

A Proper 15	Praying through God's Silence Matthew 15.21-28 by Tim Isbell	Preached 8/28/2002
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Thesis: Sometimes God is silent in the presence of our prayers for a long, long time. But eventually he will break the silence.

Read Matt 15.21-28

We want a Christ who always speaks when we ask him to.

We want a vending machine Christ.

A Christ who says:

- *Ask and it shall be given.*
- *Seek and you will find.*
- *Knock and the door will open.*
- *Come all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest.*
- *If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you can ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.*

We want the "I am" Christ, the...

- Water of life
- Bread of life
- Light of the world
- Door
- Good shepherd
- Resurrection and the life
- Way truth and life
- True vine

So when we come to Matt 15.21-28 we are troubled.

Jesus left home country to get away for a little while; so he goes to house in Lebanon. But it didn't work. A woman finds out he's there and interrupts his retreat by making an urgent request.

How could someone from Lebanon even know about Jesus?

8 centuries earlier there's a story told in 1 Kings 17

Elijah visited King Ahab of Israel, in Samaria. God told him to tell Ahab, "no rain for few years!"

Elijah escaped to safety; he went east to the Kiresh Brook, near the Jordan River, where

God fed him by ravens. The brook ran dry and God says go outside of Palestine to pagan village of Zarephath, near Sidon where a widow will feed you.

Sure enough, Elijah meets a widow as he enters town.

Tell the story.

That's how people around this north coast heard about the God of the Jews and his power.

So a Gentile woman makes a request

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter has a demon in her, and it is severely tormenting her." (v22)

A woman come here to church this week with her son.

Marilyn requested help. She and her boy are homeless. I listened to her go on and on with her story. In the process she cried and begged for help.

I had other things to do with that time and I wanted to just send her away, but after a few minutes of listening I spoke with her. Then I gave her some help.

I just couldn't imagine not saying something, and not helping her somehow.

Jesus listened, but said zip – nothing. (v23)

We like this kind of demeanor in Matthew 27.12, when chief priests challenge him to defend himself and the Bible says "He said not a word."

We kind of like it in Matt 27.14 when Pilot challenges Jesus to defend himself, and the Bible says "He said not a word."

We understand it in Mark 14.60-61 when the high priest says, "Man, don't you know the power I have? Speak up for yourself." And Jesus answers ZIP

But here's a broken-hearted woman with a daughter in serious condition. We don't like what we read about Jesus here; we don't like it at all. We think Jesus should always speak, but sometimes he remains silent.

There are times for silence

- Once I visited the remains of Jewish town outside Krakow, Poland. Hitler's army massacred nearly everyone in the town and there was a statue of a grandfather running, carrying a child, trying to escape. It was a time for silence.
- I visited the Vietnam War Memorial. It was a time for silence.
- Listening to a friend tell a heart wrenching story. It's a time for silent listening.
- At the bedside of someone dying is another time of silence.

But how do we handle a God who chooses not to speak when we are in crisis? How do we act when he seems to be ignoring you?

How do you handle a Jesus who tells us to get in a boat and go to the other side, but he goes to sleep when your life is in danger?

What if you're like the Apostle Paul and have asked God many times to take away the "thorn", but God is silent?

How do you handle a God like that?

Jesus excludes Canaanite woman

Jesus says... ""I was sent only to help the people of Israel--God's lost sheep--not the Gentiles." (v24)

But did you notice what she did? She dropped to the ground and worshipped Jesus.

Before he did anything to help her. All he had done is ignore her and exclude her, and what does she do? She falls down and worships him!

It's a bit like Jehoshaphat in 2 Chron 20: He puts the worship choir first, and all the army had to do was mop up.

Maybe we're to worship God before anything happens... v25

- Before healing comes
- Before you get an A on an exam
- Before you get that job

Tell God, "I'm going to worship you before anything happens, just because you are worthy of my worship."

Then Jesus embarrasses her... v26

He calls her a dog! You would think this woman, who has been ignored, excluded and now embarrassed would quit. But the Bible says she agrees with Jesus! (v27), saying "Yes, Lord, but even dogs are permitted to eat crumbs that fall beneath their master's table."

She doesn't have a well-defined theology of grace, but she has enough sense to understand that whatever she gets from God, she won't get by convincing him that she deserves it. If she gets anything, it will be out of Jesus' grace.

She says, "Yes, Lord. I know, but even puppies eat crumbs. I don't mind not being first; all I want is your hand upon my daughter and me."

And so Jesus heals her daughter... v28

Some of us are one prayer away from deliverance.

- One prayer away from blessing
- One prayer away from physical, spiritual, relational or emotional healing.
- One prayer away from a breakthrough

There was nothing elegant about the Canaanite woman's prayer. It didn't follow ACTS, BLESS, or any other template. It was just one of those desperate prayers we pray in a crisis, "Lord, have mercy on me. Have mercy on my child!"

Do you realize that God answers desperate prayers like this?

This woman came into the place where Jesus was, and had a challenging time in his presence. But in the end he had compassion on her.

The Lord **WILL** break the silence.

God may be silent for a while, but he is not absent and he will speak.

There was a greater silence than the one in this story. The greatest silence we've ever known took place on Calvary. One Friday Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

And God said nothing ... ZIP

The sun protested and went into an eclipse, the moon came between the sun and the earth, but God said nothing ... ZIP

The earth began to quake, but God said nothing ... ZIP

Even the Roman centurion began to protest, "Surely this is the Son of God." But God said nothing ... ZIP

Nothing on Saturday morning, Saturday night.

But early Sunday morning he broke the silence and began to speak.

And what he said offers the healing that Jesus gave to this Gentile woman to every one of us in this room.

Because Jesus lives, we can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because he lives, we can face the future. Life is worth living because he lives.

Let's sing it in closing.

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