

More Than a Miracle: Breaking Through the Silence  
Matthew 15:21-28

Miracles are God's intervention in our daily lives. It is when God intercedes and reverses course on a dire situation. They are reminders that God listens. They are reminders that God is still in control. They are reminders that God is actively involved and concerned with the lives of his people. C.S. Lewis reminds us one last time: "Miracles are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see." Miracles are moments of rescue, respite, and rest that point us to bigger truths about God. We've explored some of these truths in the last couple of weeks. God provides in abundance for you, even in the most desolate of places. God stands on top of your chaos, protecting us from the storm even as it rages on. Miracles show us this in tiny ways. I hope you've been comforted by that these last few weeks. I pray you've been drawn closer to God and his work in your life through this even if you haven't seen anything explicitly miraculous.

Today, the miracle we see is explicit yet delayed. I want to focus on the entire exchange as the banner message, not just the miraculous ending. In our gospel reading, Jesus is trying to withdraw again. As he is attempting this a Canaanite woman approaches him. Her daughter is sick, not just any kind of sick. She is possessed by a demon. Darkness has overtaken her and this poor mother doesn't know what to do. Through tears she begs Jesus, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." There has to be a reason that Matthew says what he says next. In response to this woman's pleading Jesus did not answer her a word. He was silent. He did not say a thing. Can you imagine? I thought this man was compassionate. I thought he was a loving savior. I thought he was a powerful redeemer. I thought he was the almighty Son of the Living God, king of all creation. Why is his initial response silence? Why does he respond to any of us with silence?

You've known the silence before. You know exactly what I'm talking about. Just like that Canaanite woman, you've approached Jesus honestly, earnestly seeking his redemption, his deliverance, any kind of a miracle to stop what is happening in your life. You prayed to exhaustion at the side of that hospital bed, surrounded by tubes and beeping machines. You prayed and prayed for deliverance, for rescue, for saving and healing. You prayed for the doctors and nurses, everyone who was working so hard on your ailing loved one, laying, dying on that bed. And in response? Silence. Machines shut off. The breathing stops. Silence. Maybe you know someone excitedly going to get their first ultrasound. They've prayed for this day. They are there to get the first picture, the first sign of life from the life growing inside. They want to hear a heart beating. They want to see a body moving. Yet as the ultrasound technician glides the transducer across the expectant mother...silence. Nothing to be heard or seen. No word from God either on the devastating aftermath to such a discovery.

Maybe you've seen it in a marriage. The fighting has increased and so has the distance. You pray and you pray. God, can you heal our hearts? Can you humble our speech? Can you heal our marriage? Can you restore what has been broken? As the door closes behind a former spouse for a final time, you collapse on the floor in a now empty home. Silence. Maybe you've seen it in a sin or addiction that has plagued you for far too long. You've prayed consistently, persistently. God, can you please remove this thorn from me? I don't want to be controlled by this anymore. I don't want to be a slave to these addictions any longer and yet there you find yourself again. Doing that thing you promised yourself you wouldn't do anymore. Then in the aftermath, all that is left is silence as you slink down in shame and defeat. The silence is deafening. The silence is heart breaking. The silence can destroy you. This woman. This Canaanite woman approaches Jesus with the only thing in her life that matters. The only thing on her mind. The only thing that has occupied her time, her energy, her mental strength, everything. Jesus looks at her and doesn't say a thing. In response to her tears there is silence.

What is the miracle here? What is the banner message hanging over this woman, this situation? You know the rest of the story. The woman's daughter is healed after she persistently pursues Jesus. The demons are cast out. Her faith made her well. That's the miracle yet many of us, as we look at this scene, know that we are still stuck in the silence. There has been no

miracle for us, no response, just the silent stare of Jesus. Many of us are still stuck in place, frozen by a non answer from God. And you know, in those moments when there is nothing but silence, when the silence blares loudly in our ears, we're left to fill in that void by ourselves. We're left to make sense of it. We try to be the answer to our problems ourselves instead and we fall flat. Our minds race with reasons why it didn't happen. Why God kept his mouth closed. Why did God turn his face from me? Why is there silence? In the moments where we are left to fill in the void that is where depression and despair settle in. That's when the darkness, the cold dark like a dense fog settles in around us. We had hoped for a miracle and there was only silence. There is still only silence.

The sound of silence is disturbing, disquieting. What are we supposed to do with that? How are we supposed to keep living that way? This is, by far, the hardest part about being a follower of Jesus. By far the hardest part is trusting that the silence is but for a moment. The hardest part as you sit with that Canaanite woman is that Jesus stares blankly back at her without a word spoken from his lips. That is the hardest part of being a follower of Jesus. Because we look at him with desperate eyes, quivering voices, tears flowing down our faces and in response we get nothing. Jesus leaves us hanging there, waiting with baited breath for any kind of sign that things will get better. Is that what we are left with? Is that the banner message that hangs over this moment? Jesus looks at you in your darkness and depression, in the most desperate places you find yourself and he says nothing? If that's the life of a Christian than I'm out. If that's the only hope for a believer than I'm done. I can't bear it. I can't bear moving forward in this faith and I certainly can't continue on in this life. Sadly, that's where many find themselves. Sadly, you and I have been there too.

Jesus does eventually break his silence and heal this mother's child. He casts as much darkness out of this desperate woman as he does her little girl. Jesus breaks through the silence and chases away the shadows. Jesus breaks through the silence and casts out the inner demons that torment us. Jesus breaks through the silence and addresses our deepest longings. Jesus breaks through the silence and snuffs out the devil's schemes, lifting the fog of uncertainty off of us. God's silence is hard to take. It must have been excruciating for the woman in our text. But only out of that silence does true faith arise. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen". The woman hoped for healing for her daughter. But even before that, she hoped for a response from Jesus. You and I have hoped for things, too. I've been with many of you as you've struggled through the silence. Many of you still suffer in the silence alone. There is silence I too still sit through as I stand before you today. Just as he did with this Canaanite woman, he breaks the silence with us too. He breaks the silence and responds with a gift, a promise, a hope that far surpasses anything we could have dreamed or imagined.

The promise in this sermon is not that Jesus will respond here and now by doing our will. He does on occasion, and at such times we sing a song of praise and thanksgiving. But in many cases, and in an ultimate sense, we are stuck with the silence. Our shared experience with the woman in the text comes to an end... for now, at least. We have been stopped short, still hanging in the silence, waiting on the Lord to do what he's promised. You see, our story is not yet finished. Verse 28b has not yet taken place for us. But it will. At the return of Jesus, when God's silence is broken by the trumpets and His absence is replaced with His glorious presence, we will know the fullness of His mercy. We will know what joy waits on the other side of that silence. We will know the full glory that is waiting for us on the other side of this pregnant pause. Like He did for the unnamed woman and her daughter, God will bring full and eternal healing. In the meantime, we live in persistent faith and consistent prayer, appealing to and trusting in the mercy of God in Christ. Such is how it goes for those who live by faith alone.

That is the banner message above this miracle. It isn't just that he heals this girl tormented by demons. It's that the pause we sit in now is also but a moment. More is coming. We don't have to figure out how to fix it. We don't have to sit and wonder what God is doing. We don't have to slump into a deep depression, filled with the anxiety of a godless existence. We don't have to succumb to the lies of satan or the proddings of his minions. The silence doesn't mean God has forgotten. The silence doesn't even mean God said no. Learn to rest in

the silence knowing that Jesus is gathering himself to accomplish something greater. He is gathering his heavenly forces to come on the Last Day to stomp out death and the devil forever. He is gathering all those who died in the faith, that left us in devastating silence, raising them to new life for all eternity. Jesus is breaking through the silence. Maybe not today. Maybe not when you demanded him to. But maybe at the moment that is deemed right by the Lord of all creation.

I pray these miracles have shown you more than just the scraps of paper they are written on. I hope and pray that the banner messages, written in letters too large for us to see in our moments of weakness, have helped you or loved ones deal with the mental and physical anguish you are suffering through now. When things feel scarce, God still provides for you. When things feel overwhelming and chaotic, God is still in control. When you are stuck sitting in the silence, God is not done speaking. Even death isn't enough to interrupt what God has planned next. Don't give up or give in to the dark voices telling you you're finished or God is finished with you. These miracles are more than just a moment. They give us hope beyond what brings anxiety and fear today. They give us hope beyond the pains and struggles we deal with right now. May you be encouraged to look beyond these miraculous moments, even beyond your mundane or miserable moments, and see a bigger rescue coming. Jesus is Lord over all creation. That includes your life, your sins, your struggles, your disappointments. This is our God, though we wait on him to deliver in his time, he does in abundance, overwhelmingly, and powerfully. Amen.