

The Syro-Phoenician Woman

By: Steven J. Wallace

“From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden. For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. But Jesus said to her, ‘Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.’ And she answered and said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs.’ Then He said to her, ‘For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.’ And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed” (Mk. 7:24-30).

Jesus in wanting to take a reprieve from the infidelity, danger and dullness of heart of His own people traveled into the borders of Phoenicia. Among the Gentiles was a most remarkable woman. It is astonishing that from an area so darkened by heathenism where idolatry and wickedness drenched the landscape for hundreds of years that such a woman would arise in scripture. She warrants a place of verbal praise that never fell from the lips of Christ to any of His fellow countrymen. Rather than the familiar charges of “little faith,” “hardness of heart,” and “unbelief,” Jesus commended this woman, like the Centurion in Luke 7:9, saying, “Great is your faith” (Matt. 15:28; contrast Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; Mk. 10:5; 16:14; etc.). It’s amazing that this woman even knew of and sought out Christ, the son of David (Matt. 15:22). It’s amazing that this woman would continue to ask Jesus and beg His grace on behalf of her daughter though He initially ignored and denied her. Amazing still

that she persisted when the Lord’s own disciples began saying “send her away” (Matt. 15:23; Mk. 8:26). Amazing yet still, that after she was given no answer and then denied that she worshiped Jesus (Matt. 15:25). Yes, Jesus is worthy of worship even He if does not answer our cries the way we want them answered! Further amazed we find this woman persisting to engage Christ even after being likened to a “little dog” and spoken thereby as inferior to children. I think most women would have had their feelings hurt and walked away in anger or sorrow. But this woman shows to us a feisty resolve to eat even the crumbs that fall from heaven’s table. Oh that the church was full of more women like her!

How many women have faith enough to bulldoze through pride to attain grace from God today? Rather, are there not many who complain against sermons on sin, worldliness, social drinking, immodesty, dancing and the like? Are there not many who chew up the preacher to their husbands and children when issues like the above are exposed, expounded and applied? Are there not those who become offended when the role of woman is taught as being subjective to man? “Submission” is often the all forgotten trait of inner beauty in the modern woman (1 Pet. 3:1-6). If full submission was aspired and desired with the same ambition that facials, make-up, pedicures, manicures and hairstyles are, the modern family and the presentation of the church would sure look more striking than it does today. Sadly in many families the man is happy to let the woman rule the house, and sadder yet is that the woman loves to have it that way.

But this grateful woman sets herself apart not only from those “children” in Judah, but also many other women. She never tries to overstep

the Christ, but simply begs him for help and finds a crack (perhaps intentional by the Lord) in His illustration to show that little dogs can also partake without spoiling or robbing the meal designed for the children. Her goal is not derailed by any obstacle laid before her.

Her request was regarding her young demon-possessed daughter (Mk. 7:25). All who have had the blessed experience of having children can relate to this woman's throbbing heart in regards to her young daughter. That young daughter, that cute and delicate damsel, that ray of sunshine and energy amidst gloom and fresh springtime air in winter was being abused by Satan and his angels. Had this woman turned in disgust with Jesus' initial response or lack thereof, had she been insulted by the disciples telling Jesus to send her away, had she shrunk back by being likened to a little dog rather than a child...then her child could not have been saved. Think about it mothers! Her daughter's welfare was anchored in the balance of the mother's faith! Has anything really changed since then? Have you contemplated that your daughter's spiritual welfare may very well be tied to your faith? Is your daughter worth saving then? The faith is often learned and received from the parents (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; Titus 1:6). Does the scripture speak in vain when it says, "when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Tim. 1:5)? Parenting can be the cause for the acceptance of Christ or the rejection of Him. Daughters can be influenced by their mother's standard.

The Syro-Phoenician woman imparts to us that we must be faithful when it is hard, that we must persist even if it seems useless to do so, and that our children's souls are in the balance

of the decisions we make. When parents make decisions to attend a church, not because of the integrity of the teaching and soundness of the work, but because of proximity and convenience, they do not have the great faith of this great woman. I've known parents walk away from sound congregations to worship elsewhere. It may make more sense geographically, but certainly not spiritually. Are your children worth saving? When parents attend a church due to friendliness rather than truthfulness, they do not have the great faith of this great woman. This woman did not have a friendly welcoming committee in Jesus or in His disciples when she came to them. The truth is not always perceived friendly. When parents lag in Bible study at home and forsake the assembling of the saints due to competing activities, they do not display the great faith of this great woman. No activity in this life should compete with the activities surrounding the word. When parents are angered over sermons dealing with sin, giving, assembling, etc., they do not have the great faith of this great woman but rather are like those in John 6:66, "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." It is not that a demon will manhandle their offspring physically today. Rather, "the doctrines of demons" (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1) will possess and retain their thinking and their souls. Is your daughter worth saving from Satan's grip? What do your actions say? Let us pursue Christ even when He is silent. Let us reason from His answers rather than become angry (Jas. 1:19-21). Let us race after even the crumbs that may fall from the Master's table that we might save, if no one else, our own precious children.