

GREAT FAITH
Matthew 15:21-28

Intro: There were two people during the ministry of our Lord who were commended for their great faith, and amazingly, both were Gentiles. Luke also told about this man in Luke 7:1-9.

The first was the centurion which we read about in Matthew 8, verses 5-13. He came to the Lord on behalf of his servant. The second was the Canaanite woman in our text for tonight. She came on behalf of her daughter. This account is given also in Mark 7:24-30.

The part about the healing of the Canaanite's daughter that I want to focus your attention on tonight is the statement by our Lord that her faith was "great". Coming from the Lord, as it did, this ought to interest everyone of us who knows the Savior. We should want to know what made her faith so great, just as we ought to be concerned about what made the centurion's faith great. We all ought to desire that our faith would be great, not as a matter of pride, but because we can see that it was so pleasing to the Lord. A great faith is a strong faith. As Peter approached his special time of temptation, the Lord said that He was praying for him that his faith would not fail. See Luke 22:32. He obviously wanted Peter's faith to be strong. And the Lord told him that after he was converted, turned around, he should strengthen his brethren. When the Lord spoke to His disciples about forgiveness, telling them that they should be prepared to forgive people seven times a day if they sinned against them that much, their request they gave to Him was, "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). We read about Abraham in Rom. 4:20 that he was "strong in faith." And we read about the great faith of many of the Lord's people in Heb. 11.

We all have been grieved at times because we have not trusted the Lord more than we do. What is it that makes for a strong faith? Let us see what we can learn from this Canaanite woman, whom Mark spoke of as a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation.

Now let me read the passage. Please turn to Matt. 15:21-28. (Read.)

When we speak about faith, let us remember that faith comes from God, not from ourselves. And so we are looking tonight at the characteristics of great faith, and not how they came to possess that faith. That is always the result of the way God works with us, the way He causes us to respond to His Word, and the result of trials we go through.

First, let me point out that:

I. THE LORD IS THE ONE WHO SAID THAT HER FAITH WAS GREAT.

See verse 28. It was also the Lord who said that the centurion's faith was great. This is an important point. It means that their faith was genuine. It would mean also, I believe, that her faith went beyond just the crisis that she was facing at that time. We must believe that the Lord was indicating for both the centurion and this Canaanite woman that they were true believers. The woman in the story we are considering tonight called the Lord, the Messiah. She addressed Him as the "son of David." How long either one of them had known the Lord, we don't know, but it seems clear that they knew the Lord. Both of these Gentiles had complete confidence that the Lord could do what needed to be done. And the Lord told the centurion that He had not seen the same greatness of faith in any Jew.

That which the Lord had used in their lives to strengthen their faith was a great need. And in both cases the needs were hopeless. And so they came to the Lord, not just to try Him out (as many say today), but with the firm conviction that He could meet the need, and that He was the only One Who could do it.

The faith of these two Gentiles was especially strong, too, because, while others were bringing their sick to the Lord, neither the centurion nor the Canaanite woman brought their sick to the Lord. Nor did they come asking the Lord to come home with them. In fact, the centurion told the Lord that he did not feel worthy to have the Lord come to his house; he just wanted the Lord to speak the word, and he knew that his servant would be healed.

The Canaanite evidently felt the same way. And so both of them believed that the Lord did not have to be present to heal the sick. What an encouragement this ought to be for us to pray! A great faith knows that the Lord is not limited by any distance. Nor is He limited by what the needy person knows or does not know. If the need of the person we are concerned about is for salvation, the Lord has countless numbers of ways to get the Gospel to those in need. But we can learn from these two Gentiles that distance is no problem as far as the power of the Lord Jesus Christ is concerned.

But let us forget about the centurion now and focus upon this Canaanite woman.

III. THE GREATNESS OF HER FAITH IS DEMONSTRATED BY THE OBSTACLES SHE HAD TO OVERCOME.

Let us look at some that are very obvious in the story.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle was:

- A. Not only was she not a Jew, but she was a Canaanite.

If the Jews had done their job of exterminating the Canaanite people when they first went into the promised land, neither this woman, nor her child, would ever have been born. If you had to be a Gentile, and had a choice, being a Canaanite should have been last on the list. But this did not keep this woman away.

But there was a second obstacle:

- B. She was a woman.

Now these two points, the fact that she was a Canaanite, and a woman, would have made many of her family have felt that there was no point in seeking any kind of help from the Jewish Messiah. We have no idea about her husband. She obviously must have had one at some time. Whether or not she did at this time, we do not know. If she did, we do not know why he did not come instead of her, or at least with her. But none of that is mentioned by either Matthew or Mark. If a child is sick, the one to stay with the child would have been the mother. But she came by herself!

There must have been something very terrible in the background of this case because we don't hear of children being "vexed with a demon." "Vexed" means that she was demon-possessed, and "grievously" means that she was in a dreadful condition, physically and mentally, because of the effect that the demon had upon her.

So the situation was most serious. The mother seems to have been concerned about the life of her daughter. She knew that she could not go on in her present condition.

However, as difficult as these two problems were, the worst difficulty which the woman faced was:

- C. The apparent reluctance of the Lord to help her.

Note her appeal to the Lord in verse 22. What was the Lord's response? "He answered her not a word." It was like she had said nothing, or that He had not heard her. But she knew that He had heard her. However, it must have been a sore trial to her faith that He would not even talk to her.

And then we can add to that what the disciples said: "Send her away; for she crieth after us."

Some feel that the disciples were taking her side, saying that the Lord should grant her request to get rid of her. I don't think that was the case. It seems that she had spoken to the disciples, seeking help from them. But they had refused, and now hoped that the Lord would get rid of her because she was bothering them. They probably were tired and resentful of such an intrusion upon what was supposed to be a time of rest.

Then we see the reluctance of the Lord in what He did say: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That would exclude her, but it probably did not surprise her in the least. She knew that she had no right to come to the Lord. She knew that He was not obligated to her in any way. That is the reason her first appeal had been, **"Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David."** If anyone ever was relying upon the grace of God, it was this Canaanite woman. But from all appearances it looked like the Lord Himself was closing the door on her, and that He was agreeing with His disciples that she should go back home.

We can already see the evidence of her faith, and why the Lord eventually spoke of it as "great." But the climax of it all was following her next appeal.

At this point she said, "Lord, help me." She knew that He could if He would. She also knew that she and her daughter had no one else to whom they could go. How she learned about the Lord, and came to believe in Him, we do not know. But she spoke with urgency and perhaps with a note of desperation.

What did the Lord say?

He said something which was really insulting and demeaning. Listen to His words: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs."

Today such a statement would have branded the Lord as a racist. He was picking up on the language the Jews used of Gentiles. They spoke of them as dogs, and you know that even the Bible is not at all complimentary of dogs. But our Lord's statement seems to have meant that if He did something to help her, a Gentile, it would mean taking something away from the Jews to whom He had come to minister.

Then see how the greatness of her faith rose to the occasion.

The effect of her words was, "Lord, I am not asking you to take anything away from the children, the Jews, but remember that when the children eat, some of their food falls on the floor and would be wasted if the dogs did not eat the crumbs." She did not want to sit at the table. She did not feel worthy of the blessings that many Jews were experiencing. It did not offend her to be called a dog because in her sight that is what she was, completely unworthy of the help she had come to seek, but wanting only some crumbs of grace from the Lord's table.

Do you see the humility of this dear woman? She was not making demands of the Lord, telling Him what He had to do. She was appealing for His mercy. He could call her what He wanted to call her, her mission would have been successful if she could only get those crumbs. And deep in her soul she must have believed that the Lord would not turn her away.

And she was right! Do you want an example of importunate prayer? Here it is! She would humble herself as much as necessary. But she would persist in seeking the Lord's blessing, evidently knowing that the Lord would not turn her away.

What happened?

IV. THE CANAANITE WOMAN'S PRAYER WAS ANSWERED.

See verse 28 -- the Lord's response. And as the Lord was talking to the woman, her daughter, wherever she was, was instantaneously and completely delivered! What a miracle this was!

You can see that there was more to this woman than just the urgency she felt in her heart for her daughter. She had come to the Lord knowing that He could help her, but also knowing that He would help her. And so, even though obstacle after obstacle was thrown in her way, her God-given faith would not let her give up. And she finally prevailed with the Lord.

Concl: What is this miracle supposed to teach us?

It has to be one of the greatest examples of persevering prayer that we have in the Bible. How often we are in circumstances similar to hers. The need can be different, but we all know what it means to be met with God's silence. It is like He has not heard us, or that He does not want to hear us, and that He wants us to go away. And then if we continue in prayer it seems that obstacle after obstacle is thrown in our way, often, it seems, by the Lord Himself.

Why is it that the Lord often seems to deny us, or to be reluctant to hear us when we come to Him with our needs? It may be that we are praying for the salvation of someone who is very dear to us. But we pray day after day, and still nothing happens. You can put your own circumstances in at this point. What is the Lord doing? Is He trying to destroy the faith that we do have? NEVER!!! It is just the opposite! His reluctance is to teach us to persevere in prayer, SO AS TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH, AND TO KEEP US PRAYING EVEN THOUGH IT SEEMS THAT THE ANSWER WILL NEVER COME.

Look at the prayer promises in Scripture. If there is one thing that is clear from them it is that God intends to answer the prayers of His people. We can ask amiss. Or there can be things in our lives that need to be corrected before He answers. But He expects to answer. He delights to answer prayer. But He does it in the way that will be best for us, and in the time that is right for us, so that when the answer comes, we will know that the answer has not come because of our much speaking, but because of the mercy and grace of God.

Should we all stand in honor of this Canaanite woman who seems to have overcome a reluctant Savior by her great faith? Certainly not! That would make her most unhappy! She had a great faith because she had a great Savior Who kept trying her faith to make it stronger as she went away than it was when she came. She could not have known what she was going to experience, but she went back home to a healthy daughter, praising God for His goodness to both of them.

May the Lord teach us to persist in prayer, looking to Him to make our faith stronger through the way the answer comes.