

Sermon 1611

Matthew 15.21-28

September 3, 2017

How do you know what you think about God? I think that's a fair question.

It would be pointless to ask Americans if they thought God existed, because ever since religious surveys have been taken, 95% of Americans show they believe there is a god. They may disagree what that god or gods are, but they acknowledge a higher power. So what do you think of God?

It would be equally pointless to ask what people thought about God. I would venture every one of the respondents would say that God is powerful, loving and good. You see, we are not living in a post-Christian, post-modern world. God is very much alive in the hearts and minds of people. They just choose to overrule him a lot.

But how do you know God is loving? How do you know God is one God and not many gods? How do you know about your God, that he is good? That's the question Luther answered clearly and for all time.

We know about a loving and forgiving God from Scripture alone. "That's it?" the world asks in disbelief. "That's it." "Why, that's birdseed, crumbs compared to the pursuit of knowledge in other areas." "Then crumbs it will be. Because

Crumbs from Jesus Would Be Enough

1. Expect only good from him (21-25).
2. Take him at his word (26-28).

The Holy Land is a small place. At times Jesus left his homeland, but he could not leave behind his fame.

"Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly (21-22).'"

This woman knows who Jesus is. He is the Lord, a name everybody knows refers to God. She also knows something about his lineage. He is the "Son of David." That's the title of the Savior promised to the Jews for over 1000 years. She's done her homework, or, more likely, has been listening to the news. Jesus is big stuff.

But this is more than somebody trying to get a celebrity autograph. Look at what she puts up with.

"Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.' The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said (23-25)'"

She's been crying out after Jesus a long time, long enough for the disciples to feel uncomfortable with Jesus doing nothing to change the situation. She must have heard Jesus tell his disciples he was sent to help the Jews. The disciples' words

don't stop her. Jesus' seeming indifference doesn't stop her. She comes right before Jesus and pours out her heart in a simple plea. "Lord, help me."

She expected only good from Jesus. That's why she was clinging to him. That's why Jesus' silence couldn't drive her away. That's why the disciples' attempts to ditch her didn't drive her away. She expected only good from Jesus. She expected him to help her demon-possessed daughter.

This is certainly different from the way the sinful human nature looks at God. The sinful human nature expects the worst from God. Cain tells God he is unfair in his punishment of him and it is pretty obvious that Cain teaches his children that God is their enemy. King Ahab greets the Lord's prophet, Elijah, with "You have found me, my enemy." The psalmist asks, "Why do the nations rage and the kings of the earth take their stand against the Lord and against his Anointed one (Psalm 2.1-2)?" They stand against the Lord because they do not expect only good from him. They expect punishment and pain from him.

Well, we are much different, aren't we? My, is there a spiritual eye doctor in the house? We are truly short-sighted. In high school we thought it wasn't fair that other kids could go to beer parties, but our stick in the mud, go to church on Sunday parents wouldn't let us out of their sight if they didn't know where we were going. How God was crimping our style with the morality we had been chained to because we were Christians! And oh, how helping yourself was always more pleasant and delightful than helping others as Christ would have us do. We wanted what we wanted and it was usually God and his representatives who stood in our way. Fight the man often meant lose your religion, if only for an hour, or a day or a season.

This woman expected only good from God. That's the heart of a Christian. That's the heart Jesus showed. In our Prayer Circle for this next year, we will look at the prayers Jesus prayed. There aren't that many directly quoted in the Gospels, but there are enough. He always calls God "Father." You expect good things from a father. "If you, though you are evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give you his Holy Spirit (Luke 2.13)?" He always calls God "Father." Except once. While he is hanging on the cross, he does not call God his Father. But he still prays to him, because he expects only good things from God, even when he is suffering only bad things. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Mark 15.34)?" Even when he was paying for our sins of not looking to God for only good, he was looking to God for only good.

This is remarkable. This is not normal. Where did this woman get her information about God? Where can we find this out about our God? Crumbs from Jesus would be enough. Take him at his word.

"He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their pooches.' "Yes, Lord,' she said. 'Even the pooches eat the crumbs that fall from

their master's table.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed at that moment (26-28)."

She took Jesus at his word. He had used a word that our translators missed, like a lot of things in this section, but let's not get picky. "Yes, Lord, nobody would take food away from the children and give it to their little dogs. That's right. But their little dogs, the pooches, eat what falls from the table."

Boy, do they. You can tell right away who the messiest eater is. The family dog is their foot warmer at every meal. No need to sweep under the kitchen table. It is the cleanest spot in the whole house. Almost like it was spit polished! You see, Jesus used the word for a family dog, a little dog, a pooch. The woman seized on his word and held onto it for dear life. That is why Jesus should help her. She knew from his word that he was a good God who had the power and the concern for her to help her demon-possessed daughter. Her faith had won the day. Her faith in Scripture alone, what the world considers mere crumbs but for us it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Where did Luther get his knowledge about God? From the centuries of Roman theologians, from the mysticism of the western tradition of saints and visions? From the intellectual explorations of the Italian Renaissance as it made its way north and discovered a New World and a new world view? Nope. From the Bible. The same Bible you have in your hand and heart. Nothing flashy. Nothing fancy. "The Word they still shall let remain," Luther wrote in *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* because the devil, the unbelieving world and our sinful human nature cannot overcome it. "Get behind me Satan," Jesus said and Satan did. He could not stand before the word of our Lord. "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," Paul commands us (Ephesians 6.17) because this will overcome everything the powers of darkness put up against us. But we know that, don't we? It was the Word that shattered this heart of stone and put a new heart within us, a Christian heart. The pastor said, I baptize you, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." That was the word that gave us new life.

Nothing flashy. Nothing fancy. Just crumbs, really in the eyes of this world. But the Word has taught this simple truth to me, that all the world's riches and wealth, its silver and gold, its war ships and fighter planes, all the world's power and might are as nothing in God's sight. I do not need those when

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"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Great faith holds on to that for dear life. Always has, always will, for the Canaanite woman, for Luther and for us.