

The Mayflower, set sail in 1620 with 102 people aboard, three of which were pregnant. The first half of the journey, fairly easy. However, problems soon arose, storms, a broken mast, leaks, lack of food, sickness, and death. Not an easy journey.

Imagine hopping on that ship, kids in tow, not knowing what would happen, and if your destination would be reached. Leaving familiarity & comfort behind, knowing you would never return to your birthplace. They were a tough breed, a risk taking people; not weak minded, easily scared, or meek. Hardy people hoping on a dream. People who made things happen. Exceptional, even in their ordinary lives, earning their place in the 'New World' with courage. No one gave them America. They fought for it against the elements, sickness, each other; cleared fields, established government and law, planted crops, sweat, bled, and sacrificed for all they wanted.

This forged a strong individualistic world view; the rugged American individual. Americans are self made nation of self made people. In the movie "Far & Away" with Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, the settlers formed a line on foot, horseback, and conestoga. The gun went off and they raced out to stick their flag into a plot of land which each of them had eyed up prior to the race. This was 'staking your claim'; free land! A brutal race, but we cheered as Tom rode, ran, and crawled to his spot, jamming that flag into the dirt, it was an image of the American Spirit. He did it; worked for it, took it. Self made individual. It resonates & strikes at the heart of our individualistic world view. Win the land, win the woman, take it all, the individual overcoming all odds!

Since the Mayflower we've developed a great nation. We tackle insurmountable odds' in technology, finance, and medicine. Nothing holds us back. We've gone to the moon, to Mars, and seen the split second before time began with the Hubble Space Telescope. Our computers hold libraries of information. Doctors reattach severed limbs, repair hearts, prolong life, blast cancer out of a body with radiation, and control moods with drugs. We reach great heights in education; our salaries' rise to match. There's nothing we can't do.

If that's true, why is there so much relational devastation in our society? Why does the USA lead the pack in murder, suicide, and abortions rates among Industrialized Nations although we're the most 'religious'? We've spent decades in war. Some claim Evangelical Christians lead the world in divorce rates. 60% of children today will grow up living at some point in a single parent home. In 1970 single parent homes made up 11%, and now 32% or more. The divorce rate has tripled in America since 1970.

Philadelphia has become "Killadelphia". Children blow each other away at high schools. Movie theaters, no longer safe. Drugs, prostitution, and pornography are what other countries think when they hear "American". 64% of Americans, overweight or obese. The probability of a first marriage ending in separation or divorce within 10 years is 33 percent or higher. Violent offenders make up for 63% of the total growth of prison populations.

Many will go to Christmas this year and feel judged rather than loved by family. Why can't we forgive that person from years' past? Why are you so lonely and depressed? Why is my marriage falling apart? Why can't I control myself? Why am I so angry? Why can't I get along with people? Why do I need that thing to get me through the day? Will I always live with this secret? ...Am I making my point?

We boast in our accomplishments, but we come to the point of hopelessness; we have to say, all my gifts, abilities, money, and knowledge aren't enough. Wherever I go, there I am, my problems are not solved by a better job, a new beginning, a new church, or geographical change. They're internal, and I bring them with me into all situations. All I am is not enough to fix this relationship, to lose weight, to change, to save this marriage, to keep my children safe, to overcome this bitterness, to not have to live the lie any longer, or just be satisfied with life.

In relationships, our own self expectations, politics, alcohol, drugs, sexuality, the death or sickness of a loved one, with children, with family, and in marriage we come to the end of our ourselves.

In Matthew 15 there is someone else who came to the end of herself.

<sup>21</sup> Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> 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.” <sup>23</sup> 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.” <sup>24</sup> He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” <sup>25</sup> The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. <sup>26</sup> He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” <sup>27</sup> “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment. <sup>1</sup>

All that we are is not enough, but Jesus is.

A statement not only those who don’t ‘know Jesus’, but for those who’ve grown indifferent; intimacy is gone. Those who’ve grown bitter, angry, who’ve slipped away from closeness. Those just plain tired in difficult relationships. Like Francis Schaefer said, we need to know, ‘the present value of the blood of Christ’. How does Jesus grow larger as we grow older? What stands in the way? Let’s look at this woman’s example.

At first glance this is a story about a woman who wants Jesus to heal her daughter. Upon closer inspection, we find it’s a story of a woman who has come to the end of herself. She isn’t a Jew, and it’s not until much later that these new Christians would even be open to Gentile outsiders. This is pre-crucifixion, pre-pentecost. She’s on the outside looking in on a Jewish world. A Canaanite, considered less than worthy. On top of this, she has the unfortunate luck of being born a woman in a male dominated world! Three strikes against her already; she’ll just never amount to much in that world at that time.

She has a child to support; a daughter who suffers under something inexplicable, possibly in fits of rage, convulsions or sickness. Something mom can’t control. I felt that way in Indonesia, with little healthcare, when I

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (Mt 15:21–28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

held Maddie in my hands. She was maybe 2-3 years old, her body limp, unconscious, burning with a fever of 106. What could I do, I had no control, no recourse but to pray.

Kim felt that way recently when she took Aidan for a driving test but forgot to check the date on the insurance card and they were refused the test since it was old. Kim cried all afternoon, Aidan was fine with it. I finally told Aidan to yell at his mom to assuage her guilt, which he did while laughing. Then this week he took his test and passed, but all the while Kim waited in the building with her stomach churning since as a mother she feels it deeper than her child.

Imagine this woman at the end of her rope, exhausting her resources. Most likely she's been to the spiritual leaders & shaman. Probably spent a great deal of her limited resources with no results. She's found herself utterly helpless. She's only met defeat.

In her despair, she kneels at the most illogical place for a Canaanite woman, at the feet of a Jewish Rabbi. A ludicrous choice given who she is. She's seen something different in this Jewish man. Something she's not seen in others. Something unique, profound, and attractive has drawn her. She's at a breaking point. Humility marks her character; pride ebbs away. Pride which stands in contention with Jesus. She cries, *"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on ME!"*

What she requests for her daughter she requests for herself. Notice, she cries for mercy for HERSELF, not her daughter. She's experiencing pain at a deeper level than her daughter. She loves her daughter, it's beyond her ability to help. She's broken, and dying to her pride. All that she is as a mother is not enough! Have you experienced such brokenness? It's when we are broken and our pride is killed off, when we're open to Jesus. Then we can ask for and receive mercy.

The pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle in NYC says this about his daughter... (Summarize Jim Cymbala, *"Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire"* pp59-66 quoting most important thoughts.)

We focus on the pain in our relationships, the despair. We can't fix this relationship, that person we cannot heal or control. We watch our children, friends and family members making bad choices and there's nothing we can do. I can't speak to them, nothing I do makes a difference! There's nothing good here, we might as well divorce, might as well give up. We focus our gaze on the despair, and live in the darkness. Our pride dictates we're still in control - we can still make it happen, we're Americans! If we just do this or that, one more conversation, one more confrontation, one more trick...but they're all met with the same result, defeat.

Yet, she's found victory in defeat! She's found that to find yourself; you lose yourself in Christ. To allow life to kill off your pride. We want to argue Jesus on our merit, whereas she argues him on his mercy. We want to say, "Look at what a great guy I am, look what I do for you, you should do this for me, I'm worth it!" We cry and demand. She cries and pleads. She can say, *"Though He slays me, I will trust in Him."* Can we say that? Maybe he's led you to the brink of despair to clear all else from your vision, except Himself. We need to divert our eyes from pride and despair, and fixate them once again on the real Jesus who alone can save. We need to allow the heaviness of our situation wash over us, teach us, and bend our knee to Jesus.

But is this the same Jesus we all know and love? Why was Jesus so uncaring? My Jesus is a Thomas Kinkadee, painter of light, Jesus. A big "Barney" in the sky, Jesus. My Jesus would turn, with tears in his eyes, and blot out her suffering. He does nothing of the sort; he turns a deaf ear. Jesus, the same one she's heard so much of, turned an unconcerned cheek. All the stories of mercy & healing must have seemed cruel lies. Would anyone blame her if she said, *"Is this the great compassionate Jesus? He is the same as any other Jewish man, cruel, insensitive, and distant!"* She doesn't; she still sees something unique. Something we don't see when we still hold on to that last iota of pride - it clouds our vision and we don't allow him to do heart surgery; to say the hard thing, which triggers the flight instinct in us.

The disciples are fed up, the pleading must have gone on for a long time. They're like the vetting point to get to Jesus, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." She's pleading before these guys, Jesus in the

background. Like the mafia frontline when asking to see the Godfather. A destitute woman, begging Jesus for mercy, in front of a crowd of impatient Jewish men, and he seems not to care. Come on! Where's Thomas Kinkade in the first century? Paint me a better Jesus, not this unfeeling cad! She persists, and he answers with a sharp word, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.*" He argues against helping her. This surely isn't my Jesus!

She persists. Imagine her approaching, falling face down, kneeling before a Jewish man (in front of other Jewish men) with tears, pleading, "Lord, help me!"

He looks down, "*It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.*" This was the ultimate insult to the Canaanite, Jews considered them dogs. He couldn't have called her worse. You can almost hear the snickers, "Oh snap! He called her a dog!"

She should give up; accept the circumstances and resolve herself to suffering. Shouldn't you give up when you're in despair, shouldn't you just grow a tough-skin and get over it when God doesn't seem to respond? Let pride take charge, become hard, blame others, blame God - He doesn't do anything anyway! Turn away. It's as if he's saying, "*My special favors are reserved for my people, go away.*"

But she doesn't respond as we would. She doesn't spout anger in a prideful fit of rage. She persists, acknowledging her position before him, "*Yes Lord. I am a dog, I'm not worthy. But even dogs eat the crumbs from their master's table. All that I am is not enough, but you are!*" She's come face to face with her need for Jesus; she has a broken, contrite spirit. She's let go of life to find it in Him.

Maybe she came to him thinking, "I can do this one last thing, I can beg this guy". Maybe she revealed her last ounce of pride; "I can do it, I can convince Him". Maybe Jesus planned these seemingly harsh statements as the only way to purge her of that last ounce of pride. Jesus won't work with pride. He'll drive you to crucify that old self. He'll say no until we prostrate ourselves without one iota of pride in the way. Have you let go?

Can you say, all you are is not enough? The prideful heart can't bear the thought, only a broken heart can.

There's much which is commendable about her, but it's faith Jesus praises. Her conviction that Jesus is all she has. It's faith in Christ that can make the worst circumstances opportunities for growth. Faith can reconcile the worst of enemies. Faith can heal a broken heart, or a demon possessed girl. Faith can make you, and your relationships, whole again. Faith will provide for your needs felt and unfelt. But faith in Jesus alone. He seems uncaring at first as He waits for you to abandon all hope in anything but Him. To give up hope in your pride. Sometimes he seems cruel and silent allowing circumstances to draw us deeper into understanding of that prideful self which stands in the way. He allows us to be broken in order to find him.

It's at that moment, just before you give up that last shred of self, that many walk away, "This is too hard. Screw it, He doesn't do anything anyway. God never answers." But Jesus will not grasp the right hand if our left still holds our idol.

Are we still arguing the same old things? Using the same old tricks which never work, and only make us more bitter and destitute? Have we tried to do things 'right' to gain merit to manipulate his blessing? Only to feel farther from Jesus and others. Have we prayed over and over, but he's silent? Have we asked him to reveal what holds us back? Have we ever said I will surrender everything to you? Maybe we don't get it. Maybe there's something to learn? Maybe he wants us to come to the end of ourselves? Christ will take nothing less than all of you, he's uncompromising, but his mercy is limitless when our pride is sacrificed.

This is a story about a woman who's lost herself, only to find life in Jesus. She can say, "*All I am is not enough!*" It's no longer her need to see her daughter healed which is important. It's the fact that she's come to the point of humility; the prideful self crucified. And that's where faith and intimacy begin to find what we truly need; Jesus, not just once, but everyday. Her daughter's only the object which brought her to that point. As cruel as it seemed, He led her to repentance of self. He's cruel to be

kind. And she becomes the model for these disciples, no longer the laughing stock, but the one praised for faith.

Are you willing to see yourself for who you really are? Are you willing to say that all you are is not enough? What's the insurmountable thing? There's victory in defeat. Jesus take's us past the impossible. He commended her, and granted her request. He says, "*Behold, I am making all things new!*" He's waiting to do that, but He won't work with the unrepentant heart. He won't work within the demands of our pride. Let's allow him to unclench our fists, drop our idols, and kneel at his feet. Let's be revolutionarily transformed by the cross.

**A few practical thoughts:**

- Utilize our prayer ministry (Unbound Prayer too)
- Get into the Word for once, let God speak
- Make room in your schedule to commune with God. Listening prayer.
- Confess to one another and ask for help