

What Do We Do when Jesus Does Not Immediately Answer?

Yesterday I received a phone call from Evangelist John Hamblin. He asked me if I had time for a Bible question. I said, "John, they are getting ready to close the door, but now my curiosity is up. What is the Bible question? I'll have time to think about it while I fly to Mississippi." So he asked me what my thoughts were about the Syrophenician woman who came for the Lord to have mercy on her daughter, and the Bible says, "*But He answered her not a word...*" (Matthew 15:23). As soon as he said this they closed the door to our jet, requiring all cell phones to be turned off. As soon as John asked me this question, I immediately thought of that Scripture from John 6:17, "*...And it was now dark, and Jesus had not come to them.*" I think most of us have been where the disciples were that day. They were in the ship in the middle of the sea, at night and it was storming. Jesus was aware of their whereabouts - in the mountain just above the sea, but not within sight of Jesus. Many times we are in the dark and cannot see what God is up to. Like this Syrophenician woman, we have earnestly requested from God and apparently have received no answer. Jesus did eventually and abundantly answer the woman. What do we do in the meantime? Let's examine what she did in the interim and apply the same to our situation. The woman cried, "*Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word...*" (Matthew 15:22b, 23a). There was an extremely discouraging word from the disciples who cruelly responded to the woman's pleas, "*...And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us*" (Matthew 15:23). Isn't this what we do many times, when we face things we don't like and things we cannot handle? We just say, "Lord, send this away!" On one hand, Jesus doesn't answer, on the other hand, the disciples have said, we don't want to hear what you have to say. I sense even as I write these words, somebody is saying, "That's me". What do we do when Jesus does not immediately answer us?

I. We crouch in worship.

Although our Lord did not answer her, He made a statement that would certainly have a tendency to discourage a Greek woman. The Bible says, "*But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (Matthew 15:24). This was not our Lord being unkind; He was testing her faith to see if she would persevere. And she passed this test, for her response was, "*Then came she and worshipped him...*" (Matthew 15:25). She worshipped! This was the posture of a man who suffered like none other. When Job's children died and Hell was breaking out on earth for him, the Bible says, "*Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped*" (Job 1:20). We are admonished, "*O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker*" (Psalm 95:6). It also says, "*O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth*" (Psalm 96:9). The word for worship in Hebrew is "שָׁחָה" (shâchâh) which means to bow down. One scholar said it means to crouch at the feet of the master like a dog. You can see in I Samuel 2:36, the same word translated worship is translated "crouch": "*...crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread...that I*

may eat a piece of bread.” The Syrophencian woman in worship takes the posture of a dog. When I think of the word for worship, I often think of the old trademark for RCA, which has a dog sitting near the horn speaker from the antique phonograph and the caption read, “Listening to his master’s voice.” Worship is a state of awe and trust in the God who does all things well and makes no mistakes. He is too kind to be cruel, too wise to make a mistake. Let us worship Him.

II. We continue to ask.

The next statement the Syrophecian woman said was, “...*Lord, help me*” (Matthew 15:25b). When we don’t hear from God, keep asking! Jesus said, “*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you*” (Matthew 7:7). The verbs ask, seek and knock are all in the tense that denotes the petitioner is to ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, knock and keep knocking.

One night Dr. John R. Rice had a dream and in the dream the Lord showed him some beautifully unwrapped presents covered with heavenly dust and cobwebs. Dr. Rice asked the Lord what were those presents all about? He answered, “Those were some gifts I was willing to give my children had they asked me one more time.” I wonder how many of us come one prayer short of getting our answer.

III. We clothe ourselves in humility.

When Jesus finally answered, He said, “...*It is not meet to take the children's (Israel's) bread, and to cast it to dogs (Gentiles)*” (Matthew 15:26). Our Lord is reminding us of the Scripture that says, “*He came unto his own...*” (John 1:11). This is referencing the fact that Jesus came to the house of Israel. She was not yet aware of the rest of this verse and the following one that says, “...*and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name*” (John 1:11a,12). Although our Lord was collectively rejected by the Jew, He was received by the Gentile. Ah, there was hope for this lady yet!

In total meekness, the Syrophecian woman said, “...*Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table*” (Matthew 15:27). What humility! The way up is down. James said it like this, “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up*” (James 4:10). God rejects the proud, but grants the requests of the humble. The Bible says, “*For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones*” (Isaiah 57:15).

When Jesus does not answer immediately, this is not the time to argue or get impatient with the Lord; it is time to humble ourselves.

IV. We see combustible faith!

“Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be

it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Matthew 15:28). The word “combustible” means “able to catch fire and burn easily.” When worship, constant petitioning, and faith are on hand, God brings the fire. This woman got exactly what she asked for - her daughter was made whole immediately. Our Lord did not answer immediately, but when He did, it was a done deal within the hour!

I pray this wonderfully simple and simply wonderful story will be an encouragement to those who are in the dark and Jesus doesn't seem to be answering. Hold on! *“For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly”* (Psalm 84:11).

-Pastor Pope-