

1. This text is paralleled at Mt. 17:14-20 and Lk. 9:37-43. Please read all of these passages. The time is about six months before Jesus' suffering and death. He had predicted His suffering and death once. His second prediction follows the occasion of our text.
2. Jesus had just returned from the Mt. of Transfiguration with Peter, James and John. The other nine disciples were waiting. When Jesus and the three join the nine, some scribes (probably from Jerusalem) were arguing with the disciples. A man had brought his devil-possessed son to the nine for help but they could not cure him.
3. This instance of devil-possession was very severe. Since childhood this only son had been plagued by the devil. See vs. 18, 20, 22, 26. It was a terrible situation.
4. Jesus had given His disciples authority over the unclean spirits. Mk. 6:7. They used this authority to cast out many demons. Mk. 6:13. (After His resurrection, when the disciples were commissioned as missionaries, Jesus did not give them this authority). But on this occasion when the man brought his son to the disciples, they could not cure him. Evidently the disciples were embarrassed in the presence of the scribes.
5. Vs. 19 gives us Jesus' very severe indictment of the people of His day. He says: "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" The greatest problem which Jesus faced *not* was that they would believe Him. They would not believe that He was the Son of God. They would not believe that He was the Messiah. In Jn. 9, when Jesus healed the blind man, though the Jewish authorities had the evidence, they would not believe. Likewise when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Jn. 11. Read Jesus' severe indictment at Jn. 12:37-40. Or His lament over Jerusalem. Mt. 23:37-39. Sinners can be helped. But stubborn unbelievers cannot be helped.
6. Even the disciples lacked faith. See vs. 28 and 29. Vs. 29 should read: "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." Some manuscripts add: "and fasting." But scholars have determined, from better manuscripts, that the words "and fasting" should not be read here. (They have also learned that Mt. 17:21 is not in the best manuscripts). What does Jesus mean; "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer" ? Prayer is based solely on the promises of God. The basis of prayer is faith in the promises of God. Faith is a gift of God. See Eph. 2:8. Luther says in his explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Rom. 10:17. The disciples failed to do what Jesus commanded because they lacked faith. That's what Jesus means.
7. Also the father of this devil-possessed boy was weak in faith. See 22 and 23. Jesus gently criticizes the man. Vs. 23. Then the man cries: "I do believe; help my unbelief." Very likely millions of Christians have prayed this prayer. And the Lord always answers the person who prays like this man did.
8. Jesus was severe with the people of His day because of their unbelief. He even criticized His disciples when He frankly told them that they had littleness of faith (Mt. 17:20) but He promised them that if they would have faith as a mustard faith (small but genuine) they could move mountains, that is, they could do things which, with people, are impossible. But the only one in our text who received help was the father of the possessed boy. Even his faith wavered but he did believe. He is very likely a picture of many Lutherans who fit the description of James 1:6-8. Their faith is like the waves of the sea, rising and falling, unsteady.
9. Our prayer today: "Lord I believe. Help my unbelief." Sinners won't be lost but unbelievers will be lost." See Mk. 16:16.

Theme: LORD I BELIEVE. HELP MY UNBELIEF.

Introduction: Our text is a picture of mankind. Some are like the scribes who just want to argue with Christians. They are an unbelieving generation of people who don't really want Jesus and His promises. Then there are people, like the disciples, who have received the gifts of God but who do not use them because of the littleness of their faith. And then there are people like the father of this sick boy who cry: "Lord I do believe. Please help my unbelief."

I-THE FIRST KIND: THOSE WHO REJECT GOD'S HELP

A-These refuse to believe in what Jesus did and said. Jesus says to them: "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" They have heard that they are in need of salvation. They have heard about what God, in Christ, has done for them. But they reject it. Remember, it's not sinners who will be lost but unbelievers will be lost. Mk. 16:16. Unbelief damns. These people try the patience of God. The Lord permits them to live so that they will repent. The Lord ^{invites} them. See Mt. 11:28; Is. 40:27-31; Is. 55:1-13; Jn. 3:16.

B-These vex and harass Christians. When Jesus found the nine, a crowd and the scribes were arguing with them. Obviously the cause was the fact that they could not heal this man's son. This very likely vexed and embarrassed the disciples. The people of this world often vex and try the children of God. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were a grief to Lot, Abraham's nephew. The unbelieving Jews vexed Jesus in His day. Wherever St. Paul went to preach the Word, the unbelieving Jews hounded him and made life miserable for him. He escaped Damascus by being lowered in a basket over the wall. II Cor. 11:33. His enemies caused him to leave Jerusalem early. Acts 9:29,30.

II-THE SECOND KIND: LIKE THE HELPLESS DISCIPLES

A-This account of the disciples is truly a paradox. We are surprised when we read this account of the disciples. Jesus had given His disciples authority over the unclean spirits. Mk. 6:7. And we know that they used this authority to cast out many demons. Mk. 6:13. Why then could they not cast out a demon on the occasion of our text? Was the demon too strong for them? Were they afraid of the demon? No. We have the answer from Jesus' own lips. When they asked Him: "Why could we not cast it out?" Jesus answered "This kind cannot come out by anything but by prayer." His rebuke of His disciples is not as severe as His rebuke to the people in vs. 19 but it is still a rebuke. According to Mt. 17:20 Jesus said: "Because of the littleness of your faith." Jesus' authority did not work like a machine. Unless the disciples received it by faith, they could not use it.

B-The disciples perhaps remind us of ourselves. We are like the passage in James 1:6-8: "Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord." Or perhaps we need to read Lk. 18:1-8. This parable teaches us to pray and not to lose heart.

III-THE THIRD KIND: LIKE THE FATHER OF THE SICK CHILD

A-He confessed his sin to Jesus. Read again vs. 22-24. The man had a grievous problem and desperately needed help. But he was struggling with doubt. He said to Jesus "If you can." He was not quite sure. When Jesus repeated these words to the man, He was criticizing the man's doubt. Jesus said: "All things are possible to him who believes." That is a promise. And then the man cried: "I DO believe; help my unbelief." He was confessing his sin. That's where a Christian must always start.

B-He did believe and was helped. Read Jesus' promises at Ps. 50:15; Jn. 14:13,14; 15:16; 16:24; I Pet. 5:7; Is. 40:27-31. Jesus will answer prayers which are prayed in faith, even if it is weak.

Sermon Notes on Mt. 15:21-28, Lent II

1. This account and its parallel (Mk. 7:24-30) follows the account of Jesus' severe words to the hypocritical Pharisees and scribes who had come to Him from Jerusalem. Their attitude at Mt. 15:12 shows their arrogance, their feeling of superiority over other people. This happened a year before Jesus' death, at the end of the Galilean ministry.
2. This account reminds us of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:8-24) and Lk. 4:26. This Sidonian woman was a Gentile. She reminds us of the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:7ff) and the centurion of Capernaum (Mt. 8:1-13). They were the exception to God's rule that He made His Covenant with Israel. But once Christ had carried out God's plan, all would be treated alike. The rule is found at Rom. 2:9,10. These Gentile conversions at Jesus' time are prophetic of the world mission.
3. Why did Jesus call her faith great? Because (1) she had the proper attitude toward herself. She realized that she herself could not solve the problem. Therefore she cries for mercy. When Jesus reminds her that she is a mere puppy (Gentile) under the table of the masters (Jews) she does not object. She is not proud and arrogant. With Paul she agrees that she is the chief of sinners. With the Publican in the Temple she cries: "God be merciful to me, the sinner." (2) She has true faith. She calls Jesus "Lord, Son of David." She must have heard the Gospel prior to this occasion. See Mk. 3:8 and Lk. 6:17. She had a great need. Satan was troubling her daughter (Mk. 7:25). She believed that only Jesus could help. Even though at first Jesus was silent and even though His disciples urged Him to send her away and even though Jesus compares her to a puppy under the masters' table, she persists and says: "I know I'm only a puppy, but even puppies receive mercy from their masters!" She persisted in her faith and prayer despite odds. She is like the widow in Lk. 18:1-8 who kept on praying and did not grow weary. She is like the man in the parable at Lk. 11:5-8. He was heard for his persistence. This Canaanite woman had great faith because she had the right attitude toward herself and toward Jesus.
4. The sun shines all day long. But when it is cloudy it appears as if the sun is not shining. Likewise, God's love and mercy in Christ is constant but when He tests us it seems as if He is not sincere in His promises. He tests us and thus strengthens our faith. He put this Gentile woman through a series of tests: 1) He was silent and did not say a word; 2) He says He was sent only to Israel; 3) Then He says that He does not want to throw the bread to the wrong people. But He was testing her faith. She persisted and overcame the Lord. The successful struggling of this Gentile woman reminds us of the wrestling of Jacob with God (Gen. 32:26). Someone has said that God hides a smiling face behind a frowning countenance.
5. In the prayer after Holy Communion we ask God to strengthen our faith in Him and give us fervent love toward our neighbor. This woman plainly had strong faith and she loved her daughter dearly. At first she says: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David. My daughter is grievously tormented by a devil." Soon thereafter she prays: "Lord, help me." She identified herself with her daughter. That is true love.
6. Farrar says: "By language this woman was Greek; by birth a Canaanite; she was a heathen; by allegiance a Roman subject; and by faith a first-fruit of that harvest which was to spring up later."
7. The disciples said: "Send her away because she is crying behind us." Either they meant: "Heal her and get rid of her" or: "We can't stand this yelling. Get rid of her." In either case they were impatient but Jesus was patient although He did not appear to be so.
8. Bengel says: "Our Lord spoke severely to the Jews themselves, but He spoke honorably of them when speaking to others. See Jn. 4:22."
9. Children feed the puppies under the table even though their parents forbid them to do so. What a wonderful illustration!

Sermon Outline on Mt. 15:21-28, Lent II

Theme: GREAT IS YOUR FAITH

Introduction: I Pet. 5:6-7 reads: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." And James 4:10: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." Read also Mary's prayer at Lk. 1:46-55. Our text gives us a good example of what these passages mean.

I- THIS CANAANITE GENTILE WOMAN TRULY HUMBLER HERSELF

- A- She realized that she was helpless. She pleaded with Jesus because her daughter was grievously tormented by a devil. No mere human being can drive out the devil. He is very powerful. Eph. 6:10-12; Lk. 10:1. A person who humbles himself before God realizes that without Jesus he can do nothing. Jn. 15:5. Natural man is spiritually without strength. Rom. 5:6. He is like a corpse that has no strength.
- B- She was not deterred by difficulties. In vs. 24 Jesus says: "I have not been sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." God made His covenant with the Jews, not the Gentiles. At Mt. 10:5-6 Jesus told His disciples not to go to Samaritan towns but rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This Canaanite woman knew this or at least agreed to it. But she continued to humble herself before the Lord.
- C- She was not arrogant but realized her inferior status. Jesus told her that it is not good to take the children's food and throw it to the puppies under the table. She agreed to this but insisted that even the puppies get the crumbs which the children throw to them. She was not arrogant like the Pharisees (vs. 12) who felt hurt when Jesus showed them their sins. This Canaanite woman was content to get the least.

II- THIS CANAANITE WOMAN TRULY BELIEVED IN JESUS

- A- She knew Who Jesus was. It is evident that this woman already believed in Jesus. How did she become a believer? We don't know. But see Mk. 3:8 and Lk. 6:17. Likely she had heard Him preach. In our text she calls Jesus "Lord, Son of David."
- B- She asked only for mercy. This sounds like penitent David in Ps. 51. The O.T. is full of pleas for mercy from children of God. See 4:1; 6:2; 9:13; 25:16; 27:7; 30:10; 31:9; 51:1; 86:16. There are many, many more also in the prophets. The Good Samaritan had mercy on the traveller. Lk. 10:37. The Publican in the Temple asked only for mercy. Lk. 18:13. Paul acknowledged his conversion as caused only by God's mercy. I Tim. 1:16. God's mercy comes to us in baptism. Tit. 3:5. This Canaanite woman asked only for mercy.
- C- Her faith caused her to be persistent. She was not like the doubter at James 1:6 whose faith is like a wave of the sea, high one moment, low the next. James warns: "Do not let such a person think that he will receive anything from the Lord." Jesus tested this woman's faith again and again. But she persisted. She was like the widow in Lk. 18:1-8 who knew and believed that her cause was a valid one. She cried day and night and was heard. She was like the man in Lk. 11:5-8 who was heard not because of friendship but because of his persistence. She was like Jacob who would not let the Lord go until the Lord would bless him. Gen. 32:26.

Conclusion: All too often we are like little children who grow weary so easily. But stories like this one from the Bible teach us about the necessity of true humility and true faith in the Christian's life. James 5:16 reads: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."