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FAITH INDISPENSABLE TO SUCCESS.

– MARK 7:24-30. – JUNE 3 –

Golden Text: – "Great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." – Matt. 15:28.

WITH the whole of Galilee awakened, with the people discussing the wisdom and propriety of taking him by force and making him a king, with Herod's boldness manifested in the beheading of John the Baptist, and with the realization that his time for death had not yet come, our Lord left the parts where he was so well known and journeyed about forty-five miles toward the Mediterranean. This brought him to what in our lesson is called the [R3786 : page 169] "borders of Tyre and Sidon," more properly the provinces of Tyre and Sidon – within the boundary of the land called Phoenicia, of which the cities of Tyre and Sidon had been the centers of wealth, influence and business. We are not informed that Jesus went to either of those cities: apparently he merely crossed the borders of Galilee, and was thus for a time free from the authority of Herod. He would rest a little from his labors, and allow the truths which he had taught to penetrate into the hearts of his hearers. He would let the froth work off and the real essence of the truth abide in the hearts which were in condition of righteousness for it. He knew well that these would be but few.

The more his work increased and his fame spread abroad the more did the Adversary raise up opponents and hindrances. After the feeding of the five thousand and his return to Galilee he had discussions with the Pharisees, who, jealous of his growing popularity with the people, sought to oppose him. They would indeed have been glad to have recognized him as a Pharisee and to have had him do his mighty works in the name of Pharisiasm. But his attitude was that of an independent – the

Pharisees had sins that needed to be rebuked as well as others. Outwardly they were professing full consecration to God, but our Lord, who was able to read the heart, knew that a great deal of this was mere pretense, outward form and ceremony, show-religion.

These Pharisees, posing as the leaders of religious thought in that day, were made very angry by our Lord's plainness of speech, and the fact that he pointed out to the common people the general rules and principles by which a tree may be known by its fruits – that the Pharisees were not to be esteemed according to their professions, but to be measured by their deeds. They prided themselves upon their strict observances of the Law, but he showed that many of the things which they did were not really the Law of God, but the commandments of men, and that the very essence of the divine Law, love, justice, they largely ignored, not only in their teachings but also in their practices. The Pharisees feared, therefore, that the high station which they had previously held in the estimation of non-professors was being shaken, and their pride antagonized this – hence they hated him without a cause. They should have been glad to have had their attention called to their errors that they might have corrected the same, but this is not the attitude of the unregenerate heart: it rejoiceth in iniquity and rejoiceth not in the truth; it rejoiceth in whatever upholds its pride and gives color to its boastings of success. To them Pharisaism meant everything, and the fall of Pharisaism meant the fall of all religion.

It is much the same today. Many highly-esteemed people today occupy the position of the Pharisees of that time. They make an outward show, they boast of their success, they delight in the honor of men, especially in the honor of the world; they multiply forms and ceremonies and meetings and make a fair show in the flesh. They draw near to God with their lips, but give evidence that their heart sentiments are not in harmony with their

lip professions, because when the truth is presented to them they hate it instead of loving it, and they hate the light-bearers because the light makes manifest their own weaknesses, hypocrisies, dissemblings in doctrines and practice.

The improper spirit exemplified in the priests and Pharisees and Scribes in our Lord's day finds a parallel today in the anger, malice, hatred, bitter words, which, like arrows, are shot forth at those who serve the Truth, who seek to lift up the standard to the people, who seek to show up the errors of the "dark ages," and through the Truth to make known the real character of our heavenly Father and the real meaning of his Word. Persecutors always claim that they are in support of a principle of righteousness; only in this way can they deceive some whom they enlist upon their side – some of better heart and conscience than their own. As the Israelites considered that anything that would undermine them would be to the injury of the Lord's cause, so today every section of Babylon, every sect of Christendom, seems to be fully persuaded that anything which would undermine the errors of their systems would be injurious to the cause of the Lord; hence they feel that in supporting sectarianism in any of its branches they are fighting for God. Theirs is a part of the blindness which comes from the god of this world, the prince of this world, Satan, who has all the heathen thoroughly under his control, thoroughly blind to the goodness of God and his message.

Our duty, nevertheless, is to be bold and courageous for the Truth, not with the hope of convincing all of our gainsayers, not with the thought of destroying sectarianism, but with the thought of gathering to the Lord his jewels from every quarter of Babylon, "Those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." (Psa. 50:5.) This was Jesus' work in the end of the Jewish age. He was gathering the jewels. His work was a success, although it seemed otherwise to his opponents.

Similarly our work under God will be a success, even though others may see it differently. Even our Lord's crucifixion was a part of the success of God's plan, favorable not only to the believers but to all the families of the earth.

So with us: "God will turn what seems to harm us into everlasting joy;" he will so overrule that all things shall work together for good to those who love him, to those who are on his side and are faithful in holding up his standard. Faith is the lesson here: our Lord had faith in the Father's plan and followed it through good report and through evil report. The apostles had faith in him, and when others said, "It is a hard saying," they said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Similarly with us faith is necessary: if we have faith in the Lord and in his Word we cannot doubt what the results will be, and will be prepared for all the experiences of life as they will be permitted to come to us, and will get blessings from them all.

THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

The country of Tyre and Sidon was called Phoenicia, and its population was made up largely of Carthaginians and Syrians. The woman of our lesson was of Syrian ancestors, and by education and language was a Greek. In a word she represented quite a mixture of nationalities; she was therefore a Gentile out and out. She had a little **[R3786 : page 170]** daughter possessed of an evil spirit, and her mother-love awakened her sensibilities as well as her faith. Although Jesus had entered the village without ostentation, in a semi-private manner, some one had known him, and the word some way reached the ears of this poor, afflicted woman. She hastened to the place where Jesus was, and prostrated herself before him. Matthew says that her cry was, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord! Lord, help me!"

The American consul at Jerusalem, Honorable Selah Merrill, mentions the importunity of the people of the East,

saying, "To one who has ever held a prominent or official position in the East the persistency of pleading women is a fact one will never forget. They will not be driven from their purpose by a rough manner. Severe language does not deter them. They are not wearied by delays. They [R3787 : page 170] will sit and wait hour after hour, and come day by day, ignoring all kinds of refusals. They are importunate beyond anything that I ever experienced in our western life."

The case is just such a one as we know the Master would have promptly attended to under ordinary circumstances. The faith was there, hence the persistency of the request. But on this occasion Jesus simply ignored the woman, "He answered her not a word." (Matt. 15:23.) It would even appear that he left the house, and that the woman importuned the disciples that they would intercede for her with their Master, for we read that the disciples subsequently came to Jesus entreating him to "send her away." Evidently they had first tried to discourage the woman themselves, and told her that their Master was a Jew and that his mission was to Jews; that she could not have much hope for favor, and that his refusal was indicated by his silence to her first request. But the woman's faith in the Lord and love for her child led her to stay to importune.

Apparently while the disciples were speaking with Jesus the woman again approached him, pleading her own cause. This time he answered her, but unsatisfactorily. He said, "Let the children first be filled: for it is not proper to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs." Had there been pride in the heart this response would have been sufficient to have put the woman upon her dignity, so that she would have ceased her importunity and have openly tiraded against the Lord and against all Jews as ecclesiastical bigots. But she was humble as well as full of faith, and so far from taking offence at being told that she as a Gentile was classed with the dogs, she seized upon our Lord's own words

as a basis for a further plea, that as the little house-dogs ate of the fragments from the family table thrown them by the children, so she as a Gentile, as one of the dogs, might be granted her request for the relief of her daughter from the power of the devil without hindering the real spirit of the Lord's argument, without saying that she was as worthy as a Jew of his mercy and favors.

Our Lord was astonished as well as pleased by this demonstration of the woman's faith. Matthew says he exclaimed, "O woman, great is thy faith!" Her request was granted, her daughter was healed, and her further faith was shown in that she accepted the Master's word and went to her house, there to find that indeed the demon was gone out, and that in leaving he had thrown the child in a fit upon the bed. A prominent writer remarks, "It is impossible for us to realize the tone in which Jesus uttered these words or the love which beamed in full glory from his eyes. Nothing ever drew from our Lord such commendation as the exercise of a supreme faith."

LESSONS IN FAITH – PRAYERS OF FAITH

It is proper that we should draw analogies from our Lord's conduct and that we should suppose that the illustrations of Scripture, showing the trials and tests of faith, should teach us something respecting the Lord's plan of dealing with those who approach him in prayer. During this Gospel age the Lord is seeking for those who can and will exercise faith. Some undoubtedly are so constituted mentally that they cannot do this – not that God created us without the ability so to do in him, but that the fall has distorted the original creation so that many today are unable to exercise faith in a proper and full degree. It is not for us to denounce such, but rather to learn from God's Word that he has a gracious plan, which is broad enough to include this class as well as all others in the mercy and forgiveness provided through the redemption at Calvary.

After the present age shall have selected out those who can exercise faith, who will exercise faith, and who will become faith-full, obedient to faith, then will be ushered in the great Millennial age, in which light, knowledge, will be granted to the remainder of mankind, to the intent that they may cultivate faith as well as all the elements of a proper character, and by restitution processes come to the attainment of all that was lost in Adam, or, failing to do so, be cut off in the Second Death. Let us hope that when the Millennial age shall be ushered in many in the world will be found ready to accept our Redeemer even without the special chastisements and judgments of that time to impress upon them the advantages of obedience to the Lord. As this Gentile woman could and did exercise faith in the Lord, so, doubtless, there are others in the world today who, if they knew our Savior as we know him, would be no less faithful than ourselves – some amongst the heathen, perhaps, would manifest much greater faith than some in Christendom today.

"BE PATIENT, BRETHREN"

As in dealing with this woman our Lord deferred the bestowment of the blessing he desired to give her, so doubtless he does with us at times. With us, too, he may see that it will be better if he should for a time ignore our petitions on some certain subject, that thus we may become more earnest, and perhaps increase our faith and our appreciation of the blessing we desire, just as this poor woman might not have appreciated so highly the Lord's favor if he had given it to her at once. With us also the Lord sometimes makes a test of humility before he responds to our requests. Are we of humble enough mind? Have we faith enough to come to the Lord at all? Can we trust him for his grace? Are we humble enough to accept his mercies on his conditions, on his terms, acknowledging ourselves nothing, that we have no merit to plead with him, that by grace we are saved and not according to any works that we could accomplish? If so

we may be sure that the Lord will appreciate [R3787 : page 171] our demonstrations of such a faith by our holding on to his loving hand, to his gracious promises – by our confessions that we are nothing except as he shall give us of his mercy.

As all the various experiences of the Gentile woman worked out for good to her, helping her in the development of a proper and acceptable faith and a spirit of humility, so, we may be sure, all of the delays to answers of our prayers that may come to us as the Lord's people are for our advantage if we will be exercised thereby – that we may grow in his grace, grow in his wisdom, grow in his love, grow in faith, grow in obedience, grow in humility.

The more we study this subject of faith, the more we are convinced that in God's sight faith is not only indispensable but "very precious." We cannot come to God without faith, we cannot abide in his love without faith, we cannot receive day by day his mercies and blessings and leadings except by faith in his promises. We cannot realize ourselves as his children, begotten of the holy Spirit, and heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, except as we exercise faith in his Word of promise to this effect. We cannot go on day by day following the Lord except as we are willing to walk by faith and not by sight, for this is the test which he puts upon all of his followers. We cannot see how the oppositions of the world, flesh and devil, which seem so baneful to us, are blessings in disguise except as we exercise faith in God's promises that it will be so. We cannot therefore be prepared for the heavenly Kingdom in its glories and blessings and privileges except as we now have and exercise the faith which will enable us to profit by various lessons given us in the school of Christ.

"WAIT PATIENTLY FOR HIM"

An illustration along this line comes to our mind. A sister living some distance from Allegheny, deeply interested in the Truth herself, informed us that she was earnestly praying for her husband that the Lord would graciously grant him the opening of the eyes of understanding. Having some acquaintance with the husband it was our opinion that his was rather a hopeless case. Not that he was a bad man, but that he seemed to be thoroughly worldly, his hours filled with business or hunting or lodge work, etc. And so we said to the sister, by way of preventing her from having too keen a disappointment in the matter: "Dear sister, remember that the Lord is making his own selection of those who will constitute his spiritual Bride of many members. It is not for us to dictate to the Lord in prayer or otherwise whom he shall select – it is for us to feel thankful and grateful that in his providence his Truth has reached our ears and brought us the blessing of an invitation to the nuptial feast. We advise that you do not set your heart upon your husband's acceptance of the Truth, and that you do not particularly pray along that line, but rather give thanks to the Lord that he is as noble a man as you know him to be, and, by your own life, your own conduct, your own example every way of what constitutes righteousness and discipleship to Christ, set him as good an example as possible, hoping that this may profit him as respects the present life and also the future life, even though he should never come to the point of making a full consecration of himself to the Lord and his service."

The sister's answer was, "I am trying to do all this, Brother Russell, but still I feel that the Lord will not be offended if I ask special blessings upon John – if I ask him to graciously grant him the opening of the eyes of his understanding. I am not so much requesting a miracle upon my husband to turn him against his will, but rather requesting **[R3788 : page 171]** that the Lord in

his providence will be favorable to him, and make the way before him as smooth as possible consistent with divine wisdom." We uttered a few deprecatory words, thinking to ourself how sadly the poor woman would be disappointed as the days and years would go by, yet appreciating her wifely devotion and also her faith in the Lord's goodness. Judge of our great surprise when, about a year later, that husband became interested in the Truth, and followed up that interest by a full consecration of his heart and life to the Lord and in his service. We got a lesson from this similar to the one we get from the lesson today. The lesson is that God greatly appreciates faith, trust in his goodness, and that barring some interference with his plan he does, so far as possible, answer such petitions offered in an importunity of faith. Let us each, then, endeavor, more and more, to cultivate this important fruit of the Spirit, and correspondingly we will abound in the love and joy and peace, service and blessings which come from him who says, "According to thy faith be it unto thee."
