

THE APPARENT RELUCTANCE OF GOD
Matt. 15:21-28

Intro: Luke gives us two parables in which the same emphasis is made that we have in the story of our Lord and the Canaanite (or Syrophenician, as Mark identifies her in Mark 7:24-30). Mark also says that she was a Greek, i.e., a Gentile.

The two parables of our Lord in Luke are found in:

- 1) Luke 11:5-10.
- 2) Luke 18:1-8.

The same is found in the Psalms. Cf. Ps. 13.

There is probably nothing that is more difficult for a child of God to take than such treatment as is illustrated by these passages of Scripture. There are many reasons why this is a trial to us:

- 1) It often seems so unnecessary.
- 2) Sometimes it even seems cruel.
- 3) It implies that God does not love us.
- 4) Some have been made to feel that it is because there is something wrong in their lives, but they cannot find out what it is.
- 5) It often throws us into confusion as to what we should do as compared with what God will do.
- 6) We have certain times set in our minds, and it often appears that God has actually waited too long.

How can passages of Scripture like these help us?

I. SOME ENCOURAGEMENTS TO ^{Be}SEEN IMMEDIATELY. (We will confine ourselves basically to the story of our Lord's dealings with the Syrophenician woman.)

- A. The first and last things in the story indicate that the Lord's main reason for going into the area of Tyre and Sidon was to be with this woman. Cf. Matt. 15:21, 22a, 29a.

Obviously, He knew about the need, and knew what had been going on in this woman's heart, and He went up there, those many miles, just to see her!

As always, it helps to look at things from the Lord's point of view.

- B. He met the need. Cf. Matt. 15:28.

This is the outcome over and over again. There might be delays, but the Lord is always faithful.

- C. It looked hopeless for a time, but she did not actually have to wait as long as others in the Bible have had to wait.

Her daughter was actually healed before she got home.

The Lord does not ^{usually} make us wait as long as others have had to wait.

- D. At the time when it seemed the most hopeless, the Lord answered her cry.

What could possibly be more final than what our Lord says in Matt. 15:26? And yet it was right after that that the need was met -- instantaneously!

II. AN IMPORTANT DETAIL -- from Matt. 15:22.

Have you noticed what this woman called the Lord? She addressed Him as, "O Lord, thou Son of David." What do we see in this?

Not everybody walked up to the Lord and spoke to Him in this way. Here is a woman who had heard about the Lord. It would be interesting to know the sources of her information and how she had struggled with what she had heard. But it seems clear that she had come to two settled convictions about the Lord:

- 1) That He was indeed the Lord. It seems to be a clear testimony that she believed in His Deity.
- 2) That He was the Messiah -- the One promised by the OT prophets, not only for Israel, but "for a light of the Gentiles," or, "nations" (Isa. 42:6b)!

Thus, we see that the meeting of this need was only a part of all that the Lord had been doing in her heart. Not only had she turned to the Lord, but her faith was already strong before this incident.

Had she ever seen the Lord before? We do not know. There is nothing to indicate that she had. Even if she had not seen Him, she had heard of Him and believed in a way that many did not believe who had had many opportunities to be with Him.

Let us not isolate our problems. Any need we have is only a part of all that the Lord is doing in our lives -- and possibly of what He is doing in the lives of others (as illustrated by her daughter).

III. THE OBSTACLES THAT SHE HAD TO OVERCOME.

There are four of them:

- A. The silence of the Lord: "But he answered her not a word" (Matt. 15:23a).

This is the hardest thing for a child of God to endure. What a stream of thoughts flood our minds when we pray, but receive no answer.

Mary and Martha were both bothered by this when Lazarus got sick, but the Lord did not come.

- B. The opposition of the disciples (Matt. 15:23b).

They were actually praying against her. They did not want to be bothered with her.

Next to the silence of the Lord Himself, the hardest thing is to get by the discouragements that other believers place in our way.

They might mean, "Don't trouble the Lord about that?" Or, "Don't you think that the Lord has more important things to take care of than your needs?" "Do you think that you are the only one with^a problem?"

- C. The first response from the Lord (Matt. 15:24).

And this was a true answer.

- D. The second response from the Lord (Matt. 15:26).

Would she was Him to give something to her that might deprive a blessing from someone else?

Has this ever kept you from praying? You can see others whose needs are so much greater than yours. Why should you cry out about yours when others are even more desperate?

IV. THE REASONS FOR THE APPARENT RELUCTANCE OF OUR LORD TO MEET HER NEED.

- A. He gave her the need so that she would pray. It was a need beyond her ability to meet. So often it takes this before we will pray.

- B. He did not immediately answer because He wanted her to come again -- and again -- and again.

What will it take to teach us that the Lord delights in our coming, that He never wearies of our prayers, that He leaves the burden for a time because without the burden we might stop coming!

- C. He wanted her to gather up all of her arguments and present them to Him.

We do this when we go to the Word of God and search the Scriptures for promises, for truths, for any Word that we can bring before Him in prayer.

Note what Jacob did in Gen. 32:⁹12 when he was on his way back home to meet Easu.

- D. He wanted to strengthen her faith -- not destroy it.

See His words of commendation in v. 28.

Let us remember these things as we come to the Lord for help in meeting any need.

V. THE OUTSTANDING FEATURES OF HER PRAYER.

The first thing that strikes us is:

- A. Its simplicity and its brevity.

In our English translation there are only 36 words in all of her praying. In the Greek there are only 31 words.

Let us remember that we are not heard because of all the words that we use. Cf. Matt. 6:7, 8.

- B. Its sincerity and urgency, its importunity.

She was like Jacob who said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26b).

- C. It was the cry of a mother for her daughter.

The Lord understands a parent's heart. Remember that God is our heavenly Father. Do you remember also what the father of the prodigal son said after his son came home? In explaining why they were going to have a feast he said, "For this, my son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:24a).

Our Lord understood this mother's concern!

D. Her humility -- in vv. 22, 25, 27.

She speaks 3 times, and each time she calls Him, "LORD."

— Her only claim upon Him is through His mercy -- for her misery. She did not demand -- just prayed!

She was willing to be a dog under the table and take only the crumbs that were left over from what the Lord did for others -- and she was sure that just the crumbs, if they came from the Lord, would be enough!

Concl: In closing -- why do you think that this story is included in the Word -- and two times?

It is there for us!

— These are not all of the factors that enter into our praying but these are some of the most important. Time and time again we find ourselves helpless in the face of a great need. The answers do not always come as quickly as they did for this woman -- although we do not know how long her daughter had been demon-possessed, or how long this mother had wished (and possibly prayed) that the Lord would come into their area! But the 8 verses are full of wonderful teaching for us. And the Lord whose ways are past finding out (cf. Rom. 11:33) has given us this story for our encouragement and for the strengthening of our faith so that we will call and so that He can answer.