



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

Readings Matthew 15 : 21-28

Sermon: 30 August 2009

Verse for the sermon this morning Matthew 15: 28

“Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.”
And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Beloved in the Lord

I wonder how many people that is here this morning have read this passage or even heard it before. I am also sure that you all must have wondered whilst listening to this passage – can it really be Jesus that is so rude to this woman?

But if we look at this passage through the eyes of someone that lived in the Mediterranean context this passage makes perfect sense. Yes then the words does not even sound so sharp on the ear.... So let us place ourselves this morning in the Mediterranean context in which Jesus lived....

Matthew wrote his gospel originally to Jews who converted to Christianity. It is therefore no wonder that he takes his audience into consideration in everything he writes like the many quotations from the Old Testament, his sensitivity to use the name of God in vain, the comparisons between Moses and Jesus and many other Jewish sentiments. Matthew knew about the first commandment which forbids any Jew to use the Lord’s name in vain.

In the beginning of his gospel it seems that Jesus was in the same boat as Moses. Both of them were at the mercy of two kings who wanted to end their lives. Both had to run and escape from being captured. Moses went up the mountain to receive the commandments while Jesus went up the mountain to teach his followers what discipleship really means.

This passage reflects also a very familiar method of conversion into the Jewish religion. In the Biblical times everyone that stayed in Judea or Israel were Jews and practiced the same values. A Jew was only allowed to marry another Jew. But there were exceptions like Rahab and Ruth who were both heathen women. They had to then allow heathen women to become Jews. But it could only happen after they completed a certain Jewish conversion ritual. Heathen men were never allowed to become Jewish!

What did the procedure demand?

When a heathen woman wanted to convert to Judaism she had to convince the religious leaders of her true intentions. She had to go to the priest three times and he had to be so rude to her to convince her not to go through with the procedure. If she could sustain the pressure and maintain to go for the third time, she was allowed to become a Jew.

All of Matthew's original listeners knew this procedure well.

Matthew tells us that Jesus was in Tiro and Sidon., which was heathen territory. No Jew with the right mind would in those days ever venture off to such a country. The chances would be too great to touch a heathen, by accident and then you were considered as unclean and not allowed to enter the temple or be part of any religious activity. The Jews even called the heathens "dogs".

Tiro and Sidon were Canaanite cities and we know that the Canaanites and Israelites were enemies. Now a Canaanite woman comes to Jesus and begs Jesus to heal her sick daughter. It was not permitted in those days for a female to address a male in public. In those days this woman was considered as bad, shameful, heathen woman! But her need is bigger than her status. She does not worry to be shamed in public. Jesus on the other hand also acts correctly by ignoring and shaming her according to the rules of the Jewish conversion rituals.

The woman comes a second time to Jesus while he is very rude to her. He calls her a dog. And again Jesus acts according to the rules of the conversion process in a correct manner – heathen were called dogs and the Jews did think

But the woman does not give up. For the third time she comes to Jesus and says that the dogs eats of the crumbs that falls from the table! Then the surprising reaction from Jesus when he says to her "woman you have great faith. Your request is granted. He does not say congratulations for being true to the rituals of the conversion to Judaism. Her daughter was not healed because she was obeying a law. Her daughter was healed because she believed in Jesus as her Saviour!

Matthew says to his listeners that it is good to be faithful to the law and traditions but that it is not enough to enter into the kingdom of God. If they do not believe in Jesus as their Saviour then they cannot enter into the kingdom of God. All the visible traditions have no eternal value!

He also criticizes the Jews who believed that they will be saved for obeying the laws. Faith is all that they need – faith in Him as their only Saviour and Redeemer. It must have been a shock to them thinking that the heathen woman in this story had more faith than they had!

Can this story have any meaning to us?

Despite the fact that we are not Jews and we all believe that Jesus Christ came to save us all from sin, death and hell, this story can still mean a lot to us.

We too can be very demanding when it comes to membership of a church or our Christian fellowship. We can sometimes ignore people that are different from us. We can so easily neglect people that live beside us- people that may need a helping hand. But because they are different from us, we tend to shy away from them. We can so easily judge and condemn even our Christian brothers and sisters. At times we even tend to exclude certain people just because they are different from us or thinks differently or have a different religious outlook. We do not always live out our faith practically when it comes to our fellowship with other people or even our own in the congregation.

Is this what Jesus taught us to do or did we invent all the rules for excluding certain people ourselves? Jesus taught us: "To love God with all our heart, mind and soul and to love your neighbor as you love yourself!"

Is it neighborly love when we condemn other people? We can sometimes be so hurtful to other people when we gossip, condemn and are rude to them. Yes there are so many people that suffer because of Christian believers' attitude. The best part is that we are no better than any other human being. We too are sinful. We too have skeletons in our closets that we struggle to keep in.

What is the conclusion then? We are not saved by God in Jesus Christ because of our input, our efforts, or our gifts? We are not saved because of who we are, how we dress, whether we are clever or dumb or how many laws we obey. No we are saved only because God felt sorry for us and gave us a second chance. We are saved through faith in Jesus by God's grace and mercy. We are saved because we believe in Jesus Christ as our only Lord and Saviour.

Let us all forget a bit about the lives of other people and focus on our own lives of faith. Let us start living out our faith like the Canaanite women – relentless and without any fear. Let us pray for faith that can carry us through any crisis or tribulations because it was only faith that helped the Canaanite women's daughter. It is also through faith alone that God saved us from the burdens of sin, death and hell. We must just believe and thank God for such deliverance.

If we really believe in Jesus Christ we will live like new people that knows how it feels to be touched by God's grace...Let us all go out and touch other people's lives with the touch of love & forgiveness that we received from God, in Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit.

Amen

Prayer

Lord we have come to wait in Christ.
We have come as very different people.
We have different hopes and fears.
Different needs and different questions.
We have different dreams and different concerns.
We have different hurts and different experiences.
We have different gifts and different talents.
And we have different expectations.
And different ways of worshipping you.
But we come because we are one in Christ, who calls us to come.
We wait to receive all your resources of hope, peace and love.
We come,
and in coming, bring our prayers in Christ's name.

Amen