

norm in those days. Jesus was testing her humility and faith. He knew before she ever came to Him that she would persistently, humbly pray and that He would answer her prayer. Through this, her faith was strengthened, and the attitudes of the disciples were challenged.

- 3) J.W. Shephard in his book "The Christ of the Gospels" states on page 288, *"Two things He [Christ] would demonstrate to them in this incident: their own wrong exclusiveness, the heartless sinful attitude of the Jews toward the Gentiles, and the relative worthiness of many Gentiles. They must come to these conceptions before they would be ready to enter upon the world-wide missionary campaign. Their race prejudice must be corrected and their sympathy broadened."*

**b. She humbly begged for some dog crumbs.**

- 1) Note her words in verse 27. Like the dogs under their master's table, she too, though a Gentile, belonged to the Master and thus deserved some of the crumbs falling from the table. She accepted this humiliating title and considered her request to be just a crumb from God's table.
- 2) Her humble, persistence in prayer testified of her great faith.
  - a) Jesus acknowledged her great faith.
  - b) Jesus spoke the word and granted her request. That very hour the demon left her daughter.

**Conclusion:** This week, God used this passage to challenge my **approach** in prayer (I must pray boldly, respectfully, and specifically), my **persistence** in prayer (when the Holy Spirit gives me peace as to what to pray, I must pray persistently), and my **humility** in prayer (I must pray as an unworthy servant, and not think myself better than others).

Have you gotten discouraged in prayer? If so, meditate on Matthew 15:21-28 this week. Ask the Lord what lessons about prayer He wants you to learn.

**Song:** Teach Me to Pray – 346

# Humble, Persistent Prayer

21 January 2024 PM – Text: Matthew 15:21-28 – Topic: Prayer

**Introduction:** The scribes and Pharisees had attacked Jesus, probably at Capernaum, for allowing his disciples to eat without the traditional hand-washing ceremony, Jesus countered their words with a sharp rebuke (Mt 15:1-20). Perhaps, that evening as Jesus and his disciples sat around the fire eating, he said, "Early tomorrow morning, we will travel north for a break." Opposition to Jesus' ministry had risen to a point that he knew he must withdraw for a season into a Gentile region. (See Map) Following the road on the east side of Lake Huleh, they travelled as far as Caesarea Philippi at the base of Mt. Hermon. At that junction, they followed the westward road over the mountains toward the region of Tyre and Sidon along the coast (Mt 15:21). This was at least an 80 km journey. Depending on how quickly they walked, it likely took them about three days.

When they arrived at a secluded area, they entered a house (Mark 7:24). Perhaps it was an obscure wayside lodge. Jesus did not want anyone to know his location, but even in this distant Gentile region, this popular miracle-worker could not hide for long.

A certain woman, lived in that area, whose daughter was demon possessed, greatly burdening this mother. Matthew called her a Canaanite (i.e., a descendent of the ancient Canaanites), and Mark called her a Greek (i.e., Gentile), a Syrophoenician by nation (possibly half Syrian and half Phoenician <sup>CWS<sup>D</sup></sup>). She may have travelled down to Galilee and had heard Jesus preach or she may have known others who had. In some way, she knew Jesus. In her heart, she believed that Jesus could cast the cruel demon from her daughter. Hearing that he was lodging nearby, she determined to seek his help.

**Transition:** Her cries for help teach us valuable lessons on humble, persistent prayer.

## 1. We note first her approach in prayer.

### a. She came boldly in prayer.

- 1) She sought out the Lord. She cried unto him. Why, because she obviously had great faith that he could heal her daughter. This gave her boldness and persistence.
- 2) She cried unto him specifically.

- a) She asked him for mercy.
- b) She asked for the healing of her demon-possessed daughter.
- 3) She cried to him respectfully.
  - a) Mark 7:25 tells us that she fell at his feet.
  - b) She addressed him as Lord.
  - c) She called him the Son of David, a Messianic title.

**b. We too must come boldly to the Lord in prayer.**

- 1) The Lord wants us to pray. On another occasion Jesus said, (Matthew 7:7) "**Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:**"
- 2) We must believe that he is able to help us. Our short memories harm our belief. God has answered many prayers for us. If you and I praised the Lord more when He answers a prayer, we would not forget so quickly.
- 3) We too must cry to him specifically. Jude charges us to pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20), that is seeking his insight to discern what to pray, and his help when we don't know what to pray (Rom 8:26). James reminds us that often we have not because we ask not (Jas 4:2). This includes not praying for specific things.
- 4) Our prayer must always be respectful. You and I have no right to demand things from God nor to criticise him if the answer does not come as quickly as we desire.

**2. Next, we see her persistence in prayer.**

**a. She faced resistance.**

- 1) Jesus ignored her. This was very out of character for Jesus. He was acting like a typical Jew to teach everyone present a lesson.
- 2) The disciples begged Jesus saying, "**Send her away; for she crieth after us.**"
  - a) The disciples had no pity on her or her child. They thought only of their own comfort. Sadly, I can often relate to that! Can you?
  - b) Her cries sounded like the relentless squawks of a raven. The disciples lacked empathy.

**b. She persisted despite the resistance.**

- 1) Most of us would have gotten very upset with Jesus, but she did not seem bothered by His silence.
- 2) She ignored the disciples' efforts to get her to leave. Instead, she continued to cry for Jesus' help.
- 3) At that, Jesus commented, either to her or to the disciples in her presence, "**I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" Jesus had ministered to other Gentiles, like the centurion (Mt 8:5), why not this Gentile?
- 4) Rather than discouraging her, she "**came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.**" Zodiares tells us that the word worship meant, "*Literally, to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage. The ancient oriental (especially Persian) mode of salutation between persons of equal ranks was to kiss each other on the lips; when the difference of rank was slight, they kissed each other on the cheek; when one was much inferior, he fell upon his knees and touched his forehead to the ground or prostrated himself, throwing kisses at the same time toward the superior. ... In the NT, [it is] generally, to do reverence or homage to someone, usually by kneeling or prostrating oneself before him.*" She gave Jesus the greatest honour she could, and again begged for His help.
- 5) When God delays answering a prayer that we have confidence is His will, we must keep praying. Jesus urged this in his parable of the unjust judge. (Luke 18:1) "**And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.**" Years ago in England, George Muller prayed for more than 3 years for money to come in to build a new orphan house. In God's time, every cent was provided. Once we know God's will, we must pray persistently.

**3. Finally, we see her humility in prayer.**

**a. She knew the Jewish feeling toward Gentiles.**

- 1) Jesus tested her humility and faith by saying, "**It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.**"
- 2) To us, this seems extremely rude, but it was a cultural