

SERMON ZION, AUGUST 16

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. They were just north of the territory of Galilee. Jesus has gone there with His disciples, not to minister but to take a retreat from ministry. Mark tells us that Jesus did not want anyone to know where he was. But the presence of Jesus was difficult to escape notice.

“And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”

Note the humble way in which she approaches Him. First, she cries out for mercy. The term for cry that is used here denotes great emotion such as wailing. She does not demand her rights. She does not insist that Jesus ought to help. She appeals, not to justice, but to mercy. She also addresses Him with great respect. She calls Him “Lord,” but it is the second title that catches our attention – “Son of David.”

Matthew’s gospel opens with these words: **“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”** That title will appear a number of times, some with people asking the same thing as this woman – for the Lord, Son of David, to have mercy.

“Son of David” was the title for the Messiah. How then did this non-Jew hear of the title? What possessed her to use it? Likely she heard of it as the news got around about Jesus’ miraculous powers. That’s most likely why she has come in the first place. Though Jesus is outside of His native land, still this Gentile district borders Galilee and word spread. So perhaps the woman is merely using the term that she has heard associated with Jesus, and no more significance should be attached to it. Perhaps. Still, there is the title, which not everyone coming to Jesus uses.

This mother then presents her need – **“my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”** Her daughter’s suffering is terrible. **“But he did not answer her a word.”**

He ignores her. And it even gets worse. His disciples came and begged Him, saying, **“Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”** Ah, the kind hearted disciples. “Get rid of her; now she’s coming after us!” It brings to mind the time they rebuked parents for bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed. Don’t those parents realize that a man from God cannot be bothered with little kids! They would certainly have the same attitude here, for this is a woman outside of the covenant. She is a pagan, an idolater. The nerve of her for even showing up. Jesus, finally, seems to share the same attitude. He answered, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**

It seems that Jesus is answering the disciples in verse 24. He may be speaking to the woman or even to both. We’re not there and cannot see whom he is looking at. He affirms His mission as the Son of David, the Messiah. His mission is to the house of Israel. He has come to save the lost covenant people of Israel. He had not come into the Gentile district as part of His mission; rather. He has come as a respite from His mission. But she came and knelt before Him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

The woman is not repelled. She draws closer and kneels. “Lord, help me.” She does not argue; she knows her position, that she is outside the house of Israel and that the only appeal to make to this Jewish Man of God is to His compassion. He answered, **“It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”**

Let’s get this image clear. A mother is filled with anguish for her suffering daughter, is kneeling at Jesus’ feet, appealing to Jesus’ mercy.

This is the same Jesus who once had said, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart...”** (Matthew 11:28-9). He not only refuses her request, he insults her and

her daughter. She said, **“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.”**

What an amazing woman – her boldness, her quick wit. She has been ignored. She has been turned down. She has been insulted. She is out of her element. She is a woman among men. A Canaanite woman among Jewish men who are hostile to her. A pagan before a holy man whose response is cold. And she whips back a remark that stuns even Jesus. Then Jesus answered her, **“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”** And her daughter was healed instantly.

Finally, the healing we expected. Jesus makes it clear that He acts in response to her audacious faith. It was not her plea for mercy nor even the humble respect she demonstrated that compelled Him to act. It was her audacity to argue with Him.

He commends the greatness of her faith. Most of us would have given up. She persisted even while Jesus did not follow through on what was expected. She had followed the right formula – be humble and appeal to mercy. No result. She tried again. Still no result. In fact, only insulting refusal. Yet she believed in Him. She believed he had the power to save her daughter and that he would if she persisted. Truly what faith to keep her wits about her. Truly what great faith to believe when all evidence is against her. Now, what do we learn from the woman's faith? What does she have to teach us?

Number one: The simplicity of her faith. This Canaanite woman could not have been too well versed in Jewish history and theology. She would have some knowledge, but what would be most important is the report of a miracle-worker, a man of God who cared about the poor and who healed the sick and drove out demons.

She heard the title Son of David and probably knew that it was tied up in the hopes of a Jewish Messiah. Here was someone who would save her daughter. To that belief she attached her hope and would not let go.

Sometimes too much knowledge can interfere with faith. To be sure, we should strive to understand as much as we can. But knowledge – what we think is knowledge – can feed our doubts as well as our faith. The very fact that our faith is a matter of faith means that there will always be matters that we cannot fully explain and certainly cannot prove. This is God's design.

The very means by which He tests our commitment to Him. Remember Martha's conversation with Jesus after her brother, Lazarus, had died? While her brother lies buried in a tomb Jesus gives His great declaration: **"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."**

Then He asks, "Do you believe this?" Not "can you understand this?" But "do you believe?" Do you believe before I prove my words? Do you believe though your loved one lies in the grave? Do you believe though your age says there is no afterlife; though your age says that it does not matter what one believes about Me? Do you believe though your age says all truth is relative? Do you believe in Me? Do you believe Me? We would do well to have this woman's simple faith.

Number Two: The persistency of her faith. We would do well to have her persistent faith. This woman was undaunted. She was rebuffed three times. Each rebuff being stronger. She would not give up.

Some might reply that all of this about the woman's faith is well and good, but that she was motivated not by faith but by desperation for her daughter. I can sympathize with that view, but it does not quite play out.

Faith, not desperation, kept her focused. If all she had was desperation to drive her, her demeanor would have changed to anger. She would have raged at the disciples and even at Jesus after their rebuffs and especially after the insult. She was able to keep her wits about her because she believed He could, and would, grant her request. We would do well to have the same confidence of faith and so the same persistence in our prayers to our Lord.

Number three: The boldness of her faith. We must acknowledge the boldness, even the audacity, of her faith. She argues with Jesus and wins! Like Abraham she reasons with the Lord. Remember the story of Abraham reasoning with God on behalf of Sodom? The Lord has told him that He plans to destroy Sodom if it proves to be as wicked as the reports are made out to be. Abraham knows that this does not bode well for the city and is particularly concerned for his nephew Lot who lives there. So he reasons with God as follows: **"Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"** And the LORD said, **"If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."** Gen 18:23-26 Abraham goes on to whittle down that number. How about 45? 40? 30? 20? All the way to 10. And the Lord agrees. We know that not even ten righteous persons were found but Lot was saved because God did remember the intercession of Abraham.

What we take from Abraham, but even more from this woman, is that, far from being displeased by our prayer requests, the Lord is pleased that we come to Him.

He is pleased that we would have such faith that we come to Him boldly, even ready to argue our case. Only one with faith to believe in God and to believe that God listens would bother to do so.

That is Jesus' point in his reply to the woman, "**O woman, great is your faith!**" This woman really believes in Him! Note that He goes on to say, "**Be it done for you as you desire.**" He grants her request for her sake, for her faith. May we have such faith!

There are two times in the gospel in which Jesus is blown away with the faith shown in Him. This one and that of the centurion. In both cases the believer is a Gentile. Someone outside of the covenant people. They are individuals who don't belong to the house of Israel, people who are not children of Abraham. They demonstrate what the Apostle Paul would later pronounce clearly: "**Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."** So then, **those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.**" (Galatians 3:7-9).

It matters not your heritage nor your race nor anything in your background to be counted a son or daughter of Abraham. All that matters is your faith in Jesus Christ. That faith does not have to be sophisticated, merely the simple belief that here is the Son of David, the Messiah, sent by God to save you from your sin. Hold on to Him. Be persistent in following Him and turning to Him alone for your help and your salvation. Be bold, confident that in Jesus Christ you may boldly come before the throne of God knowing that you will be welcomed.