

## **“LORD, HELP ME”**

**Matthew 15:21-28**

“Help”, like other four letter words is short and to the point. It doesn’t beat around the bush. If you’re drowning, you don’t yell to the lifeguard, “If you don’t mind, Sir, when you have time, Sir, I would certainly appreciate it if.....” No, you’d be going down for the third time by then, so you just holler “Help” and if you’re ever gonna get it, you get it; but no pretty speeches, just yell, “Help”.

One of the medieval saints, a 14th century anonymous one, reduced all prayer to the two words: “Help me, Lord, help me”! If you can’t think of what to say, just pray “God, help me!” And God will find it hard to resist an honest, humble, prayer like this. I have never known even an earthly father, a good one, that is, who did not put down his paper, and become all attention, ready and willing to help, when his child says to him, straight and serious, “Dad, help me, I need your help!” Trouble is, most of us balk at admitting we need help. We’re so afraid of admitting weakness, being dependent. Come on, now--there is no such thing in this world as an independent person. Every time you turn on a light, take a drink of water, buy a loaf of bread, crank up a car, etc., you’re dependent upon hundreds and thousands of other people who make it all possible, whose help you need to make it through each and every single day. There’s no way you can go it alone--so, there’s no weakness whatever in admitting we need each other. It’s silly self deception to pretend we don’t. It’s not just the poor and minorities who need help. We all do--this is an interdependent world. We all need each other, every hour of every day, and even when we die, we need someone else to put us away! So don’t ever be ashamed to say, “Help me”.

Some of you will remember my twice and thrice told tale of my college chemistry professor. I had too much pride to go to and say--“Help me”--You see chemistry was not my cup of tea (arsenic or cyanide, maybe). When I finally did work up the courage to go see the old boy, I couldn’t admit that it was me; so I had made up a long speech of self justification and passing the buck to the lab instructor. (Silence--desperation) “Look, “ I said, “Help me--I need your help. I just don’t know what I’m doing!” “That’s obvious”, he said. “Yes, sir,” I said. But he chuckled and raised his head. And no chuckle ever sounded better to me! “Sit down”, he said, “I’ll help you.” and I did (sit down--that is) and he did (help me--that is) and I passed (by the skin of my teeth) but I passed--a minor miracle. (Next semester, I switched to geology.) You see, the key to the kingdom that day--was admitting--all in one blurt: “I need help.” And fortunately I had me a good professor. You see, most of the

battles in life are half won when you admit you need help--resources beyond your own--that you can't go it alone. How much agony and tension would be averted in family life, if we could cut the pretense, the conceit, and just come right out and admit, "I need you. Help me." A good husband or wife won't fail you then.

It's much the same way in our need of the good Lord. If we only want favors of our Father, God--or try to maneuver Him into line with our will--instead of hearing His word and getting into line with His will--if we want from the great Teacher--not correction, but corroboration--not enlightenment, but endorsement of our stupidities--if we want Providence to pander to our pride and our pet peeves--or to see us as bright angels, instead of pathetic ignoramuses--then for all our "much talking"--do you know what we'll get? Heaven's "silent treatment".....God will pay us scant attention. He won't even look up. Whereupon we may get our feelings hurt with Heaven--decide that as far as we are concerned--it can stay frozen over--and that if God exists at all--He obviously exists for other people--not us--so we'll just quit religion--the church--and all that--and pout our little pout--stick out our lower lip at Providence, for He didn't play our game. Sometimes, when we think heaven is silent to our pain--maybe it's because we're too proud to admit we need Heaven's help. Maybe to be honest with God for a change--and in a short, simple plea say: "God, help me! I'm guilty, Lord. I'm afraid." Maybe, as the old medieval mystic said, that's when Heaven lifts its head, chuckles even, that we've finally come to our senses, chides us a bit, then says, "Now that you've learned the first lesson about faith, namely, humility, that you're nothing but a pup, I'll help you.

This was the situation with the Syro-Phoenician woman in Matthew. One day near the end of His ministry--needing to get away, Jesus left Jewish territory altogether--went up to Phoenicia--to think--to get himself and his disciples together--get prepared for the coming cross. It was inevitable now--and they weren't ready--but He had hardly arrived and had not had time to put two thoughts together, when there she was! Who? Jesus didn't know. Some Canaanite--with a long tale of woe--something about her daughter being de-ranged--and on and on--with a set speech--rather demanding she was and a bit unctuous too--calling him "Sir, Son of David"--and playing to his sympathy, "Have pity on me.". But a set little speech of flattery and appeal to pity got her exactly nowhere with the Lord. At any rate Matthew recorded: "He answered her not a word". This silence on the part of Jesus has bothered expositors for centuries. Why wouldn't he look up? Why did he keep his head down? Could it be an error in the text? No, it's just that Heaven doesn't open to set speeches. God doesn't like sermons--especially sniveling ones.....No amount of

self-justification, flattery or self-pity will budge God. Your hysterics may force your family to pay you some attention--but it won't help a bit with God. (I remember thinking--when I was standing before that unheeding chemistry professor--"maybe he'd look up if I flung a fit here on the floor. I'm glad I didn't try it. I think he would just have stepped gingerly over me as over sulfuric acid spilt on the floor, and gone about his business.) Well hysterics didn't do the Canaanite woman a bit of good either. She tried it. "Send her away", said the disciples, "for she is shrieking behind us". But her hysterics didn't bother our Lord. He just didn't pay her any attention. He ignored the fuss. What else could He do? He was rather glad she wasn't a Jew: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel," He said to the disciples. He still said nothing to the woman. She was getting desperate now. Suppressing, I'm sure, a desire to turn and run--to get away from this famous Rabbi, this teacher, who was ignoring her, but refusing now to flounce away--and giving up all attempt at flattery and tears and fit flinging--and thinking solely of her child's need--"she came back one more time", said Matthew, "and knelt in entreaty before Him, and with all honesty and humility said simply, Lord, help me!" That was straight and to the point, a cry to the Christ out of deep need. It was short prayer, honest and humble, and it pierced Heaven. It was her first step toward real faith. And for the first time--our Lord met her eyes with his--smiled at her. And she knew help was on the way. A dialogue could begin now. He chided her good-naturedly for being a Canaanite--and a mere pup in the household of faith. But she could take that chiding now--she was no longer defending her pride--or she was no longer feeling sorry for herself--feeling pitiful--her courage was coming back--her wit--she met him on his own grounds--crossed swords with heaven--in effect she said, "Teacher, Lord, I'm a pup, OK, I admit it, just a Canaanite beginner under the God of Israel--but surely there's some grace--at least 'left-over grace' for the likes of me". Then Jesus, with great joy--seeing in the face of the woman that even if Israel rejected Him--there was a whole Gentile world waiting for Him, needing him--that could be wakened to real faith--said to her, "woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

#### LET US PRAY

Lord--it's time we admitted we need resources beyond our own. We need each other and we need you. It's true, Lord, we're all mere pups--mere beginners--in the household of faith. But in humility and honesty we're willing to try--so, "Help us, Lord--God, help us--we need you so". Amen