



Matthew 15:21-28 - ²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." ²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." ²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. ²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Great faith looks only to Christ



To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen

(Revelation 1:5b-6)

Getting a compliment is always nice. Getting a compliment from someone in your field of service or expertise is even better. It's the difference between grandma tasting her six year old grandchild's chocolate chip cookies and saying, "How delicious!" and hearing world renowned celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck say, "Those are out of this world!" While both are genuine compliments, one seems to carry more heft behind it. One came from a loving heart driving the compliment, the other from sheer objectivity of an expert. It's always nice to be appreciated and even praised by someone who knows what they're talking about – the difficulties of the craft, the execution of the trade, the troubleshooting of the issues. A teacher tells another teacher, "Engaging lesson today," and it comes to mean something. An auto mechanic tells another, "I never would of thought of fixing it that way – brilliant!" Getting a compliment is always nice, and getting a compliment from someone who knows all of what you go through to do what you do can be even better. So, what if Jesus complimented your faith? After all, you can be sure he knows what he's talking about when it comes to faith. "You have great faith!"

As the disciples thought back on the ministry of Jesus and as you and I today read through the gospels, does it surprise us to find that, according to the written accounts we have, Jesus only pays that compliment two times? "You have great faith!" Once in the account of the Roman centurion and his sick servant in Luke 7, and here in our gospel lesson from Matthew 15. Let's take a few minutes to see what led up to these words of praise and what these words actually mean.

It had been kind of tough week for Jesus and company. Earlier, the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticized the disciples (and, indirectly, Jesus) because they didn't wash their hands the right way before they ate. Jesus used this event as the tip of the iceberg to expose what was really going on in the Pharisees' hearts. They were so focused on obedience to their outward traditions that made them look squeaky clean before men, but they were completely blind to the rebellion of their hearts that made them unclean before God. Jesus said, in no uncertain terms, that these religious leaders, these good, "churchy" kind of people, the type of people you'd expect to be praised by Jesus, were in fact hard hearted, unclean, father and mother dishonoring, blind guides who marched people straight away from God's grace down an eternally destructive path of self-righteousness. By all outward appearances, if anyone deserved praise for their devotion to God, it was the Pharisees – but Jesus laments the fact that their hearts were as far away from God as they could be.

It's interesting to see that our gospel lesson for this morning follows on the heels of that showdown with the Pharisees. Where was great faith to be found? Watch and learn with the disciples – great faith looks only to Christ. Matthew tells us, **Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of**



David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.” Jesus went toward the territory of the Gentiles; certainly not a “proper” place for a 1st century Jew to wander around. The religious elites back in Jerusalem wouldn’t expect to find this rabbi there, much less a woman who claims faith in the Messiah of Israel, but lo and behold, there they both were! Did you notice how the Canaanite woman (yes, those Canaanites, who were supposed to be driven out of the land before the Israelites moved in) addressed Jesus? Not just, “Hey mister, hello sir, excuse me my good man!” **Lord, Son of David!** That’s Messiah talk! How did this woman, a Gentile, hear about the great things God would do through the Promised Savior? The text doesn’t tell us, but marvel at the grace of God that his promises and blessings didn’t and don’t stop at Israel’s borders! How did this Gentile woman come to believe that even she was included as a beneficiary of the work of the Savior? The same way we did – through the miracle of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts faith that clings to Jesus.

Even though this woman believed that Jesus was who he said he was, and trusted that he could help, that didn’t stop the devil and his demons from bombarding her poor daughter. Your heart breaks for this woman – frantic, pleading, knowing that because of her culture, gender, and ethnicity she shouldn’t even be talking to this Jewish man. But he was more than just a man. He’s the Son of God; the Savior. If anyone can help, he can. So how does Jesus respond to this most sincere outpouring of faith? **Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”** In other words, *“Sorry. Wrong gender, wrong culture, wrong country.”* After all, she wasn’t an Israelite, she was a Canaanite, and she was a woman. Three strikes, you’re out in the 1st century ancient near east. Every time I read and study this account, at first blush, it always strikes me as so “un-Jesus.” This woman comes to him in faith, and he seems to brush her off as not being worth the time.

What happens when Jesus seems to brush you off - when God seems silent to your prayers? What about when Jesus himself seems to be enemy of your faith? What happens and where do you turn when it seems like Jesus is ignoring you – when you’ve prayed and hoped, but your loved one’s chronic illness isn’t getting any better? When you’ve prayed and worked and hoped and tried, but the temptation you promised you’d never fall into again is the one that keeps calling you back the most loudly? When you’ve prayed and talked and hoped and dreamed, but trying to repair your marriage or family doesn’t seem like you’re building on a solid, lasting foundation, but rather seems like an exercise of rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic?

You know the promises of your Savior – **Surely, I am with you always; in all things God works for the good of those who love him; [nothing] will be able to separate [you] from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.** But what about when you feel alone or rejected or unloved? Why do I struggle so much? Why can’t I just be a different person? Why isn’t God delivering on his promises? What do you do, where do you go, where do you turn, as strange as it sounds, when Jesus seems to



be the enemy of your faith? Where did this Canaanite woman turn and what did she do? Jesus' reaction to her request wasn't one of cold indifference, but an invitation, an opportunity for her faith to shine. Even when Jesus remained stone-faced silent in answer to her plea, she kept crying out...why? She knew the promises of her Savior God. She trusted that Jesus was the only One who could help her in this dire situation. Even when it seemed like Jesus wasn't speaking to her, even though he appeared indifferent – she didn't give up. Instead she trusted and relied completely on the Word and promises of God.

Jesus said, **“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”** This woman agrees with Jesus. She believes that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, that God was keeping his long-awaited promise to Israel, and that after all, the promises were overwhelmingly addressed to Israel. She’s not suggesting he bypass the children, not by any means. But she demonstrates her faith and proclaims that just a few crumbs are more than enough for her. She knew she wasn't excluded from the promise.

And what was the result? Jesus praises her faith, **“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.** What a marvelous example of Jesus' grace! The very thing which Jesus created in her heart through his Word of promise he now praises! But I suppose this whole episode leads us back to the question - what made this woman's faith so great? Was it because it was so strong and unwavering? Was her faith great because she had lots of it and 'just believed' hard enough? Was her faith great because she said the right things, hung in there long enough, associated with the right people, and acted like a 'good Christian'? Did any of that make her faith great? No. What made this woman's faith so great? What makes your faith so great? Not your efforts, not your promises, not your intentions – nothing about you. After all, it couldn't be anything about you because faith is a gift. What makes faith so great? That it rests solely on Jesus Christ – who he is and what he's done for you, for me. Great faith knows who Jesus truly is. Great faith knows that Jesus has something for me, not because I wish it or want it so, but because he's promised.

And what has Jesus promised you? What are those words upon which truly great faith hangs? That Jesus is who he says he is – the Son of God come to earth, not to condemn, but to save; that Jesus is the once-for-all sacrifice to pay for every one of your sins (yes, even that one); that this forgiveness comes to you fully and freely apart from any work on your part through faith in him; that he is, in fact, with you always and working all things for your eternal good – even when it seems like he's sitting with stone-faced indifference. Great faith hangs on the Word and promises of God revealed in Christ – that he is who he says he is and that he'll fulfill all he's promised, even for a Gentile dog, a sinner, an outsider like me...like you. Amen

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)