

The Folly Of Not Believing That You Are In Grace Unless You Feel It.

Text: Matt 15:21-28

Suggested Hymns:
74, 331, 851, 286, 363

- 1) You Can Be In Grace, Although You Do Not Feel It
- 2) True Faith Relies On The Word Alone,
Which Promises God's Grace

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 15:21–28, ***21 Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.” 23 But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.”***

24 But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”

26 But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” 27 And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Syrophoenician woman¹ in our Gospel, although coming from the Gentiles, was a true believer in Jesus Christ. ***“O woman, great is your faith!”*** says Jesus. She was in God’s grace, her sins were forgiven, she was a child of God, and God loved her.

But did she feel these things? Did she joyously experience in her own heart that she was in such a blessed state? No; while Jesus dealt with her as He did

when He rebuked her and refused her request, she surely felt no joy. And yet she was a true Christian, in God's grace, even while her soul was filled with darkness.

One of the greatest mistakes is to think that you must feel joyful and happy all the time to be a true Christian, that you must be fully aware that your sins are really forgiven and that you are in God's grace, and, if you do not feel that way, you have no claim on the full forgiveness of your sins and on the grace and mercy of the Almighty.

That is the great error under which many churches are constantly labouring. In their revival meetings they endeavour to stir up the feelings of the people and to get them into a state of high excitement. They urge the sinners to come forward and be converted to Christ.

When any one comes forward signifying his intention to become converted, they plead with him, and gather around him, and pray for him, and the question put to him is not, *Do you believe?* but, *How do you feel?* *Do you feel that you are converted, that you are in the grace of God?* And he is not declared converted unless he says, "*I feel.*"

These conversions based on a momentary feeling of joy brought forth under the strain of religious excitement frequently prove to be mere delusions. For what guarantee of God's grace can your own heart give? Is not man's heart a deceitful and desperately wicked thing? God says in the book of Proverbs, ***He who trusts in his own heart is a fool.***²

It is foolish, therefore, to trust in your own heart, in your feelings and inward experience for the certainty of your conversion. And it is equally as foolish to think that you are not converted unless you feel joyful and happy.

With the help of God's Holy Spirit let us consider, *The Folly Of Not Believing That You Are In Grace Unless You Feel It.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. You Can Be In Grace, Although You Do Not Feel It.

You can be in God's grace and favour, even though you do not feel it. This truth is clearly set forth in our Gospel. Let us inquire into the state of the

woman's mind, who as shown before, was in God's grace, and see whether she really felt as if the grace of God was with her.

We are told, in the first place, that she was in great trouble. When Jesus came near Tyre and Sidon, *a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."*

How must this woman have felt when she, a firm believer in Jesus, was thus afflicted and her daughter was bodily possessed with a demon! But to add to her misery, what was Jesus' reply? We are told, *"But He answered her not a word."*

Did this look to her as if she was in God's grace? How must she have felt when upon her humble prayer to the Lord, she was simply ignored by Jesus who so kindly heard the prayers of other people who asked Him for help in their distress, and cheerfully granted their requests?

Picture in your mind the distressed woman following after Christ, crying after Him, asking and pleading with Him; and Christ leisurely walking on, paying no attention to her, not noticing her. How miserable she must feel!

We are told furthermore, *And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."*

How great must have been her disappointment when Jesus replied, *"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* Must she not have felt as though there was no hope for her, as though she must not dare to approach Christ, because she was not an Israelite?

Meanwhile, Mark informs us that Jesus entered a house.³ He was gone, and there the poor woman stood in the street, abandoned and forsaken. How dreary must have been her thoughts! How depressed must have been the state of her mind!

Still, she does not give up in despair. She makes another attempt. She enters the house, and *"came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"*

Stern and austere is the Lord's reply, *"It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."* She is made to believe that she is no better than a dog, being of heathen descent. All the hope she had of obtaining

deliverance is cut short. O how great must have been her wretchedness, her grief and sorrow!

Why did Jesus deal in this way with the poor woman? Was He angry? Not in the least. His grace was with her all the while He refused her prayer. But to prove her faith, the Lord, for a time, hid from her His goodness.

Note, my dear Christians, you can be in God's grace, even though, like the woman in our Gospel, you do not feel it. To this day God will sometimes deal with His dear children as He did with this woman, and deprive them of all those joyful feelings which at other times make them so happy.

To this day God will sometimes hide His lovely face, as it were, and let trials, and afflictions, and temptations come upon those whom He loves.

To this day God will sometimes deal with us as though He is deaf to our prayers and does not care to answer, and the more we call upon Him, the less we hear of Him, and the less we experience His grace and mercy, the deeper our soul is plunged into the abyss of grief and sorrow.

This truth is taught not only by the example of the woman of Canaan; it is attested and verified by numerous examples in the Holy Scriptures.

There is Job. Was he not a child of God, and in God's grace? And when tried in the furnace of affliction, how did he feel? He says, ***"I cry out to You, but You do not answer me; I stand up, and You regard me not. ²¹ But You have become cruel to me; With the strength of Your hand You oppose me."***⁴

There is the pious King Hezekiah, who was smitten with illness. He wept greatly, and after his recovery he wrote a psalm describing his feelings while he was suffering, wherein he says, ***"Like a crane or a swallow, so I chattered; I mourned like a dove; My eyes fail from looking upward. O LORD, I am oppressed; Help me!"***⁵

There is David. Even when Nathan the prophet had absolved him from his sin, he still felt the pangs of God's anger and wrath and said in the Psalm 38, ***"I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long."***⁶

There is the sinful woman, Mary Magdalene. Even though Christ had given the assurance and said, ***"her sins, which are many, are forgiven,"***⁷ still she wept

bitterly and did not feel the healing balm of grace, until Christ turned to her and said, *“Your sins are forgiven ... Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”*

You see, my dear Christians, you can be in God’s grace, even though you do not feel it. You can be in such a condition as to experience nothing but death and condemnation and, at the same time, be a child of God.

You can be weeping and lamenting over your sins, while the angels in heaven are praising the Lord for your repentance. You can have peace with God and, at the same time, your own heart may be filled with fear and uneasiness.

When you are in such a depressed and despondent state, do not let false prophets deceive and tell you that you are not a Christian, because you do not feel any joy and do not experience God’s grace.

Know that God is testing and proving your faith when He withholds those joyful feelings, that Jesus merely hides His grace, which is yours nevertheless and shall not be taken away from you. Hold on to His grace, as the woman of Canaan did, and say,⁸ as we sang before,

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.
*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

2. True Faith Relies On The Word Alone, Which Promises God’s Grace.

It is folly not to believe that you are in God’s grace unless you feel it, also for this reason, because true faith relies on the Word alone, which promises God’s grace.

Jesus praises the woman, because, in spite of His rebukes and the feeling of her own unworthiness and all contrary experiences, her faith in His grace and mercy remained unshaken.

Although Christ seemed to be opposing her, this woman obviously said within herself, *It is impossible that Christ, the Son of David, should put me off*

and not grant my request; He cannot be angry; He must be merciful; I must persevere; He surely is my Saviour, His harsh words notwithstanding.

When therefore Christ said to her, ***“It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs,”*** she clings to these words and responds, ***“Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”***

How skilfully she turns to her favour what seems to be against her! And does the Lord censure her for such obtrusiveness? No; He is highly pleased and says ***“O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”*** ***And her daughter was healed from that very hour.***

Look, my friends, here is an example showing in what true faith consists. Faith does not consist in relying on the feelings of your own heart and believing that you are converted, justified, and saved, because your own heart tells you so, or because there is a voice within you saying, *‘Now I have grace, now I am born again, now I have passed through and made my calling and election sure, now my sins are forgiven, now I am a child of God and an heir of the kingdom of heaven.’*

Modern revival conversions are largely brought about in that way, and people thus converted claim that they can fix the very minute of their conversion. They mistake for conversion what is merely an outburst of feeling.

No; true faith has a better and firmer foundation than the fluctuating feelings of our sinful heart. True faith consists in relying on the Word of God alone, which promises the grace of God. That is what the woman did in our Gospel. She held on to Christ’s words, in spite of all conflicting experiences.

If any one perceives that he is a lost and condemned sinner, for whom there is no help, and flees to Jesus, seeking refuge in His wounds, if in spite of his sins he applies to himself the righteousness of Jesus, who died on the cross for us all, and trusts in the gracious promises of the Gospel, which says, ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,”*** then he can rest assured that he is in God’s grace.

The person who does not want to believe the gracious promises of the Gospel made to all sinners, unless he can feel the wonderful effects of that Gospel on his

own heart and soul, such person does the very same thing which Thomas did when he said, *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”*¹⁰

The Lord had compassion on this doubting disciple, but He also censured him, saying, *“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*¹¹

Blessed, therefore, are those people who rely on the Word of God alone for their salvation and everything that pertains thereto!

But pity on those people who are determined not to believe unless they meet with some special experience within themselves! Their faith is not based on the right foundation. If they believe, they do not believe for the sake of the divine Word, but for the sake of their own feelings. Their own feelings will finally be their Gospel, their Christ, their Saviour, and the foundation of their salvation. And that is a foundation which will crumble into dust and finally plunge them into the vortex of despair.

Remember, my hearers, you are saved not by what you feel, but by what you believe. It is not written, He who is joyful will be saved, but, *“He who believes ... will be saved.”*¹² It is not feeling, but believing. We walk by faith, not by sight.

When I feel my soul as cold as an iceberg, as hard as a rock, as sinful as Satan, even then faith does not cease to justify. Faith prevails as truly in the midst of sad feelings as of happy feelings. For just then, standing alone, it shows the greatness of its power.

May the Lord grant to us all such unflinching faith in the words of His promises and enable each one of us to say, *I cling to what my Saviour taught, And trust it, whether felt or not.*¹³ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Mark 7:26, A Syrian of Phoenicia

² Proverbs 28:26

³ Mark 7:24

⁴ Job 30:20-21

⁵ Isaiah 38:14

⁶ Psalm 38:6

⁷ Luke 7:47

⁸ Hymn 331

⁹ John 3:16

¹⁰ John 20:25

¹¹ John 20:29

¹² Mark 16:16

¹³ Hymn 339 v 8 ALHB, By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless