

Introduction

Jesus tries to get away for some time alone with his disciples. He leaves the borders of Israel and travels to Phoenicia, but even here he cannot escape notice. A woman finds him and loudly cries for help for her daughter who is afflicted with an evil spirit.

241 Crumbs from the Master's Table 1

Pressure was coming from every quarter. The political leaders of the land had heard of Jesus and his mighty works of power and were suspicious of his motives. The religious leaders had sent delegations to question him and follow him because they thought his activities to be scandalous, dangerous, and deceptive to Israel. His family members at times thought he had lost his mind. The crowds wanted to crown him as their king, but their kind of kingdom was different from the kind of kingdom God wanted. And sometimes, even his own disciples did not fully understand his mission. They questioned him or asked him to do things that were not right. Yes, pressure was coming from every quarter.

It was time to do something about it.

“Come. We are in much need of some rest. We are leaving the land of Israel and going into Syro-Phoenicia.”

“Lord, we are leaving our people?”

“Just for a little while. Then we will return. There is still much work to do. But for now, we will rest.”

Jesus and his disciples had tried to take a break several days previous. The disciples had just returned from their preaching tour and were tired. They got into a boat and sailed to a spot on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where they thought no one would be, but word had gotten out about their destination and they were greeted by thousands! Jesus, graciously, spent time with them, teaching, healing, and feeding the thousands. But it was time to get away again. And this time, Jesus and the disciples did something they rarely did, they left the border of Israel.

They went northwest from Galilee of Israel and into the region of Tyre and Sidon, the land of the Phoenicians and Syrians. This was a hilly area where few people lived and the prospect for some days of rest and quiet seemed almost certain.

The land of the Phoenicians and Syrians had played a role in the history of God's people. When King David built a palace for himself, he used workers from this area who were experts in carpentry, and the wood from this area was some of the best in world. Solomon used them in the building of his temple. This was a wealthy land and the people of this region had been a great sea power for centuries, trading with other nations, and even colonizing distant lands. Now, in the time of Jesus it was inhabited by many sophisticated Greek people who were aligned with Roman imperial policy. Rome was the new power and Rome afforded protection for their land and wealth.

It was also a land of great spiritual darkness and need.

Rome could give military protection. The Greeks could bring their wealth and philosophy, but neither could satisfy the hunger of hearts for a relationship with the true God. Neither could provide solutions for the deep spiritual needs of people.

In this land lived a woman and her daughter. We are not told if she was married, a single mother, a widow, or divorced. But we know she had a child, a daughter, and something was wrong with her little girl. The woman believed she was afflicted with an evil spirit. We are not told what this spirit did to the child, but only that it caused great suffering.

The fame of Jesus had spread, and this woman had heard the stories. News about his healing power spread far beyond the borders of Israel. Matthew tells us that the reports of Jesus had reached throughout Syria; and that people brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Naturally, as people returned home with great joy, they would also return with the news of this great man who had power and compassion for everyone.

This woman had never been able to travel to see this Jesus. But then one day she heard something that brought hope to her troubled heart – Jesus was in the area! Jesus had come to her land, and she set off at once to find where Jesus was.

If only we could have seen this picture from above! We would see the woman travelling in one direction, southeast and she is looking for Jesus. Jesus is travelling in the opposite direction northwest and towards her, but he is looking for privacy and quiet. The woman is travelling with great need in her heart – she is burdened for her daughter afflicted with an evil spirit. Jesus is travelling with great need in his heart – he is burdened for the world, but he also needs time to rest and find refreshment for the great work that was ahead of him.

Their paths would soon meet in one of the greatest stories of faith ever told.

Jesus and his disciples entered a small village. They made some inquiries and found a home of a fellow Israelite that they could use for a few days. Jesus entered the house and he told his disciples, “Please, don’t let anyone know that I am here.”

But the woman has arrived in the same village and she was asking everyone, “Please, I am looking for Jesus. I have heard that he is somewhere in the area. This is Jesus, from the people of Israel. He is the one who has healing power. Do you know where he is?”

To house after house she went. Person after person she questioned, and then finally she asked someone who said, “Yes, I know where he is. He is using my home – look, just down at the end of the road. You can see some of his followers there. In fact, I think Jesus has just come outside to speak with them. See him there, but I don’t think he wants to be disturbed, I think ...”

But the woman did not hear the man. As soon as she saw Jesus, she set off as fast as she could and as she approached him she cried out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David, my daughter is cruelly afflicted with an evil spirit. Jesus, please, help me. My daughter is so sick.”

But Jesus did not say a word. He continued looking at the woman in her pitiful state, and she continued crying and asking for mercy with a loud voice. “Jesus, Lord, Son of David. Have mercy upon me!”

The disciples could not believe it! They have been discovered again. Was this going to be like the Sea of Galilee where they tried to get away for a few days of rest only to find thousands of people waiting for them? Yes, this was only one person, but she was making so much noise, others would hear and there would soon be a crowd.

Some of Jesus’ disciples came to him and said, “Master, send her away. You sent the crowds away after you fed them. This is just one woman. Send her away. Look down the street, people can hear her and soon the whole village will know you are here. Lord, do something before this time is ruined too!”

But Jesus said to his disciples. “You want me to heal her just to quiet her and send her away? No, I will not. Besides, in the ministry my Father has given me – for this time, for this moment – I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. This woman is not of Israel. It is not yet time for the others.”

The woman listened closely to everything Jesus and his disciples were saying, and with boldness she came right up to him, fell at his feet and said, “Jesus, please, help me. Lord, help me!”

And Jesus said to her, “Woman, when you Gentiles prepare a meal, do you take the food and share it with the little puppies around the house, that your children play with, or do the parents feed their children first? It is not good to take away the food that belongs to the children.”

But the woman said, “Yes, Lord, that is true. But sometimes, the little dogs are under the table, and when crumbs of food fall from the table while everyone is eating, the little dogs eat those crumbs and they are satisfied.”

A huge smile broke out on the face of Jesus and his heart filled with joy. He closed his eyes – saw the little girl and the spirit that afflicted her – and he said in his heart to the spirit, “Be gone.” And immediately the evil spirit left the little girl.

Then he looked at the woman and said, “O woman, because of your answer, the demon has gone out of your daughter.”

The woman could not believe what she had heard. Her heart filled with joy and she stood up, wiped the tears from her face and said, “Thank you Lord. Thank you.” She walked away from Jesus and when she returned to her home, she found her child resting upon her bed with a look of peace upon her sweet face, for the demon had gone, never to return.

There is so much to learn from this story. Why did Jesus say he was sent only to Israel? Was he not sent for the whole world? Why did Jesus say that he did not want to give food to the dogs? Was he calling the woman, or the woman’s child a dog? And then, why did he immediately heal the woman’s daughter?

We will answer these questions and more in our next broadcast.