

August 20, 2023

St. Matthew 15:21-28:

“We Have Some Things to Think About”

- I. God Tests His People.
- II. Think About What We Really Deserve.
- III. The Divine Perspective.

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St. Matthew 15:21-28

Dear Friends in Christ,

Back in 1994 Concordia Publishing House published a book written by Thomas C. Peters entitled Battling For The Modern Mind. The book deals with G.K. Chesterton who has been quoted from this pulpit a number of times over the years. Peters wrote, "Chesterton is widely known as one of the most effecting and entertaining defenders of the Christian faith in the early part of the 20th century (p.13)." Regarding the Christian faith and the offense always associated with the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, Chesterton wrote:

The great ideals of the past failed not by being outlived...but by not being lived enough... The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried (p.14).

That is a most interesting statement: *The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.*" Do you remember, at all, the reaction of the many people who chased after and followed Jesus; their reaction to His teaching? Listen: "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him (Jn.6:66)."

I ask you to listen to this definition of sentimentalism: "Sentimentalism is a practice of being sentimental (of course), and the tending toward basing actions and reaction upon emotions and feelings, in preference to reason." That is exactly what much of the church in this world has become: sentimental. Walking with and worshiping the Lord is mostly about the want to feel a certain way about God, not the want to know how God sees and deals with us!

I'll ask what I've asked before: If all we had for worship was a room, a bunch of chairs, no organ or instruments, no hymnals; if we had to bring our own Bibles, and could only sing what we had memorized; if all we had were the written and spoken Word and the visible word of the Sacraments would this church still be your church? Would it? Would you turn away, as many have, because the Word and Word alone is too much; doesn't appeal to what a person thinks and feels?

You know, at this point in time . . .

WE HAVE SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

I. God Tests His People.

God tests us. And, hopefully, we understand that some tests are severe. We can't walk away or hide from, "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives (Heb. 12:6)." We can't walk away or hide from, "...you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (I Pt.1:6,7)." We can't walk away or hide from Paul's sufferings: "Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked...endangered from robbers, dangers from my own people...danger in the wilderness...danger from false brothers...in toil and hardship..there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant (2 Cor.11:25-29, selected verses)?"

Just as profound is this from the Book of Hebrews: "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ...but (God) disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness (Heb. 12:7,10)." That is to say, to keep us focused on His Word and eternal life.

And then the writer of Hebrews makes this observation: "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant (again, our journey with the Lord isn't always smiles and happy feelings), but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb. 12:11)." God's tests and discipline are always in the context of His perfect love for His children: His desire for their eternal welfare.

In the midst of the trials and tears of life we would be greatly comforted if we cling to this Word of God through David: "When the righteous (those who God sees as righteous through faith in Christ) cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles (in His time and way). The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all (Ps. 34:17-19)."

And that brings to our text . . .

II. Think About What We Really Deserve.

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 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 (vv.21-22)."

This is a horrifying disaster, isn't it? A mother with a demon possessed child. Her baby. It tears at the heart. And on top of that she's an undesirable Canaanite. We're told that the disciples "begged him (Jesus), saying, 'Send her away, for she is crying out after us (v.23b).'" This Canaanite woman shatters human reasoning. She doesn't whine, cry out, as most do, "If God is love then why is He letting this happen?" She doesn't even think it: "I've been a good person. Surely God owes me something."

Her request is one made by a person with spiritual insight: "'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David (v.22b).'" She recognized Jesus as "the Son of David." She recognized Him as the One who could save. She understood what many Jews didn't: Jesus is the Son of God and a descendent of David according to the flesh. He is God and Man.

This lady understood a piece of theology that many fail to understand: God owes us nothing. He didn't and doesn't sin against us. We did and do sin against Him. And, yet, He gives us everything in Christ; forgiveness of every sin, the promise of eternal life, feeds us Word and Sacraments, the promise that He will Shepherd us through this world. In the midst of all the trials we cry, **God have mercy on me!** He does.

David was quite clear about this: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps. 51:17)." And He doesn't. As messed up as we often get, His love is always there! As God says through Asaph: "and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me (Ps. 50:15)." That's the promise.

And that brings us to verses 21-28 of our text:

III. The Divine Perspective.

But he (Jesus) did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord help me." And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly (vv.21-28).

When Jesus said, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.", He is referring to the fact the first concern of His mission was for the Jewish people, though Gentiles were brought into the church throughout the history of the Old Testament. The Greek word used for *dogs* refers to a house pet, not a wild dog. And we remember the great commission in which Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (Mt.28:19)."

But the question is there, isn't it? Is this our loving Jesus? He has to be cajoled into healing a demon possessed child? Listen to this excellent insight; author unknown: "...as Jesus looked on the woman, He did not see her as an interloper as did the disciples - an unwelcome intruder on His time and energy. Rather, he saw her as a woman of great personal faith, and His conversation with her was designed to test that faith..."

Look! He already saw the faith of this woman. He further developed it in a most dramatic way. Her faith would witness to the those first disciples - and the ones now. Many of us have been at the bedside of suffering and dying brothers and sisters, of family and friends. We have had occasions when their faith strengthened us. Yes, sometimes He lets things get "bad", as we would say. Everything He does with His people draws them to the most important gifts that have been given: forgiveness of every sin and the promise of eternal life through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.

William Thomson, known as Lord Kelvin, was a noted British scientist of the 19th century. He made this observation: "When you are face to face with a difficulty, you are up against a discovery." You know, we've got some things to think about when our faith is and will be tested.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott