

Developing Great Faith
May 24, 2015

Would you lie about being a Christian in order to save your life? That was the decision one Korean youth had to make. On November 20, 1950, Kim Duk-soo and his father were hiding in the root cellar of their home. They were hoping to escape to South Korea. But first they had to elude the North Korean soldiers who were arresting and executing Christians.

Kim tells this story later, with tears filling his eyes. "When we heard the soldiers coming, I was sure we would be killed. My father told me we could not tell a lie to save our lives. I told God I would serve him all my life if I got out of the root cellar alive."

The soldiers found Kim and his father and took them off to a makeshift prison. They were to be executed the next morning. That evening, a captain approached Kim. "Are you a Christian?" he asked. For a fleeting moment, lying to save his life seemed to be the only logical choice. But then he remembered his father's instruction about not lying to save their lives.

"I am a Christian," Kim said.

The captain drew closer, and whispered, "I am a Christian too. I used to be a Sunday school teacher before the war. You must escape tonight. I will help you."

Kim fled that night, having to leave his father under heavy guard awaiting his eventual death. The young Kim reached safety in South Korea. He learned to play the organ and played for worship services for many years.

Would you tell a lie to save your life? Or would you put your faith in Jesus no matter what the outcome?

When Jesus was on earth He was on a constant lookout for faith-filled people. Of all the people He met only twice do we have it recorded that He discovered someone with great faith. We're going to look at one of those meetings this morning.

We are in the gospel of Mark. Matthew recounts the same event in his gospel, providing a few more pertinent details. So I have combined the two accounts. The parts from Matthew are in italics.

Mark 7:24-29 (NIV) (parts of **Matthew 15:21-28** in *italics*)

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia (*a Canannite*). She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. *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.

"First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

"Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! For such a reply, you may go Your request is granted. The demon has left your daughter." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

If you do not yet have a great faith in Jesus, you can develop a great faith. That is our subject this morning. We're going to look at several aspects of a great faith in Jesus, as demonstrated in this story.

Great faith makes bold requests of God...

Jesus had come to a non-Jewish area. He and His disciples had left Galilee for a little R&R. The woman came to Jesus uninvited, interrupting their vacation. She boldly asked something of Jesus even though she was a woman, not a Jew, and had no relationship to Jesus.

By contrast, we do have a relationship with Jesus. We have the privilege of prayer because we are brothers and sisters of Jesus, have put our faith in Him as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. We do have the right to come and make requests of Him. Yet, I know some of you think you should not pray for yourselves. This is a false teaching. Jesus wants you to ask, expects you to ask.

In fact, you should ask boldly for the things you need. The book of Hebrews tells us how to make our requests. Because Jesus has experienced temptation just like we do...

Hebrews 4:16 (NIV) Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We are to pray with confidence. Some translations say to pray with boldness. Because of our relationship to Jesus, let us make bold requests of God. Because Jesus has experienced the power of temptation He has compassion towards us, so pray with boldness. Because Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit during his public ministry, as we need to, pray with boldness for all you need in order to live out the will of God.

In the fall of 2000 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. But God specializes in hopeless situations. 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.

God can do great things. He is not limited by the unbelief of non-Christians. So ask for what you need. By faith in Jesus ask boldly, confident of your relationship to Him.

Great faith makes bold requests of God, asking good things for the right reasons.

Make bold requests of God, but ask for good things for the right things. We are told to not ask for just anything or for any reason.

James 4:2f-3 (NIV) 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.

You can pray boldly because of your relationship to Jesus. You can also pray boldly when you are asking for the right reasons. The woman Jesus met did not have selfish motives, but was asking healing for her child. It was an unselfish request.

What have you been asking God for lately? Why have you been asking for this?

Is pride wrapped up in what you are asking for?

Is ego involved?

Is greed?

Is it to bring attention to you or to God?

Is it to build your kingdom or God's kingdom?

Does it have temporary (earthly) or eternal value?

These are questions you must ask yourself.

The woman was asking for healing for her daughter. In this instance, and by the hand of the one she believed to be the Messiah, God would be glorified by this healing. She asked a good thing for the right reasons.

Jesus said that giving her what she wanted did not fit His priorities. Jesus had come to this area for some rest with His disciples and to give them some instruction without the interruptions of the crowds. That is what Jesus meant in His answer to her. The children He spoke of were His disciples and the bread was His time, attention, and instruction. In addition, Jesus points out that He was sent only to Jews, not Gentiles.

Mark 7:27 (NIV) "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

Look how she answers. She gives Him a reason to say yes to her request.

Mark 7:28 (NIV) "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Now don't misunderstand how either is using this word dog. A different word for dog was used when it was an insult. This word refers to a family pet.

The woman recognized that she was not a Jew but spoke as if she were a pet of some Jews. 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. And the dogs are eating at the same time the children are. In essence she says, "I'm not asking for much,

just a few crumbs. It won't cost you any time or effort or interrupt why you came here. She gave Jesus a good reason to say "Yes" to her request.

The prophet Moses gives us a similar example of this in Exodus 32. In that passage God told the prophet Moses that He, God, was going to destroy the rebellious Israelites. Moses, in asking God not to do so, gave God a good reason why it would not be a good idea to destroy the Israelites.

Exodus 32:11-12 (NIV) But Moses sought the favor of the LORD (YAHWEH) his God. "O LORD (YAHWEH)," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

Moses was concerned for the glory and reputation of God. Moses pointed out how God's reputation would be hurt by destroying the Israelites, even though they deserved it. Moses gave God a good reason for granting Moses' request. God agreed and did not destroy the Israelites.

Great faith makes bold requests of God, asking good things for the right reasons.
Great Faith persists in asking for a definite answer.

At no time did Jesus say, "No!" to the woman's request. So she assumed she could keep asking, and she did.

How often do we not receive something because it is just an idle wish, not something we really want, not something we will persist in requesting? My kids asked for every toy they saw advertised on TV. But they only did so when they saw the ads. The toys they really wanted they asked for often, even when they were not reminded of it by an ad. That is how we knew what they really wanted. When it comes to what you want, how persistent are you?

Sue Evan-Jones of Yate, England finally got her driver's license in 1997. She was then 45 years old. It took her 27 years, 10 instructors, 1,800 driving lessons, and about \$30,000 in fees. When the examiner said she passed, Ms. Jones, asked, "Are you sure?"

Persistence is the quality of never giving up as long as what you want is still possible.

She kept asking until she got a definite answer. Are you persisting in your asking? Is this something you really, really, want? Is it something you are willing to go after? Or is it just an idle wish? How often do you see someone else's skill or job and think, I'd like to do that? I'd like to play the piano like Margaret does. I'd like to play the guitar like Jim does. I'd like to be able to teach a Bible class. I'd like to understand my computer. I'd like a desk job. I'd like an outdoor job.

How many of your desires are just daydreams, idle wishes, and how many are things you really, really want? God knows the difference. The things you really want, persist in your asking and pursuing until God gives a definite answer.

Great Faith believes the answer.

Notice that when Jesus said her daughter was healed, she believed Him and returned home. She took Jesus at His word.

That is also a mark of great faith. She didn't say, "Well, how do I know she is healed?" She didn't insist that Jesus come home with her to heal her daughter in person. She believed that Jesus had done what He said was done.

If you have a right to ask for what you are asking, that is, if you have a right relationship with Jesus, and you are asking for a good thing, and asking for the right reasons, and it is something you really want, then persist in your asking until God gives you a definite yes or no. But when He does, accept it. If Jesus says, "No" to your request. Accept it and quit asking. If He says yes to your request, believe Him. Don't keep asking after He has given you an answer. Believe the answer He gives you.

In the book of 2 Corinthians we learn that Paul the missionary had a physical ailment at one time. It was really bothering him, hindering, he thought, the work he was doing. So he prayed three times that God would heal him of it. Evidently Paul did not get an answer the first two times he asked God to heal him. After the third time God said, "No, I'm not going to heal you. This problem serves my purposes." What did Paul say? He said, "If that is Your will, that is fine with me," and he quit asking for healing of that problem.

We know that Paul had a great faith in God, a great faith in Christ Jesus, a great faith in the Holy Spirit. So when God gave Him a definite answer to his request, he knew God had an excellent reason for His answer. So Paul readily accepted God's answer and moved on. People with great faith in God persist in asking until God answers, but then great faith accepts God's answer, even if it is no.

Maybe today you have been asking God over and over and over for something. And He has told you no, but you have not accepted it. And since God said no, you feel like there is this huge obstacle in your relationship with God. There is an obstacle. You are the obstacle. Insisting on your will over God's will is the obstacle. The only solution is to accept God's answer and move on in submission, obedience, and humility.

Great faith believes that God's answer is always the right answer. Believe Him and move on.

How can I get great faith? Faith grows when it is exercised. The more you take God at His word and obey, the more God will prove the faithfulness of His promises to you. You will receive peace, joy, spiritual truth, courage, direction, wisdom, and more.

One of those promises is forgiveness. God promises that if you put your faith in Jesus' death as the full payment for all of your sin, God will forgive your sin and cover you with Jesus' righteousness. He takes your sin upon Himself. You receive His righteousness upon yourself. God now sees you as one of His own. And when you die, you will receive eternal life.

Today, won't you trust this first promise of God? He loves you. He sent you the Savior that you need for heaven. Believe Him and receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, turning your life over to Him.