

MUCH MORE THAN CRUMBS!

By Waveney Martinborough

Theme: Faith

Call to Worship: #796 Hope and Comfort , *SDA Hymnal*

Opening Song: #517 My Faith Looks Up to Thee, *SDA Hymnal*

Closing Song: #286, Wonderful Words of Life, *SDA Hymnal*

Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

Attention

The woman was desperate. She was crying! Why was she crying? What was the reaction of those who heard her? The topic of today's sermon is Much More Than Crumbs! We will look at this topic under the following areas: praying words, Unkind words, Encouraging words, Words of life.

Matthew 15:21 and the first part of verse 22. A background of the story shows that Jesus left Galilee where He was rejected by the Jews and journeyed to the coast of Tyre and Sidon. There a woman of Canaan came out and cried unto Him. Why did Jesus go to this heathen country? He wanted to teach His disciples the lesson that the heathen needed to hear the gospel. So why did He choose this country and not another? Ellen White in the book *Desire of Ages*, page 400, tells us that "Christ knew this woman's situation. He knew she was longing to see Him, and He placed himself in her path." In other words Jesus went out of His way; so to speak, to meet a heathen woman! A woman of Canaan! When the Jews hated and despised the Canaanite race, Jesus loved them. When others looked down upon women, Jesus honored them. When others treated women like property, Jesus treated them with respect and dignity.

The more I think about Jesus the more I read, the more I realize He is full of love. We sing a chorus in English that says, "What you think about Jesus? He's all right. He woke me up this morning and set me on my way. Jesus is all right! He knows your situation, He knows my situation. He knows our need for money, for food, clothing, and shelter. He knows when we are looking for a job. He knows of our need for acceptance. He knows all about us and loves us with an everlasting love.

Praying Words

The last part of Matthew 15:22 tells us that the woman cried, saying 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David: my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.' Mark 7:25 says "She came and fell at His feet." Imagine the woman prostrating herself before Jesus; she was praying, she was interceding for her daughter who was possessed with the devil.

Her prayer of intercession was simple—"Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David." Bible commentators tell us that when she used the title "Son of David," it meant that she recognized Jesus as the

Messiah. Maybe she had heard about Jesus from people who had heard Him speak, or had seen Him heal or perform one of His miracles. This heathen woman believed in Jesus as the anointed One, the Deliverer, and the expected King of Israel.

Like the woman, we too must believe. "He that comes to God must believe that He exists," that He is real. Recent statistics from a 10 year study show that 50% of our youth in their 20s leave the church. One young man told me that he does not believe that God is real. No wonder theologian Oswald Chambers says, "It is impossible for us to have living and vital intercession unless we are perfectly and completely sure of God. This means that when we pray we do not have to struggle to keep thoughts of ourselves out. We are focused on God and praying with the assurance that He will intervene." So when like the woman we are interceding for our unsaved adult children we must believe that God is real. When we see the innocent suffer, and witness the injustices in our world, we must believe that God is real. When we experience sickness, sorrow, and disappointments, we must believe that God is real.

Mothers, let us pray for our children. Church, let's pray for our children. Dwight L. Moody tells of a father and mother who were in great distress because their absent son had wandered away from God and gone to the wild bush of Australia. These parents asked that the church unite in prayer for their son. That day 20,000 prayers rose to the mercy seat for that son. That very hour when those prayers were ascending to God, that young man was riding through the bush on his way to town. Strangely enough, as he rode his horse, he began to think of his home and his parents. Then the Spirit of God brought conviction to his heart. He stopped, and kneeling by the roadside, prayed for forgiveness. Assured of conversion, he wrote the good news to his parents and like the prodigal returned home. All because the church prayed!

Women's Ministries encourages prayer activities and engages in intercessory prayer. As a matter of fact we have a program called "Prayer and Love Saves" that helps parents form support groups to pray for the unsaved children of our church.

Unkind Words

When the woman cried out "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David," what did Jesus do? Matthew 15:23 says "He did not answer her." And the disciples urged him saying, "Send her away; for she cries after us." We groan inside when we hear such unkind words.

How could the disciples react that way to the woman in need? First, because of Jewish pride and prejudice. Ellen White tells us that when the disciples "saw that their Master did not answer the woman, they believed that the prejudice of the Jews against the Canaanites was pleasing to Him." *Desire of Ages*, page 400. She also says that Jesus wanted to teach His disciples a lesson. He wanted them to see the difference between His attitude and that of the Jews. The Jewish rabbis would have sent the woman away like the disciples suggested.

But over and over again Jesus wanted to show His disciples that He was full of compassion, love and care not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. When He died on the cross with His arms outstretched He was saying to the world, "My love embraces all people—whether you are Jew or Gentile, red or yellow, black or white." All are precious in His sight. According to Ellen White, pride and prejudice have built strong wall of separation between different classes and races of people so that some feel shut away from

the ministry of the gospel. Let them not feel that they are shut away from Christ, because He has made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth. (Acts 17:26)

Secondly, she was not only a stranger, she was a woman. There was no time and place in their concept of the gospel commission for strange and foreign women. Again Jewish prejudice taught that it was improper for a man to speak to a woman on the street, and the rabbis often described women as inferior and lacking ability to learn. But Jesus shocked His disciples by talking to the woman at the well in Samaria, and receiving women as followers. Luke 8:2 gives the names of some women who accompanied Jesus on his second missionary journey. We are all laborers together with God. The work of God needs the combined effort of all to finish the work so that Jesus can come.

And as we wait for His coming our watchword should be kindness to all. Kindness is the body language of love. Again Ellen White tells us that if we are loving and kind to others, there would be 100 more conversions in a day where now there is only one. According to a commentator, "It is possible to become so occupied with spiritual matters that we miss the real spiritual needs right around us, simply because of prejudice or the inconvenience they cause. So join me in praying, "Lord, help me to show your love by being more kind and caring."

Encouraging Words

With all the negative reaction from the disciples and the silence from Jesus you would think that the woman would give up and return home. Instead, what did she do? Matthew 15:25 says, "She came and worshiped Him saying, 'Lord, help me!'" She persisted in prayer. And again Jesus assumed the attitude of the Jews and said, (Matthew 15:26) "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." In other words, I cannot take the bread of salvation and give to the Gentiles. The Jews felt that salvation was only for the Jews and would be wasted if given to the Gentiles like you and me.

Again the woman was not discouraged. We women can be very persistent. We persist in prayer, we persist in nagging our spouses. I once read of a mother who prayed 60 years for the conversion of her wayward son.. And so this woman did not give up. She would not let any seeming insult deter her. Why? She wanted Jesus to help her daughter—that was the only thing that mattered. And so she gave the classic answer. (Matthew 15:26). "And she said, yes, Lord, even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." In other words, Yes, Lord, I am a little dog, so then can I have the crumbs. Oh what faith! What perseverance! She needs to be commended!

And that is exactly what Jesus did! He commended her by saying, "O woman, great is your faith!" How do you think she felt? How do you think our children feel when we praise them for acceptable behavior? Husbands, how do you think your wife feels when you tell her that you enjoy the meal? Wives, how do you think your husbands feel when you tell them that you feel proud to be his wife? As a pastor's wife I was so happy to hear the church elder pray for me and the children in the pastoral prayer in church, calling our names. Let us encourage one another; let us commend rather than condemn one another, so much the more as we see the coming of the Lord drawing near.

Words of Life

Finally Jesus concluded by telling the woman what she wanted to hear. Matthew 15:28 last part, reads "Let it be to you as you desire. And the daughter was healed from that very hour." *Desire of Ages*, page 401 reads, "The Savior is satisfied. He has tested her faith in Him...He has shown that she who was regarded as an outcast from Israel is no longer a stranger, but a child of God. Christ now grants her request, and finishes the lesson to the disciples. Turning to her with a look of love, and I imagine a smile on his face, he says, "O woman, great is your faith; let it be as you desire. And the demon troubled the daughter no more." In other words Jesus was saying, "You were willing to take the crumbs, but I am giving you much more than crumbs. Your daughter is healed, and more than that because of your faith in Me as the Messiah, you are now a child of God. For it is by grace are we saved through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.

This miracle teaches us many lessons. First, it tells me that when we pray and feel like giving up because we think that God is silent, ever remember that the silence of God does not mean His displeasure. We need to persevere in prayer, trusting His providence and accepting His will. Secondly, it helps us realize that this world offers us lots of crumbs—pleasure, drugs, illicit sex, money, and fame. Good as some of these are, they are not lasting. Jesus offers us much more than crumbs—peace, joy in this life, salvation now and eternal life forever and ever. For the Christian, heaven begins here!

Jesus spoke words of life to the woman of Canaan. Jesus also speaks words of life to us through His word. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. The story is told of a young woman who read a certain book, and when she was finished she said that it was the most boring book that she had ever read. Not long after, she met a certain young man and a friendship developed, then ripened into love. One evening she told him that she had a book in her library with the same name and initials like his. After he told her that he was the author, she sat up all night and read the book again. This time she said it was the most interesting book she had ever read. The book was no longer boring. The book came alive! Why? She now knew and was in love with the author! The Bible will come alive when we know and are in love with the Author! Jesus says, "Search the scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life and they testify of Me" (John 8:39).

I was touched by the faith and persevering prayer of the Canaanite woman. My heart was warmed with the tender love and compassion of Jesus. Were you? I am grateful that I can read the Bible, and listen to words of life from Jesus. Are you? Then join me in praying "Lord, help me to use intercessory words to pray for others, help me to express not unkind words but affirming words to encourage others, and help me to share words of life to bring salvation to others." Is that what you really want? "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer" (Ps 19:14). God bless each one of us.

About the Sermon Writer: Waveney Martinborough is the Women's Ministries director for the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.