



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

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Matthew 15:28 "Then Jesus said to her, 'O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed at once."

Tucked in a couple of the Gospels, is this fascinating story of Jesus healing a Gentile girl. There are several things that are very impressive about this lesson, and one of the greatest is that the mother, having so many obstacles in her way, truly believed and that belief impressed Jesus. There are not too many people that impressed Jesus, she was one of them.

There are many things that impress us. I have a home office that I have decorated with my touch. There are several neat items. I have on one wall a British putter from 1896. It has a beautiful wood shaft. I have a collection of autographed baseballs, including my favorite player when I was a kid, Sandy Koufax. I have a series of beautifully framed photos of old car hood ornaments. I have a 1926 Underwood typewriter and a 1906 Kellogg candlestick phone. And then there is the framed Jersey of Freddie Patek, a dear friend and great baseball player. There are two Beatle 45's framed and on the wall. There is a signed photo of Ted Williams and Mickey Mantle. I have some arrow heads framed and they sit on the book shelf, along with some very old books. Everyone that comes into my office spends time looking at all this stuff and they are impressed. I love my office. My office is awesome. But you know what? None of this stuff would impress Jesus. There are just things. Our lesson from Matthew reveals what grabs the attention of Jesus.

This woman had many things going against her. (1) She was a Gentile. She is called the Syrophenician woman. Matthew adds that she was a "Canaanite woman." Jesus had gone up to the region of Tyre to get away. The Pharisees wouldn't follow Him up there. They were too good to set their feet on Gentile soil. So, Jesus found a place, a house, where He could rest. Who He knew up there is not revealed. While up there, word spread that He was there. People came. One is this Syrophenician woman. (2) Her daughter was "cruelly demon possessed." This is the only account of a Gentile having a demon. This is unique. Only God could cast out demons. It is important that the Gentiles knew that Jesus was not just the Jews God, but the God for all. Had all the miracles been on Jews only, one might wonder. There were other Gentiles, such as the centurion's servant, and the Samaritan leper, and now this demon possessed girl, that Jesus healed. Jesus was the God for all. (3) When she first approached Jesus, He did not respond. He said nothing. Silence kills. Silence can be worse than a "no." (4) As she persisted in asking Jesus, the disciples pled for Jesus to send her away. That is always their answer to problems. Some churches do the same today. When the 5,000 were hungry, the disciples suggested, send them away that they can get some food. Jesus said, "feed them." When the children gathered around Jesus, the disciples tried to shoo them away. Jesus said, 'permit the children to come to me.' (5) Jesus said, 'You do not give the children's food to the dogs.' The children must eat first. Jesus was referring to Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were the children. The Gentiles, the dogs. The reference to dogs is

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not insulting. She did not leave in a huff. She did not get angry or upset. Jesus is talking about an order of things. Mama doesn't cook a meal and then, first, put a plate down for the dog. She feeds the family first. If there are any left overs, then she feeds the dogs. Jesus did not say I ONLY feed the children. (6) She counters Jesus' statement, by requesting not a meal, but the crumbs. The idea that she is a Gentile woman and she is engaging in this conversation with a Jewish rabbi is most remarkable. She is persistent. She won't give up. She's a mama bear who is fighting for her daughter. (8) She understood that the crumbs were enough to heal her daughter. She didn't need a full "meal." Jesus was so powerful that just a crumb from Heaven would be all she needed.

Jesus was impressed. He told her to go home, the daughter was healed. Jesus never saw the daughter. He never spoke any words to her. He was impressed with her determination and faith. When she approached Jesus, she bowed. She called Him, "Lord, son of David," which were strong Jewish expressions that indicated his role as Messiah and coming King. She had heard those words. She believed those words. She expressed those words. The disciples were not doing this. They were stumbling along in their faith not completely sure who Jesus was. It is doubtful if this Gentile woman had heard Jesus preach or seen other miracles. She believed based upon what she had heard. She was desperate.

Jesus was impressed. He was impressed by faith. The same happens today. It's not the size of our house, how cool our offices are decorated, how sharp we dress, how many names we can drop-those things do not move the needle for Jesus. Today, society is slobbering over the Oscar scene. Who wore what and who sat where and who said what. These actors and actresses have become like gods to many people. Doesn't impress Jesus.

What impresses Jesus is genuine faith. It's a young mother, who in her last moments of life, still clings to Jesus in faith. It's an old soldier of the cross, who looks to Heaven as he says good bye to his mate of sixty years. It's a young man who recently obeyed the Gospel and excitedly proclaims, "I want to know everything. Will you teach me?" It's an aged couple who, on a snowy winter day, come to worship, because they love God. These are all things I have become aware of in the past few days. Men and women who are walking by faith. In trying times, in joy and in sorrow, clinging to the hope that is in Jesus. Stuff the Hollywood scene in a box. Don't get caught up in that superficial and fake stuff. They will cry about the poor in the world, and spend thousands on one outfit for one night. Get real. Get a life. Get some faith.

The Syrophenician woman impressed Jesus. There are those who are impressing Him still. Those who are humble. Those who are believers. Those who want Jesus.

God can help those with broken hearts, just as He could help a woman whose daughter was possessed. God can help those who want to be right. God can help those who want to know. God will find those who are seeking Him.

God is impressed by what is in your heart. God is impressed by what you do in faith. Love, faith, compassion and forgiveness are the things that God notices. The woman in our story didn't intend to impress Jesus. She was simply trying to get help for her daughter. Those that seek to impress, usually fail. It's those who are just naturally living by faith that happen to catch the eye of God.

Today, we are one step closer to Heaven.

Roger Shouse

