

Great Faith
March 16, 2014

One day Jesus is returning to this planet. On that day He will gather His followers to Him. His followers are looking forward to that day. We long to see Jesus, face to face, and be with Him.

When we see Him, we are hoping He has some things to say to us. There are several things we hope to hear Jesus say to us. The first thing we want to hear Him say is, "Well done my good and faithful servant." A second thing we'd like to hear Jesus say is, "You lived a great faith in me."

Faith is important to Jesus. We see that in the Bible. Jesus was on constant lookout for people of faith. He gauged how much faith in God people had. Some had no faith in God. Others had a little faith. Some had a good amount of faith. But there are two people who stand out. The Bible only records two people of whom Jesus said they had great faith. One was a Roman soldier, not even one of God's chosen people. I told you about him last autumn. The other was a woman, also a non-Jew. We're going to look at her story today so we can learn why Jesus said she had great faith.

I believe Jesus wants all of His followers to have great faith. He wants us all to live out a great faith in Him. If you want to hear Jesus comment on your faith when you see Him, you need to know what He is looking for in terms of faith. Let's learn from this passage what constitutes great faith.

Matthew 15:21 (NIV) Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Jesus had come to this area for a little R&R, Rest and Relaxation. He had been in the town of Gennesaret in Galilee of Israel. There he had been confronted by the lack of faith of the Pharisees, again, and needed a break. Their resistance to faith in God wore Him down spiritually and physically. So He has left the Jewish areas and gone to a non-Jewish region. Mark's account of this story says he hid himself in a house. But word leaked out that he was there and the woman came and sought to see him.

Matthew 15:22-28 (NIV) 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.

There is much good about this woman that Jesus could have complimented. He could have mentioned her great love for her daughter. He could have mentioned her humility and courage in coming to Him. He could have mentioned her persistence in seeking help for her daughter. All of those are good qualities. But what Jesus focuses on was her faith. He characterized it as great faith.

What clues do we have to her faith? First she addresses Jesus as Son of David. While this word could simply mean a descendant of the ancient King David of Israel, in this context it is one of a series of titles used for the long-expected messiah, the special servant of God that the Jews were waiting for. The messiah would restore the glory that Israel once had as a nation. She uses this title for Jesus, showing her recognition of who He was.

She boldly addresses Jesus as the one He is. That is much more than most Jews did. While some of them thought He might be the messiah, few of them addressed Him that way. She wasn't even Jewish. If she could recognize the truth about Jesus, His own people could too. Some did, but many did not want to admit who He obviously was. They dismissed Him because they did not want to show respect to Him.

So the first sign of her faith was believing who He was. This was not yet great faith. It was just faith.

Have you got this much faith? Can you admit, to Jesus, who He is? For over 2,000 years people have been talking about Jesus. Some claim He was just a man. That is all they are willing to admit about Him, despite the evidence to the contrary. To admit more than that would require them to pay attention to what He said, and that they do not want to do.

Some people recognize Jesus as a prophet, sent from God, but no more than that. And most of those who believe He was a prophet still do not pay attention to what He said. His words hold no authority for them.

Some know that Jesus is more than a prophet. They know that Jesus is the Messiah God had promised would come. But even some of these refuse to submit to Him. I have known people who truly believe in Jesus, but refuse to submit to Him as Lord of their lives.

Some of you here may be in this group. You know in your heart that Jesus is real. You know He is Savior and Lord. But you don't want to admit it for then people will ask you why you don't submit to Him. So you say you do not believe. You are like people who hear from the doctor that you have a terminal illness. You could live if you would change your lifestyle, eat right and exercise. But you don't want to do that, so you refuse to admit that you are sick.

Don't be that way. Jesus is your only hope of heaven. Turn to Him today. Trust in Him for forgiveness of your sins and turn your life over to Him.

The first sign of faith was this woman's belief in Jesus as the messiah. The second sign of her faith was believing Jesus could heal her daughter. She believes Jesus to have the power and authority of God to heal her daughter. She expresses this faith by

begging Jesus to do so. This too is not great faith. It is just faith. Lots of people had come to Jesus believing that He could heal them. They had that much faith.

No, there is something in the conversation that tells Jesus she has great faith. Let's look back at the what they say.

Matthew 15:24-28 (NIV) 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.

Persistence is the quality of never giving up as long as what you want is still possible. At no time did Jesus say, "No!" to the woman. So she kept asking.

What Jesus DID say was that giving her what she wanted did not fit His mission. Jesus seemed reluctant to hear her or help her. I believe He was just testing her faith. We never see Him turn anyone away. The written word does not tell us with what tone He said this, or what expression He had on His face. It may be that both His tone and expression hinted that she could continue to ask.

Now don't misunderstand how either is using this word "dog." A few weeks ago I spoke to you about Lazarus and how the mangy half-wild roaming dogs came and licked his wounds. The Greek word for that kind of dog is a different word than we see here. The word for the half-wild dog was used as an insult. The word that both Jesus and the woman used here refers to a family pet.

The woman admits that she is not a Jew and entitled to what God had reserved for them. But she isn't asking for much. You would not feed your family pet the food meant for your children. But as the children eat and crumbs fall to the floor, the family pet gets those and no one minds a bit. It is a very insignificant amount. She says, "I'm not asking for much, just a few crumbs."

It is for this comment that Jesus says she has great faith. Why? Let me explain.

Her daughter is sick, demon possessed. The daughter is suffering a lot of physical and mental anguish. And no one can do anything about it. Everyone is helpless to heal her. The mom can't do anything. The doctors can't do anything. The priests and witchdoctors of her own religion can't do anything. From a human standpoint the girl's healing is hopeless. It requires a tremendous power, more than any plain human has.

Yet, for Jesus, it would be like nothing. It would be like a crumb of His power. That is what she answers Jesus. While healing her daughter is beyond human ability, for Jesus it is practically nothing. She says Jesus has that kind of power.

It is for this answer Jesus praises her as having great faith. And this brings us to the application for us.

Great faith relies on the greatness of Jesus.

Great faith relies on the greatness of Jesus. Great faith relies on the great compassion of Jesus, the great mercy of Jesus, the great love of Jesus, the great wisdom of Jesus, the great grace of Jesus. Great faith relies on the greatness of Jesus.

Are you living this kind of faith in Jesus? Are you relying in your everyday life on the greatness of Jesus, or on the not so greatness of you? Is your faith in you or Jesus?

Two weeks ago I asked you to write down your most pressing problem, the biggest obstacle in your life right now. What huge problem are you dealing with today? What huge problem or worry is beyond your ability to solve? You don't know anyone else who can solve it for you. You don't know where to turn for help. You don't know who to call.

Whatever that problem or worry is, it is not huge to Jesus. This huge thing in your eyes is like a crumb in His. You could flick a crumb off the table with your little finger, or blow it off with a puff of breath. Jesus needs even less power than that to solve your problem.

But don't think that because the problem is small to Him, that it is of little importance to Him. Remember that Jesus has a great love for you. Jesus has great compassion for you. Your problem is as important to Him as it is to you. So bring your requests to Jesus.

Great faith believes Jesus is capable of great things. About ten years ago some missionaries in an African nation had ordered some Bibles to have on hand for a big conference they were holding. The Bibles were confiscated by some government authorities who were hoping for a bribe to release the Bibles. The missionaries, even if they considered paying the bribe, had no money to do so. The situation seemed hopeless. The missionaries began to pray that the Bibles would be released. They were.

They then prayed that a shipping container that had been impounded would also be released, in time for the conference even though the release process usually took many weeks. The container was released on time for the conference.

This was beyond the missionaries' ability. But it was a small thing for Jesus. He is not limited by the unbelief of non-Christians.

Paul tells us to ask boldly, confident in the power of Jesus to meet our need. Jesus will not turn you away. He may not say yes, but He will not fail to give you an answer. So ask.

Whatever your need is today, believe that Jesus can meet your need. No matter how beyond your ability it is, it is a small thing for Him to accomplish.

Invitation

There may be someone here who has a sin problem. You know that you are a sinner before God. You know you will one day stand before God and answer for your sin. You know there is no excuse that will save you. None of your goodness will save you. None

of your charity giving will save you. None of your good intentions will save you. You know you will be condemned worthy of death and hell.

You need a savior, someone who can rescue you.

Well I have good news for you. God loves you. God loved you even before you were born. God knew you would need a savior. So God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for you on the cross.

Jesus died as a substitute for us. He died for your sins.

God offers to forgive your sins today if you will believe that Jesus died in your place. God will credit Jesus' perfect obedience to you, thereby pardoning you of all your sins. With this pardon comes an inheritance, eternal life.

So put your faith in Jesus today. Receive Him as your Savior and turn your life over to Him as your Lord.