

Great Faith - Matthew 15:21-28; 7:7-8

Introduction: There are many definitions of faith. Mark Twain said, *“Faith is believing what any fool knows is not true!”* David Lloyd George said, *“Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible.”* Abraham Lincoln said, *“Faith is not believing that God can, but that God will!”* Then there is the Acrostic which says: *“Forsaking All, I Trust Him.”* However, the best definition of faith is the biblical definition found in **Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)** *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”* In practical terms, that means:

- Trusting your son with the car on prom night.
- Trusting you daughter and her date on her first date.
- Trusting that the mechanic who worked on your brakes.
- Trusting a doctor’s handwritten prescription you can’t read with a pharmacist you don’t know as he mixes chemicals that you can’t pronounce. **THAT’S FAITH!**

This morning, I want to share with you from God’s Word, an example of a person who demonstrated not only a great faith, but a genuine and persistent faith as well. Specifically, we’re going to see from her example the actions of a person of with great faith. **Let’s read her story in Mt. 15:21-28.**

This woman’s experience with Jesus was a living example of His promise found in **Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV)** *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”* The first action we see here is that a person of great faith will:

1. Ask for what You Need (21-22).

When Jesus departed from the area around the Sea of Galilee and traveled toward the coast to retreat from the crowds for awhile. He needed to do this because He was being pressured by the Jewish leaders, by Herod Antipus, and by the crowds who wanted to make him their King right then. Besides, He was tired. He needed a place to rest and further prepare His disciples for what was shortly to come.

But as is true of any famous person when they go out in public, Jesus was recognized by a mother who desperately needed help (22). This woman was a Gentile. She was not a part of God’s covenant people, but she came to Jesus anyway.

What makes this woman’s faith so great is that it was based on so little. She had been raised in a pagan culture. She didn’t have God’s Word to follow.

She came to Jesus in desperation because her daughter was under the control of a demon. No doubt, she had heard of Jesus' miraculous abilities and sought His help.

She "*came to Him crying out.*" The tense of the verb here suggests that she kept on saying it. But the disciple's said, "*Send her away for she keeps crying out after us.*"

But the persistent woman kept calling on Jesus to have mercy on her. Though she knew she was unworthy of Jesus' help, she trusted in His mercy to save her daughter.

She called Him by His messianic title "*Lord, Son of David.*" Now a normal Canaanite would have known that title, but she knew it. More than that, she asked Jesus to do something she could not do. Because of her great faith in Jesus, she expressed her need to Him and believed that He would help her.

James 4:2b-3 (NIV) says, "...*You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*" So, if we're going to have great faith, we must first ask for what we need and not assume anything; and we must ask expectantly. Walking by faith means we make asking God to meet our needs the first thing we do instead of the last thing.

The second action we see is that a person of great faith will:

2. Look Beyond Your Problems (23-24).

This woman with great faith believed in Jesus for her answer in spite of some major obstacles in her way.

First, she wasn't Jewish. She was a Gentile. She spoke a Gentile language, lived in a Gentile culture, and practiced the Gentile polytheistic religions. In most Jewish eyes, she was a dog. Despite all this, she believed Jesus would help her.

The second obstacle in her way was the fact that at first, Jesus seemingly ignored her. And even when He did speak, His response seems rather exclusive. He said, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.*" But even despite this, she continued to persist in her cries for help.

The third obstacle she had to overcome was the fact that Jesus' disciples tried to "*send her away.*" Apparently, they saw her as nothing more than a pest, a nuisance, and a bother to Jesus. I wonder how often we see people in need and we view them as a bother, when they truly are trying to exercise great faith?

But this woman looked beyond her problems. She didn't lose her faith in Jesus because of her problems; instead, her faith grew in spite of them. How is it with you? Do you lose faith because of your problems or does your faith grow in spite of them? Are you a seeker, or sinker?

The very essence of faith is seeing beyond the obvious. Remember Heb.11:1? It says that faith is "*being certain of what we do not see.*"

You see, here's the truth behind this step of faith: In this life there will always be problems. There will always be obstacles in our way, storms to go through, and disappointments to endure. We can't run and hide from them. We can't wish them away. We can't escape problems. I've heard people say, "*My church has so many problems, I'll just go somewhere else.*" Well, guess what? The church down the road has 'em too. Has it ever occurred to you that God may want to use your problems to strengthen your faith. That is what was happening here with this lady.

Jesus wants us to do as this woman did - take our eyes off our problems and put them on the solution: Jesus. Most of the time, our problems are not really what they appear to be. Most of the time, our real problem is that we don't keep our eyes on Jesus.

Think of it as trying to land a plane entirely on instruments. I mean, you can't see 10 ft. in front of you for the weather. Your instincts tell you not to trust the instruments...trust in what you can see. But if you've been trained to trust the instruments, it's the only way you're going to make a safe landing.

God endows each believer with the instrument of faith to see him through the storms of life. Sometimes things look confusing and frustrating. Sometimes our problems shroud us in a fog. That's when the Christian must trust their faith in God. That's when we have to look beyond our problems.

The third action we see is that a person of great faith will:

3. Knock and Trust the Character of God (25-28).

That's what this woman did. She didn't give up. She kept on knocking even when it seemed Jesus didn't care. And by doing so, she trusted the true character of Jesus.

Even though Jesus seemingly rejected her plea, the woman didn't give up. She wouldn't allow herself to believe that Jesus would turn her away. In fact, verse 25 says she "*came and knelt before Him*" saying, "*Lord, help me!*"

Jesus' answer to her has been troublesome to a lot of people, for it sounds like a rather harsh response. Using the analogy of Gentiles as dogs, Jesus said, "*It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.*" The term "*dogs*" does not refer to wild savage animals, but house pets. So Jesus was actually saying, "*Mam, don't you realize that the common practice of my people is to view you Gentiles as nothing more than a house dog? Do you understand that a good Jewish father will not take away his children's supper and feed the*

dogs with it?" And applying the statement spiritually, Jesus was saying, *"The common practice in Judaism is to seek out their own kind. They do not consider Gentiles as being worthy of salvation."*

For most of us, that would have been it. We would have got up and gone home mad. However, great faith perseveres. She admitted her condition and continued to plead for mercy by saying, *"but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."* Like a little pet who keeps on scratching on the door, believing their master wouldn't let them go hungry, this lady of great faith kept on asking, she kept on seeking, and she kept on knocking.

I'll bet Jesus' broke into a big smile at that moment. Like the sun breaking through the clouds after a storm. He said, *"Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."* Jesus' words rewarded her faith. Her prayer was answered instantly for *"her daughter was healed from that very hour."* Heb.11:6 says *"Without faith it is impossible to please Him."* And nothing pleases Him like genuine faith.

Conclusion: What would you do in this situation? If you were lost in a desert and near death for lack of water, and you came across a pump with a canteen hung on the handle with a note that read: *"Below you is all the fresh water you could ever need, and the canteen contains exactly enough water to prime the pump,"* what would you do? Would you drink the water in the canteen or use it to prime the pump? It takes **GREAT FAITH** for someone who is thirsty to pour out the whole contents of the canteen for a promise of unlimited water.

How is your faith today? Is it real? Have you primed the pump by asking Jesus to meet your needs, or have you tried to do it yourself? Have you primed the pump by looking beyond your problems and actively seeking God's solution to your needs? And if you aren't getting any answers, have you primed the pump by being persistent? Are you still knocking? Are you trusting in His character to meet your needs? If you have great faith you are.