

The Healing of a Demon Possessed Girl, and Feeding the Four Thousand

Matthew 15:21-39

Matthew 15:21-39 - *"Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." ²³ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." ²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" ²⁶ But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." ²⁷ And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*

²⁹ Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. ³⁰ Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. ³¹ So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

³² Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."

³³ Then His disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few little fish." ³⁵ So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. ³⁶ And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. ³⁷ So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. ³⁸ Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹ And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala."

Background Notes

"Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon." The region of Tyre and Sidon is north of Israel on the Mediterranean Coast, where Lebanon is located today. According to the Gospel record, this was the only time during our Lord's public ministry that He went outside Jewish territory.

This departure emphasizes the transition in the middle chapters of the Gospel of Matthew. In the early chapters of Matthew, the gospel of the Kingdom was preached and presented to Israel: the promised and predicted Kingdom of the Messiah was at hand, because Israel's Messiah and King had arrived. But the people of Israel rejected their King and His

offer of the kingdom - in fact, they arranged His crucifixion! As a result of their rejection, the gospel of God's grace would go out to the Gentiles - to the whole world!

Once again we see this truth prophetically portrayed in the events of Matthew 15. In the first half of the chapter the Lord condemned the Jewish religious leaders. He referred to them as "hypocrites" and "blind leaders of the blind"! In the second half of Matthew 15, the Lord turned from the Jewish people for a time, and withdrew into the Gentile district of Tyre and Sidon. Here He healed the demon-possessed daughter of a Gentile woman. Notice that He didn't go to the young girl, but healed her from a distance. This adds to the prophetic picture of our Lord's present ministry in the Gentile world.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord rewards the persistent and humble faith of His followers.

In verse 22 the Gentile woman is called a "Canaanite" woman, but in the parallel account in Mark 7, she is called a "Syro-Phoenician" woman. Is this a contradiction in the Bible? No, both accounts are correct - of course! The woman was Canaanite because her roots went back to the ancient Canaanites. She was Phoenician because Tyre and Sidon were part of the ancient nation of Phoenicia, and she was a Syro-Phoenician woman because this area was now in the Roman territory of Syria. So there is no contradiction in these two accounts.

Why did the Lord refer to this woman as one of the "dogs" (v26)? That seems to be a harsh description for the Lord to use! A partial answer is that Jews looked down on Gentiles and referred to them as "dogs." But His primary reason for using this term is that the Lord wanted this woman to recognize that He was **Israel's** Messiah, and as a **Gentile** she must be willing to take a humble position. However, the Lord opened the door for her to approach Him in humility.

It's interesting to notice that the Lord didn't use the normal word the Jews used for Gentiles, a word that meant "wild scavenger dogs." No, the Lord used the word for "little house dogs" or "puppies," and some translations make that plain. This Gentile woman picked right up on His use of the "pet dog" word, and she responded, *"Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."* In other words, "Lord, I'm willing to take the humble place as a little puppy in your house and just eat the crumbs." The Lord was greatly pleased with this response, and He said, *"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour."*

What a lesson for us! The Lord rewards the persistent and humble faith of His followers. Are you willing to take a humble place before the Lord – and willing to receive only the "crumbs" from the Master's table? That's the humble position we must all take in order to be saved. We **deserve nothing** from God! We are sinners, and God is perfectly holy. But if we come to God in humble faith, recognizing that we deserve nothing and can do nothing to save ourselves, and if we accept His free gift of salvation in Christ, then we will be saved.

There is also a lesson here for those of us who are already saved. Do you have a need in your family, as this woman did? Maybe it's a need for your children or your grandchildren? Are they all believers? Are they walking with the Lord? This

Gentile woman followed the Lord, cried out to Him, and humbly submitted to Him - and then the Lord answered her and delivered her daughter from demon-possession. In the same way, the Lord can answer our prayers for our children, our grandchildren and other members of our families. The Lord rewards the persistent and humble faith of His followers.

2. The Lord meets the spiritual and physical needs of His followers.

Verses 29-39: *"Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. ³⁰ Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. ³¹ So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.*

³² Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." ³³ Then His disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few little fish." ³⁵ So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. ³⁶ And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. ³⁷ So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. ³⁸ Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹ And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala."

We don't know exactly where the feeding of **four** thousand took place, but from the parallel account in Mark 7 we know that it was in the region of the Decapolis, on the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. Note that this is not the same place, nor is it the same event as the feeding of the **five** thousand. Both of these miracles are recorded in both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark, and these are **two different miracles!**

There are other differences besides the different locations and how many were fed. In the miracle of feeding five thousand men there were five loaves and two fish, and twelve small baskets were left over, but in feeding four thousand there were seven loaves and a few fish, and seven large baskets were left over. A different Greek word is used for the baskets in each case. So there were two miracles: the feeding of five thousand and the feeding of four thousand.

The main lesson in this wonderful and gracious display of the Lord's power is our doctrinal point: the Lord meets the spiritual and physical needs of His followers. Throughout our Lord's Galilean ministry He both taught and healed. Look at all the miracles of healing that are mentioned: *"Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. So the multitude marveled*

when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel” (v30-31). Notice that these were not “psychosomatic” diseases that were healed. No one could doubt the miraculous when disabled people could walk again, and blind people could see! And then comes the great miracle of feeding four thousand men - plus women and children!

So with His teaching, healing, and feeding miracles, the Lord Jesus took care of the spiritual **and** the physical needs of the people who followed Him. And this is still true today. Whatever your spiritual or physical needs may be, the Lord knows how to meet those needs. The Lord can still heal people today.

However, in His sovereign plan the Lord may choose not to heal your literal physical illness or difficulty. Rather He may choose to restore your soul, and give you His grace and strength so you can live with that physical problem - with joy! Remember what the Lord said when the apostle Paul asked the Lord to remove his “thorn in the flesh”? *“I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).* The Lord meets the spiritual and physical needs of His followers.

Practical Application

Let’s not be hard-hearted disciples!

“Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.’ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she cries out after us” (v22-23).

The disciples were annoyed by this Gentile woman’s persistent, loud behavior! They had no compassion for her cry for help, or for her distressing situation. They were impatient and hard-hearted.

Are we like the disciples? We may love the Lord, but we have a hard time tolerating people who constantly annoy us with their needs. And let’s face it - some people can be quite persistent and quite annoying!

Well, let’s try to be compassionate - even with people who annoy us. Many of them have real needs that the Lord wants to meet. And He wants us to be involved! Let’s **not** be like the hard-hearted disciples.