

## Desperate Prayers

Matthew 15:21-28 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

### The Syrophenician Woman

*<sup>21</sup> Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely demon-possessed." <sup>23</sup> But He did not answer her with even a word. And His disciples came up and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us!" <sup>24</sup> But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup> But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" <sup>26</sup> Yet He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> And she said, "Yes, Lord; but please help, for even the dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed at once.*

### Introduction

Our topic this morning is desperate prayers. Not the ordinary prayers, but the prayers we offer in desperate times. I am going to tell you three stories. They are all true. One from a book that I read. The second one from today's Scripture. The last one is my own. All of them were desperately offered on behalf of the family members. All of them were answered affirmatively.

#### A. The woman with scuffs (slippers)

Pastor Craddock went for a hospital visit. In the corridor, he saw her. *kc: From now on, you are about to hear in the first-person narrative:*

"Her head was against the door, and both fists were up beside her face, and she was banging on the door: "Let me in, let me in, let me in!" I couldn't imagine someone locking her out of the room. I got there, and it was the chapel door. I said, "Let me help you." I tried to open the door, but the knob wouldn't turn. It was locked. I stopped a worker, and I said, "The chapel is locked."

She said, "We have to keep it locked. There were some kids in here some time ago, and they trashed the chapel. We had to get all new furniture and paint the room. We can't afford to keep doing that, so we keep it locked."

"Well, find someone with a key."

She came back a little bit later with another woman, who opened the door for us, and this woman and I went in. I would say she was about forty. She had the look of

desperation. I could tell that she hadn't come to the hospital with any planning; she came urgently, she came running. The dress she had on was not typical public wear. She had no shoes, just scuffs. Her hair had not been combed, no makeup. She had the look of desperation. She had the voice of desperation. I can't tell you if she was screaming or crying or moaning or what it was, but it was desperation. Strange sound. I heard some of her words. "I know he's going to die. I know he's going to die. I know he's going to die."

"Who?"

"My husband."

"What's the matter?"

"He's had a heart attack."

I said, "Can I get you some water?"

She said, "No."

I told her who I was, and I said, "Can I pray with you?" And she said, "Please."

I started to pray for her and for her husband, and she interrupted me. She didn't just interrupt me; she took over. She started praying herself and stopped my prayer. I think maybe I was too quiet or too slow or saying the wrong thing or something. Anyway, my prayer wasn't getting there, and she knew it. So she said, "Lord, this is not the time to take my husband. You know that better than I do, he's not ready. Never prays, never goes to church or anything. He's not ready, not a good time to take him. Don't take him now. And what about me? If I have to raise these kids, what am I going to do? I don't have any skills, can't find any work. I quit school to marry him. If I'd have known you were going to take him, I'd have stayed in school." She was really talking to God. "And what about the kids? They don't mind me now with him around. If he's gone, they'll be wild as bucks. This is not the time to take my husband." Whew.

I stayed as long as I felt useful. I went back the next morning, and she had on a nice dress; she had on shoes; she had combed her hair. She looked fine. She was in the hallway outside intensive care. Before I could ask, she said, "He's better." She smiled and said, "I'm sorry about that crazy woman yesterday."

I said, "Well, you weren't crazy."

She said, "I guess the Lord heard one of us."

I said, "He heard you."

She was desperate. She had God by the lapels, both hands, and was screaming in God's face: "I don't think you're listening!" That's desperation.

"*Craddock Stories*, Fred B. Craddock, ed. By Mike Graves and Richard F. Ward, pp. 110-111,).

## B. The Syrophoenician Woman

The next story is about the Syrophoenician mother who lived in the region of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon were northwest side of Israel (modern day Lebanon territory). All the people lived there were considered Gentiles, who had nothing to do with Jehovah the God of Israel, therefore no salvation to them. Quite often, the Israelites despised Gentiles as subhuman and treated them like dogs or pigs. They would have no dealings with them whatsoever.

Before this trip, the all-knowing Jesus, must have known ahead of time that He would encounter a Gentile woman on the road. In other words, Jesus didn't enter this region casually. He had something in His mind when He chose to withdraw to this particular Gentile region. He knew exactly what was awaiting Him. He knew that the Canaanite woman would ask Him to cure her demon-possessed daughter. This background information is crucial to understand Jesus' cold attitude toward the woman in verses 24 and 26.

Let's move on. The lady had a daughter who was demon-possessed. We do not know what kind of trouble the daughter had--it could've been physical or emotional, or both. But it must have been very difficult to handle, let alone to cure. One day, the mother heard that Jesus the Healer was in town.

She began to run toward Him crying out aloud, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!" Now, please note here that the woman didn't stop after crying out only once. Instead, she kept crying out aloud on top of her voice, "*Have mercy on me, Lord! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.*" She was desperate. She was determined to get the attention from the Lord.

Notice here how Jesus responded to the woman's desperate cry. He did not answer (v. 23). Not a word! Jesus didn't bother even noticing her cries. He seemed totally ignoring her and busy going on His way. We are surely baffled with His coldness.

Her outcry surely bothered someone else, though: the disciples. So much so that they went to their Master and begged Him, saying, "*Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us*" (which means, Lord, please do something about her! You have cast out demons many a time before. What's the big deal now? Please grant her wish and let her go in peace so that we too may have peace and quiet!).

Jesus replied, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (not to the Gentiles!) (v. 24). Wow! That settled everything. The disciples got the message. The Master spoke. They became quiet and were ready to suffer the ongoing outcry of the woman throughout their journey.

By then, the woman came closer to Jesus, and she prostrated before Him and begged, "*Lord, help me!*" (v. 25). I cannot help thinking that Jesus intentionally was ignoring her pleas until she came close enough to him to talk face to face. He was waiting for this very moment.

Have you ever been in a situation like that? You are desperate. You've been crying out to God for some time, yet God seems so silent? Don't you think, then, perhaps He has been waiting for you to come closer to Him?

Now, the next words that came out of Jesus' mouth were even worse than before. In fact, they were discriminatory. He said to her, "*It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs*" (v. 26). Wow! What an absolute rejection! Sure, Jesus didn't directly call her a dog; however, everyone knew what He meant by His words.

After such an insult, how would you feel if you were the woman? For most of us, the natural reaction would be, "Well, excuse me, Jesus. Forget it. I thought you were very compassionate and caring, but I was wrong. Go back home and never come back!" Her reaction was amazingly different, though. She didn't utter a single word of bitterness or resentment. She simply replied, Lord! You are right! I am a dog, and you are the master. Yet, listen to me! Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table, don't they? (v. 27).

Wow! She surely got Jesus' attention this time. In fact, Jesus was so impressed with her reply that He exclaimed, "*O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.*" *And her daughter was healed at once* (v. 28). Desperate situations require desperate prayer.

### **C. My own testimony:**

Lastly, here's my own story. Some of you heard it before. But please bear with me for those who haven't heard this testimony.

It was the winter of 1978. I was in Korea. One night my family got a call from a local hospital saying that my older brother was in the emergency room with head injury. We all rushed to the hospital. There, on the hospital bed, my brother was lying unconscious.

That night, before the accident, he was drinking and having fun with his girlfriend. After that, they got on his motorcycle and drove home; neither of them was wearing helmet. A formula for disaster! Drunk, he ran his motorcycle into a city block. He and his bike flung in the air, and he landed on his head. His girlfriend escaped with a few scrapes. Later, the X-rays showed that there was a tennis ball size blood clot lodged in his brain. The doctors asked the family if we wanted a surgery with a 50-50 chance of survival. The family opted out. First, my brother had no health insurance. Next, it was a third-tier city hospital, and finally, there was no government aid, either. So, there my 28-year-old brother was hopelessly lying in his comatose, just breathing!

What would I do, what would I do? Back then, I was just a baby Christian. I heard about the power of prayer. I also heard about the effectiveness of fasting. So, I decided to fast for three days and plead with the Lord for my brother. I went to a prayer mountain and

was going to fast for the next three days. I was so desperate that I couldn't elaborate my prayers. All I said to the Lord repeatedly was, *Lord, give his life back to me! Give his life back to me!*

On the second day of my fasting, the Lord answered my cries. He didn't say audibly that my brother would make it, but He filled my heart with such a peace and assurance that I knew He answered my prayers. Returning home, I told everybody in the family that my brother would live again. No one believed in me. Even my mother thought I was crazy. Praise be to God, because two weeks after the accident, my brother came out of comatose opening his eyes by himself. Another two weeks, he walked out of the hospital on foot. With no surgery. With no physical therapy. Nothing. Just God's miracle. The same brother is still alive today. Praise the Lord who answered my desperate cries. He still does for those who cry onto Him.

### **Conclusion**

We worship and serve the same Lord. He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). So, next time, when you are stuck in a desperate situation with your children or family members, please go to God and cry out unto Him. Let your heart be known to Him. Cry out to Him like the lady with scuffs. Cry out to Him like the Syrophenician mother. And He will answer and show you great and mighty things beyond your imagination (Jeremiah 33:3). Amen.