



Life Group Study Notes

“Great Faith: Overcoming Barriers”

Dr. Rice Brooks - January 20, 2019

Warm Up (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question to answer, or ask another. No right or wrong answers.

- What's your favorite ethnic food?
- What other culture do you find interesting? Why?
- From whom have you most learned about another culture?

Word (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at www.bethelworld.org

Matthew 15:21-28 ESV *And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.*

Jesus helped this woman overcome significant barriers to receive a great miracle. In the process he also taught his disciples by example to overcome barriers to reach people with God's gracious salvation.

The woman is identified as a Canaanite. These were the ancient enemies of Israel, God's chosen people. They were the ones who had violently resisted Israel when they first came to the Promised Land. Even up to the times of Jesus they were still viewed with prejudice.

The region where she lived and met Jesus was in the vicinity of the pagan towns of Tyre and Sidon. These cities were full of idolatry, injustice, and immorality. Through the centuries Israel's prophets condemned these cities again and again. The people of this region were well aware of the prejudice and hostility with which the Jewish people viewed them.

She had to overcome numerous significant barriers to approach Jesus. Her ethnicity, her heritage, her place of residence, her religious background—all these were significant barriers that would have kept most people with her background from thinking they could approach

Jesus and ask him for a miracle. On top of all this she was also a woman. Women were greatly undervalued and even oppressed in the ancient world. Even some influential Jewish rabbis were known to pray and thank God daily that they weren't born a Gentile, a dog, or a woman.

Jesus' response to her request would not have been unusual given the historical-cultural context: *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* And again after she persisted in her request, *"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."* However, it is a surprise and seems even scandalous given the rest of what we know about Jesus from the Gospels. Why would Jesus respond to her and talk to her like this?

Jesus had penetrating insight into the woman's heart and drew a response of great faith from her. She was convinced that God would help her through Jesus, that Jesus was merciful and gracious and powerful. By speaking to her in the way that his own disciples would have likely spoken to her, he provoked her to express the depth of her beliefs about God and Jesus. And she was correct! Her persistence and her faith were richly rewarded. Her daughter was instantly healed.

Jesus' aim was not merely to draw out the depth of her faith and reward her for it, but also to teach his disciples an important lesson. They had wanted to send this anguished woman away. Jesus however demonstrated God's heart for everyone, even those we deem as unworthy or view with prejudice. God's heart is for all people. His compassion is for everyone. He desires to reconcile people from every background to himself, no matter how sinful they've been or how far from him they seem to be. He wants his disciples to put aside every prejudice and to overcome every barrier to offer God's salvation to everyone no matter who they are.

Discussion (10-15 minutes)

Choose one of the points below, and discuss how the lesson applies to our lives.

- What barriers have you had to overcome to embrace the Gospel, Jesus, God?
- Who does God want to reach in your life that you've been reluctant to talk to about God?
- What barriers hinder you from communicating Jesus to some of the people in your life?

Prayer (10-15 minutes)

Pray any of the following, as well as any other requests you may have.

- Thank God for his kindness and mercy that has helped you draw closer to him.
- Ask God to make you aware of people around you that he wants you to reach with the Gospel.
- Ask God to help you overcome every barrier that hinders your ability to minister the Gospel to others around you.