

A Mother's Great Faith

Matthew 15:21-28

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Matthew 15:21-28 is one of the great stories of Jesus' encounter with the Syrophenician woman. Matthew said, "Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan..." we don't have her name "...came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!'" Three times she will use the term "Lord." "'My daughter is severely demon-possessed.' But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, for she cries out after us.'" In the Greek it says that "She is constantly crying after us."

"But He answered and said, 'I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!'" Here is the second "Lord." "But He answered and said, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.' And she said, 'Yes, Lord...' here's the third reference to "Lord" "...yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.' 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."

We have, in this beautiful story, a picture of a mother who has great faith. There is no doubt in my mind that she was everything a mother should be; the story indicates she was loving and affectionate. Look at verse 22. She actually used the phrase, "my darling, little girl." When she mentioned her daughter, she said it affectionately. She was also humble. She cried out for mercy. She came asking, "Have mercy on me, O Lord." And she was patient and persistent, verse 23. The disciples said, "She cries out after us." It in the Greek, it says she was "constantly, continuously crying after us." She was persistent, as well as humble and loving and affectionate.

Jesus commended her for her great faith. Verse 28 says, "O woman..." which in that time of the culture was an endearing, loving way of addressing a woman "...great is your faith!" So Jesus commended her for her faith.

I believe that the most important quality that a mother can have is her faith. Jesus didn't commend her for her wardrobe, for her ability to use makeup, for her hairdo, for her interior-decorating ability. No; He commended her for her great faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." Everything you are as a mother and as a believer springs out of your faith and trust in God. Proverbs 31:30 is a great Mother's Day verse. "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." And 1 Peter 3:4, he says, "...the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."

So all the things we praise in a mother springs from her faith in God. It's that "gentle and quiet spirit," the trusting in the Lord, the woman who "fears the Lord, she shall be praised."

I want to look at this woman's great faith this Mother's Day in three facets. Number one, its obstacles; they were great but she overcame them. Number two, we'll look at the character, nature or the kind of faith she had. And Number three, we'll see the rewards of her great faith.

Number one, let's consider the obstacles of her great faith. The reason her faith was great was because she had to overcome great obstacles. First, she was a Gentile living in a very dark, dangerous, demonic place. Verse 21 says, "Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon." If you go up the Mediterranean coast of Israel, you arrive at the modern-day nation of Lebanon. This is the ancient area of Tyre and Sidon. In Jesus' day, it was a very Gentile, demonic area of false religions and Canaanite worship.

There are only two places in the New Testament where this story is found; it's found in Matthew, which is quite Jewish in its emphasis, and it's found in Mark, which is more Gentile or Roman in emphasis.

Jesus was going to this Gentile area to get away with His disciples for some rest and recuperation. He wanted to disciple them and minister to them. So He left the hostility of the Jewish area, the hostility of the Pharisees and scribes, which was mounting. He was on His way to the Cross.

So they went up to this area of Tyre and Sidon along the coast, which was a pagan, Gentile, demonically energized area. This woman was from a very dark place.

Second, this woman was from a forbidden race or a despised race, verse 22. "And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region...." The Canaanites were an ancient, native people that dwelt in the land. They worshipped false gods and were very wicked. They were the enemies of ancient Israel, and when the Israelites went into the land under Joshua, they were given instructions to destroy and wipe out all the Canaanites. So she was of a despised race from a very dark place.

In spite of that, the Scriptures indicate that she heard about Jesus, she came to Him and called out to Him. She called Him "Lord" three times.

You may be a mother, who lives in a very dark place. I grew up in San Bernardino and pastored there for 39 years. It is a very dark place. It is a dangerous city and very difficult in many ways. I'm now living in Murrieta, but when I meet people and say I'm from San Bernardino, they say, "Oh, I'm sorry!" But Jesus came from Nazareth. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). John Miller can come from San Bernardino.

So this woman came from Tyre and Sidon and was a Canaanite. But the light shines the brightest in the darkest places. She shined her light.

As a mom, maybe you're living in a dark world. Maybe your husband isn't a Christian. Maybe he doesn't bring a sanctifying influence on your marriage, on your parenting, on your home. You have to stand for the Lord on your own. Perhaps you're a single mother because of death

or divorce, so it's dark and difficult. But the Lord becomes your husband, and He comes into your home and helps you do what He's called you to do.

Perhaps you live in a wicked city. Maybe your kids go to public school where there is a lot of demonic activity, and you're concerned for them. In Proverbs 3:5-6, it says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

Moms, if it's dark, if it's difficult in these demonic times and you're worried about your kids, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him..." by faith "...and He shall direct your paths."

So Jesus came to this area and found this woman in this dark place. She had to overcome both her race and religion and the prejudice of the Jewish people.

Third, this woman's daughter was demon-possessed. That's a great difficulty to overcome. She said, in verse 22, "My daughter is severely demon-possessed." She doesn't just say her daughter has a demon, but her daughter is "severely demon-possessed." The New Living Translation renders this, "My daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely."

How do you handle that?! Whenever our kids were sick when they were little, my wife had to send me out of the house, because it freaked me out. It was so difficult for me to watch the kids suffer. So I imagine this woman's heart is broken. When our children suffer, we suffer with them. She was a parent, a mother in pain.

Maybe your heart is suffering now because of some trial or demonic activity in the life of your child. You're a parent in pain. Put your trust in God; He will not let you fall or disappoint you.

So this woman's pain actually brought her to the Lord in prayer. Someone said,

"I thank God for bitter things;

They've been a friend to grace.

They've driven me from paths of ease

To storm the secret place."

So it was her pain who brought her to the Lord, to her knees before Him, and ultimately brought healing for her daughter. She was a parent in pain, who turned to the Lord in prayer.

If you're a mother, you should do the same thing. If you're in pain and struggling, turn to the Lord and call upon Him. In verse 22, she "cried out to Him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!'" I can see the tears streaming down her face. She had a mother's broken heart. "My daughter is severely demon-possessed." Someone said, "Adversity is the diamond dust

heaven polishes its jewels with.”

But moms, don’t become bitter toward God because of your child’s problems. When your child is going through a difficulty, turn to the Lord in prayer.

Fourth, this mother had to overcome the silence and seeming indifference of Jesus. She came to Him as a Gentile trying to enter through Jewish, covenant doors. She said, “O Lord, Son of David!” But verse 23 says, “But He answered her not a word.” Then in verse 24, “He answered and said, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” So she came to Him using the Messianic, Jewish covenant title, “Son of David.”

God had made a covenant with David that through his line, the Messiah would come. So Jesus, who was the Messiah, was the Son of David, and she acknowledged that. She said, “O Lord, Son of David!” But Jesus said that He was sent only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” so He stepped back.

This interchange between the Canaanite, Syrophoenician woman and Jesus is interesting. She approached Him with the words, “O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed,” but Jesus stepped back in utter silence.

We’re thinking, Why this silence? Why don’t You answer her?! Eventually He said to her, “I’m sent only to ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” Then He said, in verse 26, “It is not good to take the children’s bread...” referring to the people of Israel “...and throw it to the little dogs.” We think, “Lord, You’re calling her a ‘dog’?!”

So this silence and avoidance of Jesus is hard to interpret. How do we do that? As F.B. Meyer said, “It was impossible for her to come by the door of the covenant, but the silence of the Lord lead her to knock on another door.” I like that. Every time she took a step toward Jesus, He took a step back. She took two steps forward; He took one step back.

What was Jesus trying to do? He was trying to pull out for display, for demonstration, for His own heart and for others to see this woman’s great faith. He knew she was a woman of great faith, He knew she was humble, He knew that she would be persistent and He knew that He was going to heal her daughter. But He backed up in silence to bring out her faith.

Many times when you turn to the Lord in your pain and you call upon the Lord, but He doesn’t answer, He wants you to persistently keep on seeking Him, keep following Him, keep pursuing Him. Don’t give up or stop.

So Jesus was bringing out her faith. Someone said, “It was like a diamond, and every facet was being displayed.” As you turn a diamond, the light hits the diamond, and it reflects different colors. Charles Spurgeon said, “The Lord Jesus was charmed with the fair jewel of this woman’s faith. In watching it and delighting in it, He resolved to turn it around and set it in other lights; that the various facets of this priceless diamond might each flash with brilliance and delight His soul.” What a picture! Jesus was not actually denying her; He was developing her

faith.

I think the same thing is true of us today. When you pray and you don't hear an immediate answer from God, this is where faith comes in. When the heavens are silent and people seem to oppose us, when God doesn't seem to respond, we must persistently, humbly, continually seek the Lord in prayer. Someone said, "He may be silent, but surely He does care. He cares for us." By the way, if God answered all our prayers immediately the way we asked Him, we wouldn't need faith.

The fifth obstacle she had to overcome was the harsh treatment of the disciples. They responded by saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." In other words, "Lord, get rid of her! Lord, tell her to bug off!" Whether they were saying, "Heal her daughter and send her away!" or just "Send her away!" we don't know. But I wonder, Lord, where did you get these guys?! Jesus had it all under control; He knew He would heal her daughter, but they just wanted Him to get rid of her.

There are times when we let people discourage, disappoint and hinder us from coming to Jesus. Many times I've met people who say, "I don't go to church, because there are hypocrites there" or "I can't believe in Jesus, because I knew a Christian who did this or that." Don't let people's sin keep you from trusting in Jesus. Don't let the disappointments of another human being or disciple of the Lord keep you from coming to Jesus. If you study someone's life long enough and close enough, I promise that you will find something that disappoints you. So keep your eyes on Jesus. If you look at people, you're going to stumble and fall. Let your trials make your faith stronger, grow better and not bitter.

What obstacles are you facing today? Put your trust in God. Maybe someone disappointed you, maybe someone let you down, maybe someone hurt you, so you've given up your faith in God. No; trust the Lord and keep pursuing Him.

Number two, let's look at the character of this mother's faith. Why was her faith great? It overcame obstacles, and it was in the right character or nature of her faith. Let me point out three things. First, the object of her faith was the Lord. She said, in verse 22, "Have mercy on me, O Lord." And in verse 25, she said, "Lord, help me!" And verse 27, "Yes, Lord." So she put her faith and her trust in the Lord.

The key to faith is not in its intensity or amount but in the object of that faith. A little faith in God can do great things. A lot of faith in man can do very little. If you put your faith in money, you get what money can do, which is not a lot. If you put your faith in government, you get very little. If you put your faith in God, which is what the Bible says to do, you get everything God can do. So the key to faith isn't in its intensity but in its object. Christ should be the object of our faith. "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). That faith is in Jesus Christ.

I like John 14:1-3, where Jesus said in the upper room, "Let not your heart be troubled; you

believe in God, believe in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

So put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. I believe with all my heart that if we trust in the Lord, we will not be put to shame, and we will not be disappointed. Why? Because Jesus is Lord.

The second character of her faith was that she was humble and persistent. In verse 22, she said, "Have mercy on me." Her daughter was the one vexed by a demon, but she was asking for mercy for herself. And in verse 25, she humbly worshipped Jesus; "She came and worshipped Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!'" She was humble. And in verse 23, the disciples said, "She cries out after us." It speaks of her persistence. Humble and persistent—that's the quality of her faith. In Mark 7:25, it says that she "heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet." So she humbly prostrated herself and worshipped Him.

Jesus, in speaking of this kind of prayer and faith, said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). In the Greek, it's "keep asking; keep seeking; keep knocking." So don't be deterred. Don't be turned away. Trust in the Lord and focus on Him. Her faith was in Jesus, it was humble and persistent.

The third character of her faith was that it took Jesus at His word, verses 26-27. Jesus said, "It is not good to take the children's bread..." Again, this is in the context that if you're not Jewish, you can't come to Him as a son of David, and you have no covenant relationship. Continuing, "...and throw it to the little dogs." This is what troubles people.

Did Jesus just call her a "dog"?! You need to know that in the Greek, in which this was originally written, there are two different words for "dog." One word meant "wild, undomesticated, mean scavenger." The other word meant "domesticated pet," which could be translated "little puppy."

We live in a world today in which people are choosing not to have kids but turn their pets into their "children." I saw a guy driving the other day who had his dog riding shotgun, while his wife was in the back seat! I thought, Wow! That marriage has gone to the dogs!

Here, Jesus used the word for "dogs" as "little, domesticated puppy." So He did call her a "dog"; the Jews called the Gentiles "dogs," but here it could be rendered "little puppy."

Now how does she respond? In verse 27, she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." So she agreed with the Lord that she was a Gentile, Canaanite "dog."

Friday night we had dinner with some of our kids who live in Orange County, who have dogs that were running around the table while we were eating. We finished our meal and there was some bread left over. I guess my son-in-law just flicked a piece of it under the table, and I saw it flying across the dining room. I thought, What was that?! Then the dog jumped up and

grabbed it and ran away. I thought of my sermon. “Even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

The point I want to make is that this mother’s reply blew Jesus’ mind. What an amazing statement this Gentile, Canaanite mother made! Faith in the promises of God will never disappoint. Standing on the promises of God cannot fail.

So women, moms, be a woman of the Word. Know the Word of God, and stand on the promises of God.

This leads us to, number three, her faith’s rewards. We had the obstacles to her faith, the character of her faith, and now we have her faith’s rewards. When Jesus heard this woman’s reply, in verse 28, it says, “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.” Her faith was great, because it brought great rewards.

I want to mention three things about verse 28. First, her reward was the commendation of Christ. Jesus said, “Great is your faith!” Only two times in the entire Bible did Jesus ever say to someone that they had great faith. The first time was to this Gentile, Syrophenician woman. The other time was when a Roman, centurion soldier said that he had men under him who obey him when he says “Go” or “Come.” So if Jesus would just “Speak a word...my servant will be healed.” Jesus said, “I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (Matthew 8:8,10). Both times Jesus said this to Gentiles or “dogs”—as far as Jews were concerned.

This whole story, as found in Matthew, is to remind us that the Gospel of Christ is for the whole world. It’s not just a Jewish Gospel; it’s a universal Gospel that goes out to the whole world. All the world will be blessed through the promised Seed of Abraham.

So Jesus told this woman that she was great in her faith, because she had taken Him at His word. Mothers, get in the Word of God and trust God.

Second, Jesus gave her a carte blanc. In verse 28, He said, “Let it be to you as you desire.” He was referring to her daughter. He gave her a check, signed it but didn’t fill in the amount. That can be dangerous. By the way, my wife still writes checks. Whenever she does, people look at her like, What cave did you just crawl out of?! Young people say, “What is that thing?” It’s a check.

You ask, “Is that safe what Jesus did? Is that okay?” Let me give you three reasons why it was safe for Jesus to give her this “blank check.” Number one, she was asking for her darling, little girl. She was pleading for the Lord to help her darling daughter.

Parents, pray for your children. Jesus loves and cares for them more than you do. He wants to heal them, to forgive them and to save them. Maybe you have a prodigal. Maybe you have a prodigal who is demon possessed and you are praying to God for them.

Number two, it was safe to give her carte blanc, because she was asking humbly. All she asked for were “crumbs.” “Yes; don’t take the children’s food and give it to the dogs, but the dogs get the crumbs, the leftovers.”

Number three, it was safe to give her this “blank check,” because she asked in faith. In James 1:6-8, it says, “Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Third, notice the cure, in verse 28. “And her daughter was healed from that very hour.” Oh, the power of Christ to heal, to forgive, to save and to restore!

So when moms come humbly, come persistently in faith to the Lord and cry out to Him, His ears are open to their plea. He will save their children.

This story is also a picture of how sinners come to Christ. We come unworthily—we are dogs and sinners—and we come in faith and trust in Christ, because Jesus alone saves us and forgives our sins.

I want to encourage all you moms, on this Mother’s Day, to be a woman of faith. Be persistent and humble in your faith. And don’t let anything keep you from trusting in the Lord with all your heart.