this woman won her victory of faith--her daughter's cure. Like Jacob of old, she would not let Him go, until He blessed her; like him she had power with the One with whom she strove, and prevailed. Sustaining two opposite characters in the self-same suit--plaintiff as regards her child, defendant as regards her race--she won her cause in each; a double judgment was entered in her favor by the Lord's command. If a miracle of healing proceeded from His lips--surely He must have inspired a miracle of pleading at His feet!

What had been this woman's introduction to the presence-chamber, where indeed things had fallen out so unexpectedly that, instead of simply receiving a munificence as from a king, she had to argue her cause as though she had to substantiate claims in court? Poor claims they were, no doubt--the claim of the dog to eat the crumbs which fell from the children's table. But the small possessions of the poor are infinitely precious to them; their heritage of crumbs is their very life.

Her only introduction to the feet of Jesus--which, after all, was a royal presence-chamber--was by her misery. Misery is a strange steward--but it is a high officer in the court of Jesus; it is one of the grand

stewards, and it has authority at all times to introduce to audience with the King. Am I miserable--I ask not from what cause--but am I miserable--then by that very fact I am sure, if I desire it, of an immediate introduction to the presence of my Lord. The misery itself supplies the means.

Diverse people were treated differently when they came to Christ--though each one doubtless was treated exactly as his case required. And so we cannot say, when once there, what may go on. Only we know that, whatever it is, it will be exactly what is right, and what in the end will be best for us.

No doubt there are many arguings and soul-strivings carried on at the feet of Jesus. It may even be that the heart's fiercest battles have been experienced there. And here this woman has to argue--and mark where--at the feet of Jesus. It was when Christ might have been supposed to want to proceed on, she was exactly in the place where she was likely to impede Him most.

It is as though we were to be taught, that Jesus has no occupations of too great importance to be arrested by human, even by individual misery. We have such occupations in action, often such pre-occupations of mind--that we must not be stopped by anyone, or for anything. That is just one of the differences between Christ and us.

One would have thought that while Jesus was on kept standing there--that all this argument might have been dispensed with. But He Himself, who alone could dispense with it, did not do so; that dealing with that woman's heart, was no lost time to Him.

In all probability, in human judgment--in that of the disciples--the whole thing was most inappropriate. The woman had gone from bad to worse; whereas she had been crying after Him, now she was prostrate before Him.

But Christ had work to do with this woman's soul, which they knew nothing of; and surely He also commences in a way which they could not understand. It was a strange way to prepare for conferring a gift--by giving what seemed an unanswerable reason why the gift should not be conferred. But some of the highest gifts which men have ever had, they have come by in this way. They were emptied--that they might be filled; they were pressed hard against the earth--that they might spring up the higher from it.

Christ tells this woman that she has no national claims upon Him at all. The statement of her being a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation, or in other words, "a stranger," comes very quick upon the mention of "Jesus' feet," and her position at them, suggesting to us how entirely--humanly speaking--she had no business there.

But she drew an argument from her very unworthiness and alienhip. She seized instantly upon that idea of the dogs, and of the children being filled, and of their being filled first. There was hope for her in these three points. She, on her part, recognized the priority of the children's claim, and their claims to fullness--but then came the claim of the dogs. Even the word used for "dogs" gave her an argument--for it was a soft, mild term the Lord used--the little dogs.

Now here we are met with a multitude of practical thoughts.

When we come to the feet of Christ, let us remember, first of all--to take up our assigned position, however low it may be. What, indeed, must be our frame of mind, how little can we know ourselves, if we are laying claim to anything in the way of personal worth or position at all! We can gain no advantage by refusing to take up our assigned place--our low starting-point; we only lose time, we only lay ourselves open to the

still sharper dealings of God. It may be that, we think we are put in a hopeless position by being thrust down so low; but let us remember from what depths--up to what heights, men have sprung--how that publican who smote upon his breast returned to his house.

This woman was put at the very extreme end of creation--the Scripture always speaking as badly as possible of "dogs," and not recognizing any of their nobler qualities. It was thence--and what a "thence"--that in one bound she sprang to the forefront among the children of faith. Having taken something even more humble than the lowest room, she heard a voice which said unto her, "Friend, come up higher." The master of the feast set her--a stranger--above many of those who were his kinsmen according to the flesh. He gave her, not crumbs--but bread; the last became the first; and her victory of faith carried away as its lawful spoil--her daughter's cure.

Let us be encouraged then to seek for much, even when under deep consciousness of our unworthiness and guilt. Let us not say, "I will seek for such and such choice blessings--when I feel myself worthy and strong as a child of God. I will put off asking any great thing until I feel myself thus strong, and am in the special enjoyment of the sense of acceptance." Let us seek for what we want--as we are. Perhaps we have been placed in a depressed condition, or allowed to come into it for a while--in order that we may the more deeply feel our need, and the more earnestly, and so effectually, plead with God. Many a Christian's experience is this: "If I had not fallen so low--I would have not climbed so high."

But when we come to the feet of Jesus--we must be like this Syrophenician woman--and not to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by our need, however great. But we are to be honest, and to try and see things as they really are, and to recognize and make use of such hopes and openings as exist.

This woman, as we have already incidentally noticed, found three points of hope--three grounds of argument--in her own and her daughter's behalf--out of the one sentence addressed to her by Christ.

Jesus said, "Let the children first be filled." The point was, not that there is nothing for anyone else--but that abundance must be secured for the children, and this "first." And this "first" implied a sequence. As soon as that was done, an opening was made for something further; that word "first," if only the woman had power to see it, was the possible opening of a floodgate of blessing. Could we have entered the recesses of the heart of Christ--we would have heard there the echoes of the words of Hosea: "Though I lead her into the desert--yet I will return her vineyards to her and transform the Valley of Achor (Trouble) into a gateway of hope."

And here was this woman's Valley of Achor, only in her case the darkness and the light did not keep apart--but, as it were, intermingled, so that to one who could discern them, there were clouds and sunshine at the same time.

Now, it is a great thing to have an eye for encouragement--to see hope and openings where they are, to be quick to catch up crumbs of comfort. It is very honoring to Christ--for us to deal with Him with a hopeful spirit--to approach Him with such; and even if things do not seem to go as well with us as we desire, still to persevere.

We do not say that the materials for hopefulness always lie on the surface; they certainly did not do so in this case. They may have to be searched for; but, even though often it may be in the most unlikely places--they will be found. Many of God's choicest things are found in such places. There was Elijah's provision by that poor widow; and that piece of silver in the fish's mouth; and that feeding of the multitude

by those five loaves and two small fishes; and here the blessing, in what at first sight, one might almost be warranted in calling a curse.

In all our times of trial and depression--let us be on the look-out for the sun-gleams. No matter how few they are, still wonders may be done with them if they are used. The prize flower at a recent exhibition in London, was one grown in an attic, on which the sun shone for but a short time every day. But the old man who reared this plant held it up during that time to catch the beams, and turned it round and round, and won the prize. Watch for sunbeams; use them, and you shall win with them.

Believe that there is something to come; or, at any rate, that something may come. Have great faith in possibilities, especially when Christ is on the scene of action. This woman believed in the possibility of something after the "first." She did not dispute the "first," she only fixed her hope on what might come after that.

Let us avoid the mistake of undervaluing 'possibilities', let us see things as large as they really are.

The crumbs here alluded to, are said to be something more than what fell accidentally from the table, for it was the custom during eating to use, instead of a napkin, the soft white part of the bread, which, having thus used, they threw to the dogs.

We do not want to diminish anything from the severity of the trial of the woman's faith, or make Christ's dealing with her less sharp and apparently severe than it really was. What we say is that, here were the elements of some comfort, and it was her wisdom and blessing that she realized them.

The same remark applies to the Greek word which, when translated literally, means "little dogs"--or "pups". Here we discern a touch of kindness; for when, except for dealing with sin, was Jesus unmitigatedly severe? That little cloud was the beginning of abundance of rain. The nucleus of blessing is often very small; crumbs picked up at the feet of Jesus turn miraculously to loaves. Never be afraid of using to the uttermost any bright thought which is suggested to you there. When Christ gives you a bright thought, or puts within your reach the material of hope, be it never so slight--it is that you may weave a net therewith--to enfold Him hand and foot, so that He cannot part from you without a blessing.

Thus this woman remained and argued at the feet of Jesus. Now we must add a few words upon her endurance of apparent repulse.

There was one terrible element in her trial which we must note. She was not spurned to the feet--but at the feet of Jesus. Her worst trial came upon her there. And had that woman come away unblest from that place, and had not all this been but a deep, dark gorge on the highway of blessing--then we are bold to say that no man can calculate what would have been the terrible results. For proud sinners fixing on that scorn of the Lord would never subject themselves to an endurance of the like; and men of feeble hope would feel the hopelessness of going there; and those of tender constitution of heart, and of an anxious temperament, would never adventure a conflict with such roughness. But now we understand it all, or at least enough of it to make us feel there is no real cause for fear. We are on the safe and right road, though some of the stones on it are sharp.

This experience of the Syrophenician woman, tells us to avoid the mistake of always expecting dealings of unmingled brightness at the feet of Jesus. He has many strange dealings with people--to bring them to His feet. Likewise, Jesus has many strange dealings with people--when at His feet. The reader of these

lines, if he knows much of the spiritual life, would lay down these pages as unreal, or would receive what they have yet to say with distrust--if we made out that unmingled brightness was the characteristic of all dealings at Jesus' feet.

But, however dark may be the things which are there shown us about ourselves, blessing is not on that account about to be withheld.

When Joseph "spoke roughly" to his brethren--he was still their brother, and was planning great things for them. There are certain blessings, doubtless, which can come only by rough experiences. The heroes of faith, like all other truly great people, have ever borne, as well as done--much. The sustainings are as wonderful as the accomplishments in the spiritual life.

When Jesus gave a hard saying, many asked, "This teaching is hard! Who can accept it?" And when it became still more incomprehensible, "they went back and walked no more with him." "Therefore Jesus said to the Twelve--You do not want to go away too, do you? Simon Peter answered, Lord, who will we go to? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God!" John 6:67-69. The faith of the Canaanitish woman, and that of the prince of the apostles, was one--they each bore up under the hard sayings of the Lord, and refused to go away.

So she persevered, and won the blessing she desired. It was on this occasion as on others--great miracles, and good doings, and outflowings of blessing, followed on times of, as it were, personal withdrawals on the part of Jesus. It was after a withdrawal of Himself--that the multitudes were fed, and that He appeared walking upon the waters. It was when He made as though He would go farther--that He yielded to constraint, and revealed Himself as He had not done all the time He had spoken with them by the way.

All withdrawals of Christ, rightly interpreted, are real onleadings. In Solomon's Song, when the bride sought her beloved--but could not find him--then she rose and went about the city in the streets; and in the broad ways she sought him whom her soul loved.

"It is expedient for you," said the Lord Himself, "that I go away"--for thus the Holy Spirit came, and the heart is led onward to an ascended Christ in higher conceptions of Him than it could have had, if He had tarried here.

We would observe in closing our contemplations on this scene, how we are taught that there is mercy at the feet of Jesus--for those whom we perhaps think to be outside all possible circle of blessing. The highway and the hedge teach us this--and so does this story of the Syrophoenician woman at the feet of Jesus.

Let us also see how that very often our judgment about strugglers may be altogether wrong. We know not why they are struggling, or what purposes of mercy are wrapped up in it, or how it will end. The exercises of a soul are among the hidden things of God. Of one thing alone, let us assure ourselves on these occasions, and let that reassure us--is all this really going on in the right place? For all striving must prosper in the end, which is carried on at the "feet of Jesus."

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