

16th August, 2020

“Faith that won’t give up”

Bible Reading: Matthew 15: 21-28

Thank you again for your faithful prayer and support during these very different days! Please continue to pray those in aged care for protection, and comfort in these times of isolation from family and friends.

On our preaching plan for August, David Ratten was to come as our guest preacher next Sunday August 25th. We wish! However, he has provided the text of his message that you will receive next Sunday on “Psalm 23-The Shepherd’s Psalm”. He has also provided a YouTube link, so you can sit back and enjoy his message in your lounge room! We are grateful to David for joining us, and for his encouraging message.

This week we’re continuing our series in the Gospel of Matthew, and we’ve learned that Jesus is doing a lot of things that are out of the ordinary. He’s offending and surprising people, many times even His own disciples.

In Matthew 15 we read that after Jesus had yet another “run in” with the Pharisees who had come from Jerusalem to scrutinize His actions and criticize His failure to follow the ceremonial traditions of the elders, He and His disciples withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. It was slightly northwest of the Sea of Galilee and the city of Capernaum where most of Jesus’ ministry takes place. This is near modern-day Syria and Lebanon.

It’s important to understand the significance of this location because this is the region that was home to the ancient enemies of Israel, the Canaanites. The Canaanites were the ones that Israel had battled thousands of years ago, going all the way back to Joshua and the Israelites’ entrance into the Promised Land.

1. A Desperate Mother

A Canaanite woman from a distance, saw, recognized, and cried out to Jesus, “*Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.*” v22

Surprisingly, He did not respond to her at all! So, with a faith that wouldn’t give up, she kept crying out to Him – to the point that Jesus’ disciples begged Him to “send her away!”

Nothing grieves the heart of a parent like seeing their own child hurting. When they hurt, you hurt. I’d rather be sick than see them sick! And I hear from many whose children are away from God, you can’t imagine how much that hurts. You may not approve of what they’re doing, and they may shame you at times, but they are still your kids and you can’t stop loving them, it’s a part of your very nature.

This mother is hurting to the core. She is carrying the kind of burden you can’t seem to get off your back. You wake up and there it is. You laugh at something funny, but then that burdensome feeling rebounds right back into your heart...it won’t go away! But this woman did the right thing with her burden, she brought it to Jesus.

All of your kids have special needs of their own, but I want you to know that no child is hopeless that has a praying mother / father. Keep hoping for them, keep working on them, and most of all, keep on praying...it’s not hopeless!

A guy named John left home at 17 and joined the British Navy. He became a drunk when he got out and got mixed up with pirates. Before you know it, he had become a slave trader who would sail to Africa. They would gather up Africans and stick them in cages like animals and sell them as property. But all the while his mother was praying for him. She did her laundry on an old-fashioned washboard with tears streaming down her face all the while praying, Oh God, save my John!

Thru a series of circumstances, the young man almost lost his life, and became a slave himself. As a result of all of this he got saved, and John [Newton] wrote the words of the much-loved hymn, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound... [and all because of a praying mother]"

2. A Reluctant Master

No doubt some of us reading this today have been crying out to God about something and it seems like He's ignoring you. I've prayed about some things and if I didn't know better, I'd think maybe God wasn't hearing me! The heavens were silent! But God's delays are not God's denials. We live in a society where everything happens quickly, in an instant. We want it now. But our prayers are not just for the purpose of solving problems. God's ways are higher than that. Thru the process He's going to teach us some things about ourselves and about Him. He's going to stretch our faith at times, and let's be clear--it takes faith to still believe even when God seems silent.

To understand Jesus' silence, you have to look closely at the way this woman had approached Him...v. 22 "*Lord, Son of David*". We're in Gentile territory, and this is a Gentile woman. She has never been to the temple or offered a sacrifice. She is what you would call a pagan Gentile, and yet she approached Him on Jewish ground in addressing Him this way. It was a Messianic term the Jews used for the One they were awaiting to come to them.

The implication here is profound, because in essence Jesus' silence was saying, you don't have to approach me on Jewish ground. You don't have to be a Jew to get to me. That's a blessing to me, because it's true for me and you as well! "There is no difference!" Every day a Jew awoke he thanked God for 3 things: that he wasn't a slave, a woman, or a Gentile.

Galatians 3:28 "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus*". She needed to realize that she didn't have to walk thru a Jewish door to get to Jesus. And you and I need to realize we don't have to walk thru a particular theological or denominational door to get saved! All we have to do is walk thru the sinner's door and we'll find Jesus right there on the porch, with hand extended because He's been waiting and knocking, hoping we'll come and let Him in!

Jesus says that He cannot help the woman because He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, meaning, He was sent as the Messiah for the Jewish people. This was the understanding and expectation for all of the Jewish people regarding their Messiah. Yet, Jesus had already done some work among Gentile people including healing the centurion's servant in Matthew 8. So, what's going on? Why is Jesus reluctant to heal this woman's daughter?

This woman would not take no for an answer. She was resilient! Look at v25. "*The woman came, knelt before him, and said, "Lord, help me!"*"

This was her daughter we're talking about! She's not giving up! She wants Jesus to bring healing and rescue for her daughter! Listen how Jesus responds. Look at v26. He replied, *"It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."* What? Some of you are thinking, "Did Jesus just call her a dog?" Well, yes, He did. However, there's a context here that's important for us to understand.

You see, Jesus was sent as the Jewish Messiah for the Jewish people. Everyone knew that. Even the woman knew this. Remember, she referred to Jesus as the Son of David, a very Jewish description of the Messiah.

Jesus is not calling her a dog in the sense that He's trying to tear her down, but to make the point that the precious gift He has brought is for the children of Israel, not for others. This was the common thought in that day, and Jesus is pressing into that thought. However, everyone is about to learn an important lesson about the measure of God's grace and the effect of Jesus' power. Look at what the woman says in v27. *"Yes, Lord," she said, "yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."*

What great faith and determination from this Canaanite woman! She does not give up believing that Jesus can help her! She does not lose hope and trust in Jesus!

She knew she didn't deserve God's grace. She knew she didn't deserve the blessings of the Messiah. She was not even Jewish! But she also knew that the power of Jesus was so great that even the leftover crumbs were miraculous enough to set her daughter free from spiritual bondage!

3. An Amazing Miracle

Jesus saw her faith, commended her, granted her request and completely healed her daughter *"from that very hour."* Hers was a great faith that called Him "Lord" or "Master." Her faith caused her to come on behalf of her daughter. Against all odds, even when it appeared that she was being ignored and even turned away, she trusted, believed and hoped in Jesus!

Her tenacious faith kept hanging on to the hope that He would have mercy and help her; and He did! Hers was a faith that would not quit / let go. She was persistent in her plea, stubborn in her faith, and yielded in her heart, and the Lord granted her request. Jesus said she had great faith. What is great faith? It's a faith that lays hold on Christ, and will not let go.

Great faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible.

As we live out our faith through trials and testing, our faith grows into the "Great Faith" which Jesus commends – a Great Faith which invites us to come to Him; empowers us to seek Him every day, in every situation; and enables us to trust Him completely.

May God graciously grant you that kind of faith – "A Faith that Won't Give Up!" – a faith that trusts your Saviour, won't let go of His promises, and carries you safely through this world and eventually into the arms of your loving, waiting Saviour in the world to come!

Four lessons for today as followers of Jesus:

1. Courage:

She was courageous to approach Jesus as a gentile woman. We know that women were suppressed during that time. But she broke that suppression. She freed herself from a bondage of patriarchy.

We need to have courage to approach the issues of the world. We need to suppress our inner self-centred spirit and reach out to others, our mission includes people from every nation, tribe, people and language.

2. Focus:

The Canaanite woman focused on her purpose. It was not selfish, but for her daughter.

Our mission is focused on Jesus. Our purpose is to proclaim his love. We should not be selfish, but generous in our approach to how Jesus loves the nations.

3. Not Giving up:

She did not give up until she achieved what she came for. Nothing could stop her in her purpose. Our mission journey is not goal oriented but love oriented. God has called us for his purpose. Sometimes, we may be disappointed with our failures. But God is with us. She believed that Jesus could heal her daughter.

4. Be not Afraid:

She challenged the tradition. She challenged the patriarchy system. She challenged that only Jews could be benefited. She became a gentile missionary to take the message of Jesus that he has come to this world for entire humanity.

Don't be afraid to challenge prejudice and deceptive ideologies even in high places as a follower of Jesus. The least among us can be a vehicle that God can use to bring justice and healing to all of God's disadvantaged daughters and sons all over the world.

May the heart of Jesus captivate our hearts.

Prayer