

Lesson 24: Review of Matthew 15:21-39: "Persevering In The Presence of God"

What does it mean to persevere in the presence of God?

If you have spent much time reading and meditating in the Psalms you get the idea. For instance Psalm 1 begins, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does he prospers." The Psalm is a portrait of persevering in the Presence; consistently staying out of the way of the wicked and of sinners. And, it highlights "delighting" and "meditating day and night"; it describes a rootedness and fruitfulness—the results of persevering in the presence of God! I want that! Do you?

Matthew 15:21-39 provides snapshots of perseverance in the presence of the Lord. Perhaps the most notable story is that of the Canaanite woman. But we also see a large contingent of people who choose to stay with Jesus. For three days they stay near Him, hanging on His every word! Oh, what blessedness comes to those who wait upon the Lord (see Isaiah 40:30-31)!

The Canaanite Woman: Out of the Darkness! (15:21-28): Of all those who interacted with Jesus only two were ever commended for their great faith: A Roman soldier and this Canaanite woman. This should surprise us. It certainly would have surprised the Jewish reader of Matthew's Gospel. But isn't that how God works? Paul confirmed this in I Corinthians 1:27-29. In that passage Paul glories in God, that He chooses the *foolish things* the *weak things* the *lowly things* and the *despised things* and *the things that are not* to shame the *wise* the *strong*. He did this, Paul says, "So that no one could boast before Him." This is quite remarkable! But God's way is to "oppose the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Pr. 3:34; James 4:6; I Peter 5:5)

Indeed we see much grace given to this humble Canaanite woman. She was a woman dwelling among those who were "living in darkness" and "living in the land of the shadow of death". But! upon her and people living in that area truly the "light dawned" (see Matt. 4:15-16)! Jesus was among them now! She came into His light bringing to Him her distress and brokenness! Her daughter was suffering from demon possession.

She came to Him applying what knowledge she had of Him. By faith she addressed Him as "Son of David". She had little "light" but what little she had she applied it all to Jesus at this exact time! Did you notice how different was her approach from many of the religious Jews Jesus had encountered? Her approach was progressive in humility and trust, while the religious Jews were proud and condescending. She called Him Lord and even *kneft* before Him with her request.

But, you may ask, *why did Jesus appear to banter with her instead of immediately taking action?* Perhaps so that His disciples would understand something of true faith: True faith perseveres whereas "foxhole faith" does not. In this lowly Canaanite woman they witnessed true, persevering faith! Does your faith persevere?

Then, in verse 27, she expressed the depth of her trust in His authority! She confessed her pleasure in receiving from Jesus whatever He was pleased to give her. And, as you can read, nothing more needed to be said or drawn out of her! Jesus commended her faith and healed her daughter. How often we quit too soon. We fail to persevere in waiting and trusting in the Lord. Romans 5:2b-5 indicate that one of the great blessings of perseverance is a growing intimate knowledge of the love of God poured out into our hearts!

The Crowd who sought Jesus (15:29-31): Jesus moved on south from Tyre and Sidon to an area around the Sea of Galilee to an *inconvenient* location. Yet as news of Jesus' proximity spread "great crowds came to Him" and when they came they brought with the lame, blind, crippled and mute and many others! Inconvenience didn't hinder them. They persevered fully expecting Jesus to do something. What about following Jesus would you admit has become an "inconvenience" to you? Would you repent now?

The Compassion of Christ Upon those who persevered (15:32-39): Moved by their willingness to stay with Him for a seemingly indefinite time, Jesus had compassion on the people after three days. Jesus purposed to feed the crowd of 4,000. Although the disciples bristled at Jesus' suggestion of feeding 4,000, nevertheless Jesus exercised His compassion on the large group and they ate and had their fill!

This leads us to conclude that the Lord rewards persevering faith, whose object is the Lord Himself. It is of great benefit for you to persevere. James 5:11 says, "We consider blessed those who have persevered." The Lord commends perseverance. When you are ready to give up your struggle remember the Lord remembers you and the times you persevered. (See Revelation 2:3)

Questions for Matthew 16:1-12: “Christ Alone: One Sign, One Doctrine”

1. From the notes on page 1, **A)** what impressed and/or helped you? **B)** Explain “A”.

Introduction to Matthew 16:1-12: Jesus was back in Jewish territory. It is at this point the Pharisees and Sadducees confront Jesus and tempt Him to “show off” for them showing them a sign from Heaven. What is helpful to understand is that our English translations are unable to capture the intensity of the confrontation. It is as if the religious leaders are putting on an in-your-face full court press. Pressure and intensity flood the moment of confrontation as they try to trap Jesus. We cover one important point in two sections. The point: Jesus Christ is the “alone” sign from God to us. The sections: One Sign and One Doctrine.

2. Read Matthew 16:1-4. “One Sign, pt. 1”: **A)** See the word “test” in 16:1. Substitute the word “trap”, or “tempt”. What is the purpose of a trap? What does this tell about what the Religious leaders wanted to do with Jesus? **B)** How could this help you think differently about “temptations”? **C)** Who is behind this kind of “trapping” or “tempting”? (see Matt. 4:1-10) **D)** What were they wanting to see? Why? **E)** Read Mark 8:12. Linking the two accounts together, why did Jesus sigh deeply? **F)** What effect would a sign have on these religious leaders?

3. Read Matthew 16:1-4: “One Sign, pt. 2” **A)** What do you think Jesus was communicating to the religious leaders when He says, “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times”? **B)** How did Jesus describe the hearts of those demanding a sign? **C)** What are some of the potential dangers of having to “see” and “feel” Christ’s power? **D)** What sign would be given? What does Jesus mean by this sign? **E)** The sign of verse 4 is sufficient, according to Jesus. Are you satisfied with this sign? Why or why not? **F)** What could be the significance of the words in 16:4, “Jesus then left them and went away.”

4. Read Matthew 16:5-12: “One Doctrine” **A)** Why would the disciples be confused by Jesus’ teaching? (16:5-7) **B)** Was bread the real problem? What then do you think Jesus was warning them about? **C)** What, exactly, would qualify their teaching as “false”? **D)** How does Colossians 3:1,2,15,16 instruct us to avoid false teaching? **E)** What practical steps are you taking to safeguard yourself? **(If you are doing some of the things listed in Col. 3:16 what are they and how are they helping?)**