

How About a GREAT Faith?

“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 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.” The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “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.” Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.”

Contentment is a good thing. It keeps us from becoming jealous, angry, disappointed, sad because we are happy with what we have. In fact, contentment is one of those fruits of faith the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. That is why Paul not only was content when he sat in prison, why Abraham was willing to give his nephew Lot, the best land, why Matthew quit his job to follow Jesus. If we have Jesus and forgiveness and salvation and eternal life, then what more could we ever want? Really, nothing. So we are content with less than everyone else. We are content even if we have more.

But can contentment be a bad thing? Yes, at least in one area, faith. Now we do not need a great, large, strong faith to receive all the blessings God gives us through Jesus Christ. A check worth a million dollars is worth a million dollars whether it is in the hands of a strong adult or loosely held in the hands of a small baby. What a sweet comfort! Faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains. Even if there is a sliver of faith left, we receive in full forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

But should we be content with a faith as small as a mustard seed? I hope not for to be content with a small faith would like hopping on one foot and never using the other. We can still get around, but it would be much easier if we used both feet. So Jesus does us a huge favor today. He holds out before us an example of faith, not just faith, but a great faith. Let’s see what blessings we have in a great faith.

I. Faith is humble.

“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!”

I already read the full story to you before. We know that this Canaanite woman has a great faith. What made that faith great was her humility. Note how she approached Jesus. She called him Lord, one above her, and she begged for him to have mercy on her. That is because she knew she had no right or cause to ask anything good of Jesus. She was not even an Israelite, but an outsider, a Gentile. ***“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel,”*** Jesus reminded her. Are we humble before the Lord? Often we are not. We can tell we are not humble when God doesn’t give us what we want. We pout as if we deserve good or better from the Lord.

We get angry with him. We worry.

That is why God, in love, rebukes us. ***The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”*** Sounds harsh, but Jesus’ words are true! Family pets have no place at the dinner table. That place belongs to the family, not pets. She was a Canaanite woman and not an Israelite. She did not deserve to be at the table. But her response brought joy to Jesus’ heart. Even though she had no place at the table, she still received crumbs. Does that sound bad? Not if you are a hungry dog. Crumbs are a feast to a hungry dog. This woman already believed in Jesus and she had no problem acknowledging she really had no right to ask Jesus for anything. It was this humility that makes her faith great.

Friends, you have noticed that God constantly rebukes us in his Word. Time and again, in every book, every chapter, he reminds us that we have no place at his table. He points out our sins. He reminds us that our sins damn us before God. He has numbered our days and we return to dust as reminders that the wages of sin is death. His holy heaven is not a place where we belong, let alone the right to call on his name, pray to him or ask anything of him. In our Old Testament reading, we had the story of Rahab the Prostitute. I looked it up. Her name appears eight times in the Bible; of the eight, five times she is referred to as Rahab the Prostitute and not just Rahab. That sin became part of her name. What sins are a part of your name?

A great faith is humble before the Lord. But because it is humble, it is also confident.

II. A great faith is confident.

We see such confidence in this woman’s great faith. Though humble and deserving nothing good from Jesus, she still approached him. Why? Look at how she addressed him as Lord and Son of David. She already believed. Yes, as a Canaanite woman, as an “outsider” who didn’t worship at the temple, she still got the crumbs; God’s Word still came to her somehow. Although he hasn’t been crucified yet, she recognized Jesus as God in the flesh and the promised Messiah who will save her. She could claim Isaiah’s words as her own, that though her sins be as scarlet, they will be white as snow because of Jesus, Son of David, whose blood will wash her perfectly clean before God. Rahab the prostitute is in heaven because of Jesus. This

woman was confident she would be, too, because of the Son of David.

That is why she could approach Jesus with confidence, and why we do, too. Jesus commands us to pray to him with boldness, at any time, and with confidence God will answer each prayer. We can do so because we are children approaching God as our Father and not God as our Judge. Christ was judged and condemned in our place; now we run to God as children run to their parents.

This shows us how deep and wide Jesus' love is. He came to save sinners. As they hymn proclaims, "Jesus Sinners Does Receive." And his forgiveness is for everyone in the world like Canaanites, prostitutes, people like us! I find it interesting that the two times Jesus called someone's faith "great" involved gentiles, non-Israelites, people raised as unbelievers but who received crumbs and believed. It is as if Jesus is making a point: Jesus died for the sins of the whole world! That means us!

And such confidence is patient. When she first approached Jesus, Jesus didn't say a word. Sounds harsh. But she did not go away. When the disciples were annoyed at her, she did not go away. When Jesus called her a dog who had no place at the table, she did not go away. She was patient because she wasn't on hold for twenty minutes trying to talk to someone at the IRS; she was talking to Jesus who has mercy and will answer her prayer.

"Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour." She prayed three times before Jesus answered her prayer. Her patience was rewarded. Hannah prayed for many years before God blessed her with a son, Samuel. The Israelites prayed for four hundred years before God sent Moses. Jesus prayed if there was any other way besides drinking the bitter cup of crucifixion, and God said no; it needs to be the cross and Jesus gladly accepted that.

Friends, we want to be in heaven now, but God has said not quite yet. We ask for relief and so often God gives it to us. But other times he says no. And what does faith do? It is patient, knowing our troubles now are light and momentary compared to the glory that awaits. Faith is patient as we wait just a little bit more before leaving this sick world for heaven. And that faith is patient if God is silent to our prayers because faith is confident he will answer them in a way that is best.

Ok, I think I sold on a great faith. Where can we get it? You won't find it in this world. And you will certainly not find it inside of you; it is completely foreign to us. But I suggest that you already have it. It was probably planted in you by God the Holy Spirit when you were baptized as a baby. Maybe it was planted when you received some Bible crumbs falling from the table. That is because faith is connected to God's Word and the Holy Spirit through that Word.

Remember last week's sermon? Peter walked on water because Jesus said he could, not because water can support his weight. Only when he stopped trusting Jesus, only when he relied on his eyesight and not God's Word did he sink. That is why great faith welcomes testing. My dad was a newspaper advertiser for many years. On the wall in his bedroom he has a full page ad, the very first one he ever drew up. I asked him how long it took him to draw up that ad and he said two whole days. I asked him how long it took him to draw up a similar ad after thirty years, he said two hours. The more he drew up ads, the faster and better he got.

If it is true that faith is key, that those who believe will not perish but have everlasting life and those who do not believe are condemned, then it only makes sense that Jesus will make our faith a top priority, and he does. He will test our faith. That is what happened to this woman. By remaining silent, by rebuking her, by telling her she was only a pet and did not belong at the table, Jesus was actually testing her. Why? So she would cling to him more than ever and hold onto his promises more than ever. If you took away my car, I would walk to church. Jesus will test and discipline us, even take things away so we learn to walk with him. And what is amazing is she was already a strong believer before all of this, stronger than Peter. It goes to show us that Jesus will test our faith even if it is already strong.

Now imagine a lifetime of testing. Like my dad, after a lifetime of drawing up ads he became better and better at it, in a lifetime of going back to God's Word and relying solely on Jesus, we will grow stronger.

So, are you content? I hope not. I hope we all want a faith stronger today than it was yesterday. So, please Jesus, test us, discipline us, lay us on our back so we may look up to you, help us make your Word and faith a priority far above everything else. Amen.