

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 391, 08-30-2020 † Pentecost 13

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

MATTHEW 15 (NIV84)

²¹Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”

²³Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

²⁴He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

²⁷“Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.



It is hard to imagine how the Jewish people of 1930s-1940s Germany must have felt about God. Elie Wiesel, in the book Night, explains how he felt toward God during the holocaust of World War II, “Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never” (p. 32). “I no longer accepted God’s silence” (p.66).

Do you accept God’s silence? Surely God can always speak, but does God ever cease to speak? If He did not speak, would it seem that He does not have enough mercy for you? Would you conclude that you do not belong in His

kingdom? Doesn't He have enough mercy to go around? Would you conclude that He has run out of mercy?

This was the difficulty of the Gentile woman in our gospel this morning. She tried repeatedly to get the attention of the Son of God. For those with lesser faith, it may seem like time to give up, to despair of God's mercy, and to believe they don't belong. However, this woman would find that Jesus was listening to her all the while and ultimately willing to answer. She would find that she belongs.

Jesus Has Mercy Enough For All

1. For those who "don't belong"

Jesus had traveled north to Syria, an unlikely place. This was outside the boundaries of Galilee. In Jewish history, it would be recognized as the home turf of Jezebel, the wicked queen of the Old Testament, who hunted the lives of Elijah, Obadiah, and the other prophets of the Lord.

Here, there was a woman who began to cry out after Jesus. But Jesus ignored her. He "*did not answer her a word.*" If the horror of having a demon-possessed daughter wasn't enough, Jesus wouldn't answer her evil with a single word, not even to say "no." That is haunting. To have a God who won't listen. It defeats the purpose of having a God, doesn't it?

But it also begs the question whether Jesus means to be her God.

This is no small thing. How many human hearts would sink? We might say, "I'm not in grace; Jesus thinks I'm unworthy of grace. So I'm lost. God hates me and doesn't want me saved." It is more haunting than the whole experience thus far.

Even the disciples saw the problem and basically said, "Just heal her and send her away!" They were touched by the woman's misery. Jesus apparently just didn't want to. When the disciples speak up, Jesus said, "*I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel.*" What a thunderbolt! Jesus wasn't without the power to help her. They knew it. They had seen it.

Another thunderbolt? "*It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs*" (v26). She is forced to ask, "*Am I a sheep or a dog? If I am a dog, why am I here? If I am a sheep, why does God treat me like a dog?*"

How can Jesus make her think this? He has ignored her, denied her, and excommunicated her. But Jesus was showing something. He was showing how beautiful it was that this woman dogged Him, brought to the level of tablescraps & crumbs, but still implored & begged Jesus. She held fast to God & His Word.

God has made countless promises to Gentiles. Jonah's Ninevites, Joseph's Egyptians, Daniel's Babylonians ... why not Christ in His time? He is not the God only of the Jews. She held fast to His Word. You and I can, too:

- Romans 3:29, *Or is he only the God of the Jews? Is he not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, also of the Gentiles.*
- Romans 15:8, *For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed.*
- Romans 3:1-2, *What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew? Or what benefit is there to circumcision? Much in every way! Indeed, above all else, they were entrusted with the messages of God.*
- John 10:16, *I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*

By Jesus' own words, this woman was, in fact, a sheep, because she had heard His voice. This was not the first time. This area of Canaan wasn't only the home turf of wicked queen Jezebel, but also the same place God miraculously fed the widow at Zarephath, through the prophet Elijah. Despite the way He seemed here, Jesus is the God of all who believe in Him.

2. Through faith in Jesus Christ

We come to find out this Canaanite woman has great faith, even though she was not a daughter of the promise. What was this woman of great faith shouting? Let's go back and see.

Listen to her prayer: "*Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession*" (v22). She said the same thing we sing so often, "*Kyrie, Eleison!*" She prays like a Jew. She prays as Jesus prescribed in the parables and in other sick and demonized people. She called Jesus the "*Lord, Son of David.*" She knew not only that Jesus is a powerful healer but that he is the descendant of David, the fulfillment of the Savior promise. This woman bent her knee before Him and said, "*Lord, help me.*"

Like Abraham, she “*believed against hope*” (Rom. 4:18). She knew her personal worthlessness. She accepted the word “dog.” “*Yes Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table*” (27). To each lightning bolt Jesus sends, the woman said, “Yes.” She agreed. She embraced her Gentileness. But she still knew He won’t consider her less. She was a spiritual beggar, the only kind of sinner who is ready for the gospel. Not the healthy, but the sick, need a doctor. She sought spiritual aid. This is strong faith.

The rest of the Bible really supports that idea.

- *Romans 10:4, “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”*
- *Galatians 2:15-16a, “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.”*

May this lesson be a big help to us. How do you feel when you experience evil and pray to God constantly about it? Didn’t Jesus invite you to pray? Didn’t He go to the weak and worn and weary? Didn’t He dismiss demons and destroy diseases? Three weeks ago we heard this: “**Come unto me all you weary and burdened and I will give you rest.**” Now is He not listening about Corona, or your illness, or your children, or your confusion in this maddening world? No. Who could bear it? Only one strong in faith.

- *Hebrews 2:18, “Because He suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”*
- *2 Corinthians 6:2, “At a favorable time I listened to you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.”*

This woman had faith in God’s mercy, faith in Jesus as healer and Savior. Faith wills to take all God has promised to the believer. Based on what she knew, her faith willed that Jesus would heal her daughter. She didn’t forsake God. She didn’t even ask for his reasons. She simply cried out to him.

What about the times when I gave up? “I have not lost faith in God. I have moments of anger and protest. Sometimes I’ve been closer to him for that reason,” said Elie Wiesel. Wiesel does not believe in Jesus. But Wiesel shows us the need for Jesus. When we have given up, Jesus shows mercy enough for all; in His name, Amen.