

Opening Words

Why did Jesus say he was sent only to Israel and not the world? Why did he say it was not good to take the children's food and give it to the dogs?

242 Crumbs from the Master's Table 2

Jesus is in Phoenicia outside the borders of Israel, one of the few times he leaves his land. He is looking for quiet and rest but when a woman discovers him she runs to Jesus and cries 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 had 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?

Why did Jesus heal the woman’s daughter when there were so many obstacles in her path? Let’s look at what the woman had to overcome.

First, Jesus was in her village, but he did not come to teach, to feed people, or to heal. He came for rest. She wanted help. He was there for quiet and peace.

Second, when the woman first started crying out, Jesus did not say a word. He did not immediately heal the girl, but he kept quiet, reminding us that sometimes God is silent. But his silence is never a sign that he does not love and is not concerned.

Third, Jesus’ disciples wanted to send her away. There wasn’t much love coming from them. They had learned many lessons, but they still had much to learn about ministry to people. But the attitude of the disciples did not stop the woman. She persevered and stayed right there.

Fourth, Jesus said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” What did Jesus mean? Did he not care for the gentiles as well as the Jews? Had he not come for the whole world? He had indeed come for the whole world, but first, he had to come for Israel because the prophecies said that first Israel must be restored, then the message of salvation would go to the world through a restored Israel. The woman knew she was not of Israel. Yet, she did not leave. She was desperate to receive the blessing of God.

Fifth, when the woman came and knelt before him, like a little lost puppy, whimpering for her sad state and that of her daughter, Jesus said it was not good to take the children’s bread and give it to little dogs. Some have thought that Jesus was insulting her. In that part of the world, at that time, dogs were mean scavengers and were not usually household pets. They roamed in packs and were considered unclean and dangerous. And if a household did have a dog as a pet, the dog would only receive the scraps from the table after everyone had eaten.

Food was hard to come by for many. There were not modern stores with brightly colored packages of food for dogs. The dogs ate the leftovers after everyone in the family had eaten. And sometimes, the dogs would sit under the table and on some lucky days some food would fall from the table and they were there to gobble it up.

As the woman thought on how children ate first, even in her own family, and then the dogs, she thought on the many times that dogs would sit under the table and wait for food to fall.

But the woman thought on something else. She thought on Jesus and his greatness. Yes, it was true that it was not time for the Gentiles, but was not Jesus greater? She thought on how it was not yet time to feed the rest of the world but first he must feed his own people. But was not Jesus' power great enough to provide for others even now? If she could have just a crumb, just a small portion, that would be enough. She did not need a full meal, and when the woman said, "yes but even the little dogs under the table eat the crumbs that fall from the table and are satisfied," Jesus marveled and said that she had great faith.

How many times had Jesus given a full meal to his own people, yet they would not believe? How many times had Jesus shown great power to heal but Israel still would not believe? Yet here was a Gentile woman and all she needed was a crumb from the table, not even a full loaf of bread, just a crumb would be enough.

This gentile woman had great faith, the faith that Israel was supposed to have, and when she spoke her words of faith, Jesus leaped over all the obstacles that had been set between him and the woman and healed her daughter. Yes, it was true that it was not time for the Gentiles, but Jesus gladly set that aside because there was a greater lesson for everyone to hear – the lesson of having faith in him.

Oh, this was a hard lesson for his people. But strangely, gentiles and women and the blind, those in greatest need, often showed the greatest faith. Remember the story of the Roman centurion who wanted Jesus to heal his servant? Jesus marveled at his faith and said, "I have not found such faith in all Israel!" Here was a Roman, a leader of a hundred soldiers who were the oppressors of his people, yet in this Roman, Jesus found faith.

Remember the woman who had the bleeding problem? She was a woman. She was unclean. But she was desperate for healing and while everyone else was touching Jesus, grabbing onto Jesus, wanting healing and receiving nothing, she touched the edge of his robes and immediately was healed. When Jesus stopped, and had the woman come forward and tell everyone what she had done, he said to her, "Woman, your faith has healed you."

The edge of his robe, a crumb from his table. Healing is no problem for Jesus. It takes very little effort for him to heal, and whenever anyone at any time showed faith, Jesus was ready to show his power on their behalf. Yes, he often healed without people showing faith. He did that because he was merciful, but he was also looking for faith. And whenever anyone showed faith, Jesus was ready to act. When this woman showed her faith in Jesus, her daughter was immediately healed.

Why is faith so important to Jesus? It is because faith is a demonstration of a good relationship and faith shows the trustworthiness of the one in whom the faith is placed.

Think of your relationships. Think of the people you trust and the people you don't. The ones that you do trust – why do you trust them? The ones that you do not trust – why do you not trust them? With whom do you have the best relationships? Who are the ones you keep at arms-length, the ones

you don't care for? Those questions all have easy answers to them. Trust-filled relationships are the relationships we all want.

My friends, God wants to have a trust-filled relationship with us. He wants us to realize that we can trust him. He does love us. He does have our best in mind. He will work out all things for good for those who love him. God does not want to be some religious figurehead in our minds. God does not want to be just a concept and someone we refer to once a week when we go to a religious service. God wants a continued, daily trust-filled relationship with us.

Second, faith shows the trustworthiness of the person in whom you are placing faith. If you place faith in someone you are declaring to the world that this person is trust-worthy, and God wants us to have faith in him and show the world his trust-worthiness.

But there are other reasons why God wants us to have faith. Only by faith can we have vision to see what God wants to make of us and only by faith can we move the mountains that stand in the path to doing God's will. Do you have mountains in your life? Do you have obstacles you cannot seem to get over? Think of this woman from the region of Syria and Phoenicia. Think of her troubles. Think of the obstacles she had to overcome and think of the persevering faith she had in Jesus, so strong, so persevering, that Jesus met her great faith with a great work of power for her daughter.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was looking for trust-filled relationships and Jesus was seeking to build faith in his disciples. These men would need great faith to carry out the mission that he would send them on after he died and rose from the dead. Even though, during their years together in Israel, it was not time for the mission to the Gentiles, that time would come when he would send them to all the nations of the world and they would need great faith for their journeys. And so, during their time of ministry, Jesus would point out to them the faith of others – like this woman, “O woman, your faith is great.” He would reprove them for their unbelief. Remember when Peter started walking on water, took his eyes off Jesus and started to sink? He said, “O you of little faith!” Remember when Jesus stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee? He said to them all, “where is your faith!”

What about you? Where is your faith today? Do you have a trust-filled relationship with Jesus? He came to this earth, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and sent those same disciples into the world to people just like the woman in our story that they might share the good news that God was searching for people with whom he could have a trust-filled relationship. I hope that you be that kind of person.

After Jesus healed the woman's daughter he and his followers left the area. They travelled along the northern part of the Sea of Galilee and into the region to the east of the Sea which was another Gentile area. Jesus healed a deaf man and as word spread of his presence thousands came to him again, and again they had no food except for seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. But what was this among four thousand men? But this time the disciples were ready! At Jesus' command, the disciples had everyone recline, he broke the bread and the fish, and the disciples served all the people in this region of the Gentiles on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus watched as his men served the food. A day would come when they would serve the true, spiritual food to the multitudes not only here but everywhere in the world. As Jesus watched his men serve the bread and as he watched 4000 men hungrily partake of it, he thought of the woman who needed only a crumb from his table to find healing for her daughter. He thought of the trust-filled relationship he had built with her, and he thought of the trust-filled relationships he would build with millions of people in the ages to come.

My question to you is, “Was he thinking of you?”