

## The Canaanite Women Who Would Not Take No for an Answer

[Job 7:11-21; Matthew 15:21-28](#)

Unsung Heroes and Heroines of the Faith

Dr. Thomas A. Erickson

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Judging from his treatment of this Canaanite woman, you might think Jesus had never read God's promise in Isaiah 56: "The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord . . . these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Isaiah's God opens his arm to people from every nation, but when this desperate mother, this Canaanite woman, this foreigner, begs for her daughter's healing, JESUS' RESPONSE IS SILENCE. "He did not answer her at all."

Nor is this the only time in the Bible that human suffering is met by heaven's silence. Job, having lost his family, his fortune and his health, cries out in protest: "I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." (7:11) Then, addressing God, he asks, "What do I do to you, you watcher of humanity? Why have you made me your target? Why have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?" (7:20-21) But God is silent and Job goes on suffering.

But linger with me over the meaning of silence. I've been talking as though silence is a refusal, a turn-down. But not necessarily. My dictionary offers the phrase "silent assent" as an illustration of silence. Some of you have silent partners in your business. A silent partner is not opposed to what you're doing. Quite the contrary. A silent partner is so much in support that she invests her precious capital in your operation. So let's take note of our Lord's silence at the outset of this encounter, but let's not hastily conclude that Jesus is slamming mercy's door in this woman's face.

The disciples' response is more repelling: SEND HER AWAY. And it wasn't the first time they repelled people in dire need. Just one chapter earlier these men found themselves saddled with over 5,000 hungry people miles from nowhere. And since they couldn't phone Dominoes for a car load of pizzas, they told Jesus, "Send the crowds away . . . to buy food for themselves." In short, "We're not responsible for these people; let them fend for themselves."

I, for one, can identify with those men, especially when a needy stranger knocks at my door at five in the afternoon. Physically, I'm tired after a long day. Mentally, I'm already out the door. Personally, I can't wait to get home for a quick meal before returning to the church to teach a class or attend a meeting. So, uncaringly, I think to myself, Send them away.

And there is more to my rebuff than simple avoidance. I confess to a prejudice that discriminates between people who are worthy and others who are not-so-worthy. People who look like me, that is, people who are middle class, well scrubbed and well dressed, are worthy. All others are less worthy. People who speak English, who have college degrees and good jobs are worthy. Others I pay less attention to. The woman in Matthew 15 was one of the less worthy. She dressed differently, ate strange food, spoke with a dialect. And had she come to my door, insisting in her shrill voice that I help her, I might have said, "Send her away." After all, I can take care of myself, so why can't she?

But the truth is, I cannot always help myself. When a kidney stone struck a nerve several years ago I was rendered painfully helpless and utterly dependent on others. You talk about loud cries! You could hear mine for miles! I didn't care who was listening, or how much of a pest I was making of myself. I wanted help, and I wanted it now! And this mother in Matthew 15 could care less that her outcry was upsetting the disciples. Her daughter was desperately ill and she knew this Galilean could heal her. And she would keep at him until he did.

So we come at last to this woman's UNSHAKABLE FAITH. Look at the roadblocks thrown in her path: Jesus' silence and the disciples' "Send her away." And as if that were not enough, Jesus throws up two more barriers. First, he tells her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." To that she can only kneel at his feet and say, "Lord, help me." And when he answers, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs," she counters, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." I can't fully explain why Jesus put all these obstacles in her way. I can't fully justify likening that woman to a household pet. I can only admit that that's how it seems to us at times: our prayers ricochet from the ceiling, the heavens are as brass, and God seems to treat us like dogs. But, like our terrier back home who, when he clamps down on a toy, won't let go, this woman would not disengage from the Savior. "You alone have what I need," she seems to be saying, "and I'm going to keep on pestering you until you do something for me." No wonder Jesus was impressed. No wonder he told her, "O woman, great is your faith!" And she finally got what she wanted because of her unshakable faith: "Her daughter was healed instantly."

I wish I could promise that you will always get what you want when you cry out to God. But you won't. You will always get what you need but you won't always get what you want. Our daughter Sharon was 37 when a drunk driver killed her husband. No amount of prayer would bring Larry back. No matter how loudly she cried out, she would not get what she wanted. But she got what she needed: the bracing comfort of her family, church and friends, the tenacious strength of her unshakable faith in God, and a deep conviction that she had what it takes to get up and move on. Little by little she got back on her feet. There were three children to care for and she did it very well. One has a Masters degree and is teaching kindergarten. The second will receive his BA in June. The third is midway through her college education. Five years ago she took charge of the English and social studies curriculum for the entire school district. Today she is completing a doctoral degree and preparing to be a superintendent of schools. When Larry died she cried out to God, and though she didn't get what she wanted, she got what she needed.

When you suffer, don't take no for an answer. Cry out, hang on, dig in. Your Savior is there for you, and though you may not get what you want, you will always, always, always get what you need.