

Expository Tracts, No. 8.

# THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

BEING

THOUGHTS ON MATT. XV. 21-28.

BY THE

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# THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

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## MATTHEW XV. 21–28.

- 21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.  
22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou* Son of David: my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.  
23 But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.  
24 But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.  
25 Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me.  
26 But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs.  
27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.  
28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great *is* thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

### READER,

You have in the verses before you one of our Lord Jesus Christ's miracles. The circumstances which attend it are peculiarly full of interest. I invite you this day to take them up in order, and to see what they are. Every word in this narrative is rich in instruction.

1. You see, in the first place, *that true faith is sometimes found where it might have been least expected.*

A woman of Canaan cries to our Lord for help, on behalf of her daughter. "Have mercy on me," she says, "O Lord, thou son of David." Such a prayer would have showed great faith, had the woman lived in Bethany or Jerusalem. But when we find that she came from the heathen "coasts of Tyre and Sidon," such a prayer may well fill us with surprise.

Reader, the fact before you deserves your serious attention. It shows you that it is *grace*, not *place*, which makes people believers. A man may live in a prophet's family, like Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and yet continue impenitent unbelieving, and fond of the world.—A man may dwell in the midst of heathenism and wickedness, like the saints in Nero's household, and yet be a faithful witness for God and His Christ. You must never despair of any one's soul, merely because his lot is cast in an unfavourable position. Grace is almighty. It is possible to dwell in "the coasts of Tyre and Sidon," and yet sit down in the kingdom of God.

2. You see, in the second place, *that affliction sometimes proves a blessing to a person's soul.*

This woman of Canaan no doubt had been sorely tried. She had seen her darling child "vexed with a devil," and been unable to relieve her. But

yet that trouble brought her to Christ, and taught her to pray. Without it she might have lived and died in careless ignorance, and never seen Jesus at all. Surely it was “good for her that she was afflicted.” (Psalm cxix 71.)

Reader, you should mark this well. There is nothing which shows man’s ignorance so much as his impatience under trouble. We forget that every cross is a message from God, and is intended to do us good in the end. Trials are intended to make us think,—to wean us from the world,—to send us to the Bible,—to drive us to our knees. Health is a good thing; but sickness is far better, if it leads you to God. Prosperity is a great mercy; but adversity is a greater one, if it brings you to Christ. Anything, anything is better than living in carelessness, and dying in sin. Better a thousand times be afflicted, like the Canaanitish mother, and like her flee to Christ, than live at ease, like the rich “fool,” and die at last without Christ and without hope. (Luke xii. 20.)

3. You see, in the third place, *that Christ’s people are often less gracious and compassionate than Christ Himself*

The woman about whom you are reading, found small favour with our Lord’s disciples. Perhaps they regarded an inhabitant of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, as unworthy of their Master’s help. At any rate they said, “Send her away.”

There is only too much of this spirit among many who profess and call themselves believers. They are apt to discourage those who are seeking Christ, instead of helping them forward. They are too ready to doubt the reality of a beginner’s grace, because it is small, and to treat him as Saul was treated, when he first came to Jerusalem after his conversion:—“They believed not that he was a disciple.” (Acts ix. 26.) Reader, beware of giving way to this spirit. Seek to have more of the mind that was in Christ. Endeavour, like Him, to be gentle, and kind, and encouraging in all your treatment of those who are seeking to be saved. Above all, tell men that they must not judge of Christ by Christians. There is far more in that gracious Master than there is in the best of His servants. Peter, and James, and John may say to the afflicted soul “Send her away.” But such a word never came from the lips of Christ. He may sometimes keep people long waiting, as He did this woman. But He will never send them away empty.

4. You see, in the last place, *what encouragement there is to persevere in prayer both for ourselves and others.*

It is hard to conceive a more striking illustration of this truth than you have in this passage. The prayer of this afflicted mother at first seemed entirely unnoticed! Jesus “answered her not a word.” Yet she prayed on.—The saying which by and by fell from our Lord’s lips sounded discouraging: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Yet she prayed on, “Lord, help me.”—The second saying of our Lord was even less

encouraging than the first: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and cast it to the dogs.” Yet “hope deferred” did not “make her heart sick.” (Prov. xiii. 12.) Even then she was not silenced. Even then she finds a plea for some “crumbs” of mercy to be granted to her, And her importunity obtained at length a gracious reward. “O woman great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” That promise never yet was broken:—“Seek, and ye shall find.” (Matt. vii. 7.)

Reader, remember this history *when you pray for yourself*. I dare say you are sometimes tempted to think that you get no good by your prayers, and that you may as well give them up altogether. Resist the temptation. It comes from the devil. Believe, and pray on. Against your besetting sins, against the spirit of the world, against the wiles of the devil, pray on, and do not faint.—For strength to do duty, for grace to bear your trials, for comfort in every trouble, continue in prayer: pray on, and do not faint. Be sure that no time is so well-spent in every day, as that which you spend upon your knees. Jesus hears, and in His own good time will give you an answer.

Reader, remember this history *when you intercede for others*. Have you children whose conversion you desire? Have you relatives and friends about whose salvation you are anxious? Follow the example of this Canaanitish woman, and lay the state of their souls before Christ. Name their names before Him night and day, and never rest till you have an answer. You may have to wait many a long year. You may seem to pray in vain, and to intercede without profit. But never give up. Believe that Jesus is not changed. Doubt not that He who heard the Canaanitish mother, and granted her request, hears you. He does hear, and will one day give you an answer of peace.

Prayer was appointed to convey  
 The blessings God designs to give:  
 Long as they live should Christians pray,  
 For only while they pray they live.  
 And wilt thou in dead silence lie,  
 When Christ stands waiting for thy prayer?  
 My soul, thou hast a Friend on high.  
 Arise, and try thy interest there.  
 If pains afflict or wrongs oppress,  
 If cares distract or fears dismay  
 If guilt deject, if sin distress,  
 The remedy’s before thee,—Pray.  
 ’Tis prayer supports the soul that’s weak,  
 Though thought be broken, language lame.  
 Pray if thou canst or canst not speak:  
 But pray with faith in Jesu’s name.