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SERMON TITLE: How to Pray for Things that Matter to You

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 15:22-28

DATE: July 21, 2019

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Psalm 27:4-14

We are talking about prayer, but we are talking about more. We are talking about the things closest to your heart; the things that matter to you; those things that if you called your best friend you would be willing to share.

It takes getting personal with Jesus to pray about those things.

There was a woman who had a daughter who probably suffered from a mental illness.¹ Studies have been done by the US National Health Institutes on people identified during the Middle Ages as “demoniacs” and they show traits of psychiatric disorders. So people identified in the Bible as having a demon, we would call having a mental illness.

The mother described her daughter as “being tormented by a demon.” It was probably an adult daughter. Let’s hear the story. READ Matthew 15:22-28

This Canaanite woman was an outsider. The Canaanites were the people who lived in the land of Canaan prior to Israel conquering the land. Many Canaanites remained in the land. However, Jews and Canaanites had nothing to do with each other. Yet the woman didn’t avoid Jesus, a Jew. She didn’t care about that separation or the protocol of the “church” people (the Jews). She had a deep need. Her daughter was in trouble.

Although she was pagan, she lived in the region and had heard about Jesus; had probably heard about his healing powers, and she pursued every resource available to her to help her daughter. She called out—yelled at him with the Jewish term for Messiah—“*Son of David*.” But all it did was to annoy of all those who heard her cries.

Even Jesus ignored her.

Finally the disciples went to Jesus and said, “Listen, can’t you just take care of whatever she wants and send her away?”

The Greek tense of the words suggests they said *can’t you just set her free and send her away?*

So they, too, may have been asking him to take care of her problem.

But he ignored her because his priority was the Jewish people. Yet . . . The Bible says, “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.” (Psalm 22:27)

The woman was doing exactly that. Shouldn’t Jesus respond?

The desire of God is that everyone come to God to access him.

Perhaps that was implanted in her—we all are made in God’s image. Or, she was so desperate and hearing about Jesus made her respond, “I’ll try anything to help my mentally ill daughter.”

She was even willing to risk humiliation to see Jesus.

How bold are you to go to Jesus when you need help? Would you be publically bold? Or just silently whisper “*I hope Jesus can help.*”

I just got this vision of sitting in a doctor’s office or a hospital emergency room saying loudly to the staff around me—*Jesus would you heal me?* And then being so persistent that the nurses would stop and pray, “Jesus please solve her problem . . . she is so annoying!”

Prior to that day, I wonder if the woman pondered, *how can I get Jesus to do this for me?*

She knew she didn’t qualify by rank—she wasn’t in the right religion! Perhaps she didn’t go to church at all. That begs the question:

Can non-churchgoers have access to Jesus as much as Christians?

An atheist college professor was Dean of the Art Department at University of Kentucky. Howard Storm took some students to Europe to study art. While in Paris he suddenly had a terrible stomach problem and was rushed to the hospital. He would need emergency surgery for a

¹ Espi Forcén C and Espi Forcén F., “Demonic possessions and mental illness: discussion of selected cases in late medieval hagiographical literature” in [Early Sci Med](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25208453/), 2014;19(3):258-79, PubMed.gov, US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health; see [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25208453](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25208453/), accessed July 18, 2019.

gastrointestinal perforation. It was late on a Saturday night and a surgeon was not available. Hours passed and he waited. He sank into unconsciousness. He awoke out of his body and could see himself and his wife at his bedside.

He was drawn by voices into a hallway. He describes humanoid creatures that urged him down the hallway, saying that they had been waiting for him. After a while, the creatures became increasingly hostile, and began to attack him, gnawing on his arms and legs, biting his face. They were slowly eating him alive and the room was growing darker. He then heard a voice urging him, “pray to God.”

But he said, I don’t pray. I don’t know how.

He lay there in the darkness, utterly hopeless. The voice spoke three times, “Pray to God.” He started saying everything he knew that sounded religious, “The Lord is my shepherd, God bless America, Our Father who art in heaven.” That’s all he knew. The beings went into a frenzy at his words and finally left. Howard writes, “Laying there I was in such a state of hopelessness, and blackness, and despair . . . torn and ripped . . . I was perishing.” And then a most unusual thing happened.

Howard writes:

I heard very clearly, once again in my own voice, something that I had learned in nursery Sunday school. It was the little song, “Jesus loves me, yes I know . . .” and it kept repeating. I don’t know why, but all of a sudden I wanted to believe that. Not having anything left, I wanted to cling to that thought. And I, inside, screamed, “Jesus, please save me.” That thought was screamed with every ounce of strength and feeling left in me.

When I did that, I saw, off in the darkness somewhere, the tiniest little star. . . . When the light came near, its radiance spilled over me, and I just rose up—not with my effort—I just lifted up. Then I saw—and I saw this very plainly—I saw all my wounds, all my tears, all my brokenness, melt away. And I became whole in this radiance. What I did was to cry uncontrollably. I was crying, not out of sadness, but because I was feeling things that I had never felt before in my life.²

That’s the kind of rescue this mother needed for her daughter.

How did she get it? She went to the right source:

Jesus is the source for all people, regardless of faith background. She was not the right religion but she went to the right person. You have family and friends who don’t believe? Don’t give up. Encourage them regardless of faith, to pray urgently to Jesus, whether they know who he is or believe in him.

When Jesus said, “I was sent to help Israel.” He’s really saying “I am distinct. I am not from just any belief system, but from the one true God who can do something.”

You know how people will sometimes say all gods are the same? Sometimes you hear “Allah and God are the same God?” I can assure you they are not. Jesus is strictly identifying himself with the God of Israel.

“I am associated with *that* God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.” Jesus clearly distinguished himself. There was no doubt and no question who he is. This God is real and the people of Israel are this God’s children.

To gain healing, the woman had to cross over from her Canaanite faith to his faith. How did she do it? By saying, “Aren’t we all children of God?” And she bowed down to worship him, like the Psalmist said. “If I even have to be a dog under the table, a secondary citizen of your kingdom, I will do it to gain your favor,” she replied.

There was no turning back. She had taken the major step of faith and become a believer. Jesus instantly received her. Jesus was joy-filled over her faith and he immediately healed her daughter.

She used the spiritual armor of faith – she knocked; she sought, asked, and found salvation.

The atheist man called out to Jesus. Upon doing so, his wounds were instantly healed. He regained consciousness. When he awoke, he was being prepped for surgery, which repaired the stomach problem without any major problems. He later changed his life entirely.

As we think about praying for our loved ones; as we think about how to pray for the things that matter, do you know just how special Jesus is when you pray to him? Do you realize just how powerful Jesus is? Are you accessing that power through persistent faith?

Sometimes, as the Psalmist says, we have to wait patiently:

“Yet I am confident I will see the LORD’s goodness while I am here in the land of the living. Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD” (Psalm 27:13-14).

Knock, seek, ask, yell if necessary—and believe.

AMEN

² Howard Storm, from *My Descent into Death: a Second Chance at Life*, see <https://www.near-death.com/experiences/exceptional/howard-storm.html>, accessed July 18, 2019.