

## **“Working Through the Silence of God”**

### 1. THE DESPERATE SITUATION

Matthew 15:21, 22

When the Gospel of Mark tells us of this event, he records in chapter 7 and verse 26, “The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation....” The protagonist of our text was a Grecian woman living in Israel. She knew clearly who Jesus was; she addressed Him, “...O Lord, thou Son of David...” (Matthew 15:22). This is the beginning point of faith as the Bible says, “...For he that cometh to God must believe that he is...” (Hebrews 11:6).

In the highly segregated society of that time, this woman was brave in her faith to even approach the Lord Jesus, who would later be named the King of the Jews. The woman, however, was not put off because of the desperation of her situation. The Syrophenician woman’s daughter was not just vexed, but “grievously” vexed, which means miserably, terribly and severely. At this point, no home remedies, casual medications, man’s best methods and definitely not mere positive thinking will avail. If God did not come through to help this girl, there would be no help. Keep this in mind: God is never frustrated by our inability to help ourselves and others. Let me give you a portion of two verses from the book of Acts: 27:20c, “...all hope that we should be saved was then taken away” and also 27:44c, “... they escaped all safe to land.” Paul was in the worst storm of his life. It was inescapable and potentially fatal. It was when there was no human ability to save themselves that God came through. The great temptation that we all have when we have exhausted our human efforts is to give up. Don’t do that! This is when God’s greatest rescue mission most often takes place.

### 2. THE SILENT RESPONSE

Matthew 15:23a

These words are most sobering, “But He answered her not a word...” (Matthew 15:23a). No doubt, everyone has been here before. You have a great need, you have prayed and you hear nothing.

After C. S. Lewis’ wife Joy died of a long and terrible illness, he recorded in a notebook his thoughts, which were later published in 1963 shortly before his own death. He wrote: “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness...On the rebound one passes into tears and pathos. Maudlin tears. I almost prefer the moments of agony. These are at least clean and

honest...Meanwhile, where is God?...When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him...if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be – or so it feels – welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become...Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?” It seems Lewis, like so many others, came to discover that God was not absent, but that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). We say this because later Lewis would write these words, “I have gradually been coming to feel that the door is no longer shut and bolted...[I was like] the drowning man who can’t be helped because he clutches and grabs.”

Clutching and grabbing is what so many of us do when we don’t hear from God. Bruce Pandolfini, chessmaster, described his work with his students: “My lessons consist of a lot of silence. I listen to other teachers, and they’re always talking...I let my students think. If I do ask a question and I don’t get the right answer, I’ll rephrase the question – and wait. I never give the answer. Most of us really don’t appreciate the power of silence. Some of the most effective communication – between student and teacher, between master players – takes place during silent periods.” Don’t waste the silent periods. Listen. Listen like you’ve never listened before. If we get too loud in our panic, we will not hear the eventual “still small voice” (I Kings 19:12). It is in the silence that God may reveal the sin that needs to be confessed, the doubts that have overthrown faith, the cynicism that has accumulated or the patience that must be endured. Oswald Chambers said, “Are you mourning before God because you have not had an audible response? When you cannot hear God, you will find that He has trusted you in the most intimate way possible— with absolute silence, not a silence of despair, but one of pleasure, because He saw that you could withstand an even bigger revelation. If God has given you a silence, then praise Him— He is bringing you into the mainstream of His purposes.” And God’s purposes are worth waiting for.

### 3. THE UNSYMPATHETIC DISCIPLES

Matthew 15:23b

The disciples of our Lord said, “...Send her away....” Sometime in life you will be disappointed by some of the followers of Christ. We need each other and God reminds us in His word of His desire for us to not be divided, but to be of the “same mind” (Romans 12:16; I Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 4:2). There will still be the times you will long to be of the same mind with a brother or sister in Christ and they will resist and sometimes even refuse to help you when you are in need. I believe God will sometimes allow this, not to sever our ties with other believers, but to assure that our allegiance to Him will not unnecessarily be filtered in second-hand

faith through another believer. We can berate those who pray to saints instead of directly to Jesus, but are we not doing the same thing when we place the opinions of men, even men that we love and respect to hold the final word in our decision making process?

#### 4. THE MASTER ON MISSION

Matthew 15:24

These words seem cold and harsh to someone outside of the nation of Israel. However, a protocol is being followed, as seen in John 1:11: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” The Syrophenician woman was soon to discover the truth of the next verse, John 1:12: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” The mission of Jesus is lost sheep. “And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31b, 32). As we follow our Lord to the cross and resurrection we see His ultimate goal is to bring all the lost sheep to His fold. John 10:16: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

#### 5. THE VENERATED REQUEST

Matthew 15:25

Job 1:20 informs us when Job had lost all, “Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped.” He declared in Job 1:20-22, that it was the Lord who gives and takes away and he did not charge God foolishly. Worship is the best posture for a confused saint. It is in the place of worship that we begin to appreciate the greatness of God even when we cannot understand the purposes of God.

#### 6. THE INSULTING REBUFF

Matthew 15:26

This answer The Lord Jesus gives seems so harsh, but in reality as we look at it from our vantage point, it was Christ encouraging her to press on, not give up. It is so easy to interpret God’s silence as “No” when really it is a “Not yet!”

#### 7. THE UNDETERRED DETERMINATION

Matthew 15:27

Here, the woman reverently holds tenaciously to the mercy she knows personifies the Lord in all His deeds and actions, “...because He delighteth in mercy” (Micah 7:18c).

## 8. THE FAITH COMMENDATION

Matthew 15:28a

The faith displayed here reminds us of the great faith of the Roman centurion that Jesus spoke so highly of in Matthew 8:10.

## 9. THE PERFECT ANSWER

Matthew 15:28b; Mark 7:30

Three truths stand out in the Lord's healing. The girl was made whole. This is a great old Bible word that tells us, nothing else needs to be done. And then in Mark we are told the devil was gone; it was not a partial exorcism (Mark 7:29, 30; Luke 11:24-26). Finally, we discover the girl "...laid upon the bed" (Mark 7:30). Thank God for the rest that comes when Jesus heals us. He does all things perfectly!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.