

Satisfied with Crumbs

I was recently reading through the gospel of Matthew and was both astonished and intrigued by the story of the Canaanite woman (15:21-28). Jesus had just departed from the region surrounding the Sea of Galilee where he fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish and where he healed many who were sick. And yet the Jewish religious leaders attacked him for not having his disciples wash their hands before eating. (Talk about majoring on the minors.)

So Jesus ends up on the Mediterranean coast somewhere between Tyre and Sidon, definitely outside of Jewish territory and, undoubtedly, to take in some much needed R&R. There he is approached by a Syrophenician woman—according to Mark chapter 7—whose daughter is demon possessed.

As would be expected of any loving mother, she comes to the man she heard has been traveling throughout Israel healing diseases and casting out demons and pleads with him to help her daughter. One can only imagine the heart-wrenching scene of a mother falling on her knees before Jesus, tears streaming down her cheeks, crying out, “Lord, help me!” And yet Jesus’ response is enough to make one stop in disbelief—“Did he really say that?”

Jesus responds by saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” In other words, as the apostle Paul rightly states regarding the Jews: “to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” (Ro 9:4 ESV). Jesus wanted this woman to understand what he had explained to a Samaritan woman earlier in his ministry, although the time was coming when both Jews and non-Jews would worship God in spirit and in truth, that time was not yet (Jn 4).

The woman then responds with three powerful words—“*Lord, help me!*” Here is a mother who is desperate for her daughter, who is pleading for mercy, who is begging for help. And as if Jesus’ response was not

harsh enough, he then retorts: “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

Now at this point any other mother would have taken offense, given Jesus a few choice words, and then stormed off. This woman, however, responds with one of the most amazing professions of faith in the entire Bible—“*Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.*”

The woman did not disagree with Jesus that she was undeserving of reaping the benefits and blessings which rightly belonged to the Jews. She understood that she had no right to come to Jesus and make any requests of him, let alone expect him to comply. But she also understood that she was not asking for all that Jesus was offering to the Jewish people.

Much like the sick and diseased folks in the town of Gennesaret who begged Jesus to only allow them to touch the hem of his garment so they might be healed (14:34ff.), this woman was only asking for crumbs of grace. She knew that in light of all she had heard about Jesus, a man who had healed the blind, made the lame walk, and fed five thousand with five loaves and two fish, her request was a small task. She knew if she could only receive crumbs of grace, the leftovers that Jesus might offer, any small measure of mercy, it would be enough. She would be satisfied; she would be content; her prayer would be answered. We could learn so much from this woman.

The Bible makes clear we are by nature hostile toward God (Ro 8:7); we are enemies of God (Ro 5:10); we are desperately wicked (Jer 17:9); all our good deeds are as filthy rags before God (Is 64:6); we are so evil our hearts have committed sins our hands haven’t gotten around to yet (Mt 5:27-28). To be sure, the Bible makes clear that the only thing we deserve from God—the only thing God owes us—is everlasting condemnation (Ro 2:13). Yet so often we live and act and respond to life’s situations as if

God *does owe us*, as if we deserve to have more than we do. We are like homeless people standing on the corner screaming at passer-bys for refusing to drop money in our buckets, and sneering at those who do for not giving enough.

But if we understand and accept in our heart of hearts our proper station in life in relation to our Creator, then we will be immeasurably satisfied and joyful with any measure of grace God gives us. Along with the Canaanite woman, we will recognize that—apart from being in union with Christ—we don’t deserve God’s blessings; we don’t deserve for God to answer our prayers; and we certainly don’t deserve to be better off than we are today. Rather we will fall prostrate before the feet of Christ and proclaim: “*Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.*” If I could have but crumbs of grace I would be satisfied, any measure of grace and my joy would be full.

What is amazing is that for those who have been brought into union with Christ, we have not only received crumbs of grace but the entire loaf. In his letter to the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul tells us that those who are in Christ have been given “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (1:3). All that is Christ’s is ours. We are like children waiting for a wealthy inheritance, knowing with absolute certainty that that day will come. It is not a question of *if* but *when*. However, these spiritual blessings are not only futuristic but are in the here and now. Notice the aorist language of the apostle’s words: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who has blessed us* in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ep 1:3 ESV, emphasis added). Let us always remember that we are not merely dogs who eat the crumbs that fall from our master’s table, but are his children whom he bids to sit at his table and feast upon the richness of his goodness, grace, and mercy until our hearts are content and our joy is full.

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