

Persisting in faith

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[0 : 0 0] Let's go to Matthew chapter 15. We will wait on the Lord and we would look at this incident regarding the woman who came to the Lord from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, the woman of Canaan.

We find in verses 21 to 28 of this chapter. Now if you read through these chapters, when we take all these chapters here together, it is evident that the main subject being dealt with is the subject of faith.

Because we find this particular incident set in a context where immediately before it and immediately after it, the Lord to certain individuals says, O ye of little faith.

It is in that context of speaking of the littleness of faith on either side of this incident that we find this incident set.

In other words, this faith here that is commended by the Lord, this incident where the faith of this woman comes out strongly and in all its lustrous, it is set here in a way that shines the more brightly due to the littleness of faith that we find surrounding it.

[1 : 3 3] Even on the part of such as the disciples such as Peter himself, where the Lord said to him in the previous chapter, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

The woman is a lesson in faith, even to the disciples. And it's important to bear that in mind as we come to look at the incident.

But it's also important to bear in mind the way that Jesus deals with her. Because the way that Jesus deals with her is a way that is deliberately designed to bring that faith that she has out into the open.

He deals with her in such a way as draws her faith out of her. Faith will always manifest itself. Faith in Christ will always witness to itself. Faith in Christ will always come to be displayed in something or other.

And the Lord deals with this troubled woman in a way that seems surprising even speaking with respect shock.

[2 : 5 0] But it is designed specifically to reach her faith, to bring her faith visibly out into the open.

We can look at the incident following it through in the way that we find it here, because we can focus upon these difficulties that are set in a way.

Because the Lord himself as well as the disciples here, set out difficulties, barriers, hurdles before her. Difficulties that are designed to test her faith.

Difficulties that are designed to bring her faith to mount the difficulty and show itself to be true faith. And we can summarize the difficulties under our three headings.

First of all, the difficulty of the Lord's silence. And thirdly, the difficulty of the Lord's silence.

[4 : 0 4] And thirdly, the difficulty of the Lord's silence. The difficulty, first of all, of the Lord's silence.

In verse 22, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coast and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David.

My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. And he answered her, Not a word. Here is this woman with this burdened heart.

She's bringing it to Jesus. She knows that this Jesus is the answer to this great problem, this great burden. She knows that he touched those devils, that he has to power over devils.

She knows that he's a miracle worker. She knows that he is one who has done this kind of thing before. She knows that he can do for her what her heart is burdened for him to do.

[5 : 03] And she pleads with him in this poignant way, Lord, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. Lord, help me, have mercy on me.

O Lord, thou son of David. She recognizes his messianic title and qualities of God. and claims. To him she comes convinced that he can do what the burden of her heart wishes, that he will do for her.

And she's met. So it concludes silence. Heaven is silent to her prayers.

Heaven has not come with a voice speaking to her, of a ready and immediate answer to her prayer. She has unburdened her heart to the Lord. And the Lord is silent.

Heaven does not seem to us. There is no indication that the Lord has heard her words, let alone that he's going to do what they ask.

[6 : 07] But as we read through the incident, through the story, we find that this silence is the kind of silence, the silence of Christ, the silence of heaven, the silence that stays so much.

Because it's the silence that tests faith. It is the silence that deals with faith in a way that challenges it, and that really challenges it in such a way as to show itself.

The Lord is closing the door on this woman. He has slammed the door in her face by the silence. But he has slammed the door in her face, so to test and to challenge and to show her faith for what it is.

He has slammed the door in her face, not so that she will go away, but so that she will knock at it, and knock at it again, and knock at it again until it opens. It is the silence that brings faith into the open, because faith will not be put off by the silence.

Faith will not be put off by this immediate response of heaven where there is no world at all from the throne of God. Indeed, faith will use that to increase its presence.

[7 : 46] To increase its knocking at heaven's doors, even though it now seems to be fiddish. And the woman's faith just precisely does.

The silence of heaven is not off-putting soil. It is stimulating. It is motivating. It is strengthening.

It is challenging to have faith. And you and I surely know something of that. You and I in faith surely know something of that same kind of thing.

You've been praying for something. Perhaps you've been praying for it for a long time. And as yet heaven is silent in response to your prayer.

The door is still shut. Someone in your family you are praying for his or her concern. Some friend with a problem, you've brought it to the Lord, you've laid it before the Lord.

[8 : 51] You know that it's a burden that the Lord is willing to deal with. You know that the compassion of the Lord is where you unburden yourself of it. And still you're made with sight.

Why? Why not so if you let a cloud your heart. Who knows a good soul in your mother could heal, whose pain is going to heal. Not so that you'll turn your back on him, but so that your faith will mount the barrier the challenge should. So that your faith will say, well if it's still not open, I'm going to knock again. Like the athlete going through the rigorous program of training, the breathing exercises and so on. The breathing is deep. The whole process of approach is strength.

So with the vitality of faith. It isn't just in the replies of heaven's unanswered prayers. Yes, that strengthens. Of course that strengthens, that comfort, that garrison, when the answer to our prayer is given. But the silences are just as important, just as crucial to faith.

Because faith must mount the challenges. And faith must come out visibly, even against the silences of heaven, and pursue the believer's case. She doesn't stop knocking. She increases her plea. Through heaven's silence. Here then is the first of her challenges. The Lord's silence.

But before we leave the point, doesn't it remind us of how everything that burdens our hearts is to be brought to the Lord? It isn't faith at all that stays. Well when I really feel something big lying upon my spirit, then I'll bring that to the Lord. But at the moment I can cope. Everything seems to be going so far so well for me. When I really come to find myself greatly burdened, then I'll bring that to the Lord. But I don't want to actually bring everything to the Lord at the moment. I can find myself to help. That's not faith. That is not faith at all. Because faith recognizes that everything that we have, every providence, every event, every burden, however small, is there for us to bring to Christ. To bring to the Lord in faith. To unburden our hearts of in His presence.

[11 : 44] To unburden our hearts of in His presence. Oh what joy we often want. Oh what needless pain we bear. Oh because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Even when it's silence. Even when it's silence. The Lord still desires to hear the voice of His people. The voice of pain. The unburdening of a believing heart.

And then secondly. There is the sourness of the disciples. His disciples came and besought Him saying, send her away for she cries after us.

Now this isn't a desire on the disciples. To actually deal compassionately, longingly and take time over this woman. They want to be rid of this woman. She's crying after them.

And they're saying to the Lord. They're saying to the Lord. Send her away. You would have thought that the compassion, the pity of their own heart would be evoked. By this woman's burden, by this woman's problem. My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. And they don't say Lord give her of your time.

[13 : 21] Forget us. Forget us. Go after her. Deal with her. They say send her away for she cries after us. And you know the motive in the disciples mind is all too clear in these words. Send her away for she cries after us.

Why do they want to actually see this woman. Why do they want to see this woman left behind or put away? Because she's a nuisance. She's disturbing their little numbers. She's making too many demands on them. Their little cozy huddle is being disturbed.

To them, she's a bit of a pest. And they want to see this woman. And they want to see this woman. They want to see this woman. And they want to see this woman. They want to see this woman. And they want to see this woman. Too much of a bother. She's not an Israelite anyway. She's a Gentile.

Why spend time over the likes of this woman? Send her away Lord, for she cries after her. And whatever lessons there are in that, and certainly we take account of the facts, that it wasn't at that point evident to them, of course, as it was later as we find in the book of Acts, how the Gentiles were as much part of the salvation of God as the Jewish people themselves.

How the Gospel embraced the likes of this woman as much as Peter and John and James and all these Jews. But the lessons are clear for ourselves. What a terrible thing it is. What a solemn thing it is. What a dishonouring thing it is to the Lord for any of us.

[15 : 10] God forbid that it should be. That any of us should place any stumbling block ahead of a seeker after Christ.

God forbid that it is. It is all too easy for us to think that only those who are of like minds with ourselves are to be welcome.

That the Church of God exists on earth only to bring in those who see things from the same perspective as ourselves. Those who will not actually ruffle or disturb. Those who will not make demands upon us. Those who will not actually be of a different persuasion to ourselves.

All seekers after Christ must be welcomed, must be encouraged, must be nurtured, must be pointed to Christ.

You know the Lord speaking through Timothy, through Paul rather spoke to Timothy regarding the ministry.

[16 : 18] Be instant, he says, in season and out of season. Be ready at all times to deal with whoever it is makes demands upon you.

But it is true of every Christian also that we as a church must be at all times instant, in season and out of season. So that such as this woman of Canaan seeking after Christ will truly know the welcome of a believing church.

We will know that here indeed is a group of people of God who are desirous that she be led to Christ, that he be led to Christ.

Evangelism must always reach out. Our own lives must always reach out. But reach out to all different kinds.

They shall come from the north and from the south and from the east and from the west and take their place in the kingdom of God.

[17 : 29] The whole emphasis on unity, on harmony, on peace is absolutely essential.

But it must never be with the kind of attitude that says, the likes of those that are unlike ourselves, can have no place in the kingdom of God in the fellowship of this church.

Of course we value our harmony, our peace, we pray to God for it to continue. But that's entirely different to a holy huddle.

A kind of preventing of seekers after Christ. I'm sure that's not what we are. I'm not getting at anyone here. When I'm saying these things, what I'm saying is that it actually brings us to examine our attitudes.

To make sure that this is what we continue to be. A church that welcomes seekers. A church that welcomes those who are different to ourselves in whatever respect.

[18 : 41] Who are seeking after Christ. Who are longing to have the burden of their hearts relieved in the power of Christ. And to maintain with all that variety, the harmony and the peace, the discipline and the principles of the gospel of Christ.

Here indeed then, our disciples who place a barrier before this woman. Is she going to be put off by this? Is her faith going to be seen to be no true faith after all?

What's she going to do? Is this going to be so off-putting, so offensive to this woman that she'll say, Well no, there's no place there for me. I'd better go and look somewhere else. No.

She keeps coming. And before she can reply, the Lord himself sets out that third barrier, that third difficulty for her.

So, the Lord says, And then there's a third barrier. I am not sent, he says, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And then there's another statement.

[19 : 57] But there is an intervening response on her part.

So let's just follow the statement first of all, then the response, and then the next statement. I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

I am sent, he says. I'm here on a mission. I'm here on a mission. I'm here on a mission to save lost sheep. To bring them into the fold. To bring them into security.

But I'm sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. You're not of Israel. You're a Canaanite. If his silence was difficult. If his silence was a challenge to her faith.

His statement is even worse. Because it seems to close the door altogether and firmly and finally. I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

[21 : 10] Surely that's going to be the final straw. Surely that's going to send her away elsewhere. Surely that is going to make her turn about. And go in the opposite direction.

To look for a relief from her burden. Somewhere other than Christ. But no friends, no. Because that is not how faith operates. Faith operates mounting the challenges.

Faith operates grappling with the difficulties. Because faith is aimed at Christ. And as faith is aimed at Christ, nothing.

Nothing short of Christ will satisfy. And nothing but the touch of Christ. Will comfort this heart.

She's not put off. She came. She worshipped him and said, Lord, help me. When he said, Lord, help me.

[22 : 11] Isn't it apparent in these words. That she's saying, Lord, I've no one else to go to. There is no one else that can deal with the problem, with the burden that I have.

But thou thyself alone, Lord, you help me. Because where else can I go with it? Who else can do for me what I know that thou canst do?

Oh, Lord, help me. Help me. Help me. But you notice what comes before that.

Then came she and worshipped him and said, Lord, help me. Now her faith is coming to the fore, coming to a clear sight, to a clear declaration more so than it has been up to now.

Because it is seen in the attitude of worship. If it was simply the words, Lord, help me.

[23 : 22] We could conclude this is a desperate woman. She has a psychological attitude. She has a real need, a physical need. Her daughter has this great disease, this great devil possession, whatever we may call it.

And it is that that has brought her to us, this sheer desperation that makes her keep on coming against all that seems to be said before us.

If there was nothing but the words, Lord, help me themselves, we could say this is a desperate woman. That's the explanation for why she comes again and again. Well, she is a desperate woman.

But she comes worshipping. And there is much more than desperation in that. Because worshipping captures for us the essence of faith.

Because without worship, faith is meaningless. This is a woman whose faith is seen, not just in saying to the Lord, Lord, help me.

[24 : 29] Not just in regarding Christ as the one who alone can help us. But in regarding him, worship for me. With ardent devotion.

And faith must always have that element of worship.

Faith is not simply saying about God, I believe that God can do everything that I ask. It's not simply saying, I believe that God is able to work miraculously.

It's not simply saying, I believe that God can do more, exceedingly more than I can ever ask or think. It's not simply saying, I believe that that is true of God.

I believe that God can do that. It is saying that worshipfully. It is worshipping God for being able to do that. It is worshipping God as creator, as almighty, as redeemer, as sustainer.

[25 : 35] As one to whom we owe an account. As one whose grace has actually reached out and brought us salvation. To put it another way, faith must be filled with a sense of indebtedness.

We are debtors, he's called to grace. Debtors. Debtors. Debtors to such an extent that we cannot bring anything in our hands.

That will gain the acceptance of God or will gain us acceptance in God's sight. It's all of grace. It's all by what God himself provides in Christ.

Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I bring debtorship. Lies at the heart of faith. And that's why faith worships.

That's why this woman says, Lord help me in a worshipping attitude. Without that element of worship, to define faith is impossible.

[26 : 56] However much a person can say, I believe that God can do this or that. However much I may see a person persevering in asking God to do a certain thing.

I might say of that person, that that person has faith. But show me someone whose every step is a worshipping step.

Who asks God to do the impossible worship for me. And we can certainly see of that person. That is a believer. That is a man or a woman or a child of faith.

She came and worshipped himself. She held on to him worshippingly. And said, Lord help me.

And if we're examining what faith is for ourselves. You and I today must look to this. Do we truly have the element of worship?

[28 : 05] Are we here to really worship God? Worshipping God out of a sense of indebtedness. Not just in a formal fashion.

Not just in going through the motions. Not just doing it the same way and because someone else is doing it. But worshipping God from the depths of our own heart. In an acknowledgement of what we are as debtors to grace.

Pleading with God in our prayers. Worship for me. That's faith. That's faith coming to the surface. Faith expressing itself in the devotions of a believing heart.

And she came and said, Lord help me. But she did so as a worshipping. And then the Lord brings his final difficulty before her.

And he answered and said, it is not meat. It is not suitable to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. It's not an appropriate thing he says.

[29 : 09] To take what belongs to the children and to cast it to dogs. And you see he is saying by that to this woman. I have food. I certainly have something that can sustain.

But it belongs to the children. It belongs to Israel. It's not appropriate for me to take that. To take that. And to bring it and give it to dogs.

You might think that would certainly, unquestionably be the final straw.

But she says, truth Lord. I accept that, she says. I accept everything you say about it.

But even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. You see how quickly her faith has reacted. She has reacted in faith.

[30 : 12] She has realized that the Lord has taken the bolt of the door. Because when he has said that this food belongs to the children. It is the children's right to sit at the table. She says, yes.

But there are always leftovers. There are always crumbs that fall to the ground, to the floor. And she says, that will do for me. Whether I belong to Israel or not.

To these children or not. Lord, just give me a crown. And that will be enough. And that will be enough. She has the insight of faith.

That realizes that while the fear is set on the table for the children. While she has here been placed, as the Lord himself has put it, among the dogs.

And yet she says, Lord the crowns. Give me the crowns. And that will be enough.

[31 : 17] And you see how faith accepts the word of the Lord. How faith accepts the word of the Lord, whatever it says about ourselves.

Here is a woman to whom the Lord says, it's not appropriate to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs. Here is a woman to whom the Lord says, your place is under the table.

And she responds, truth Lord. Everything that you say is absolutely correct.

Because there is not only a worshipping element in faith. There is a submissive element in faith. The element of submission that casts yourself completely on the Lord and on his word.

Whatever it is going to say about you or about me today, you have to say if you have faith, truth Lord. And it is not faith that rejects whatever it says about you.

[32 : 29] Even when it tells you that you are conceived in iniquity and sin. When it tells you that your heart and mind, heart is so in the grip of sin.

That sin governs your life until Christ by his power breaks the shackles of that sin. That you are totally depraved as a sinner. That sin has affected every part of your faculties.

Conscience, will, soul, affections, emotions. All that we are is affected and stained by sin. In sin you were conceived.

In sin you were brought forth into this world. When the Bible labels you a sinner in all that sin means, in all that a sinner means. It is not faith that says, I can't accept that.

It is not faith that says, that is not for me. It is unbelief that says that. Here is a woman who accepts whatever is worst about herself.

[33 : 39] Because the Lord says it. Because the Lord says it. Because the Lord says it. Faith accepts it. The Lord, this woman rather, hasn't come to the Lord with a sense of how good she is in herself.

But she does have a grasp of how good Christ is. And of how the goodness of Christ can meet with her own wretchedness.

With the burden of her heart concerning her loved one. In faith she says to the Lord, say what you like.

It is true. Say whatever it is about me that you know. Truth, Lord. It is all true because it is thy word.

And because it is thy word I accept. Oh, the submissiveness of faith. Oh, that you and I had more of that submissiveness.

[34 : 49] Of the submissiveness that would lean entirely on Christ and on his word. That would take him at his word. That would take his word with confidence. That would bring his word to himself and say, Lord, thou hast said it.

Therefore I believe. Therefore it cannot be untruth. Truth, Lord. And the Lord commends her faith.

Oh woman, great is thy faith. Oh woman, great is thy faith. Not just oh woman thou hast faith. But oh woman, great is thy faith.

She has mounted all these challenges. Because her faith is true faith, real faith, vital faith in Christ himself. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.

But let me finish with one other point. A very important point. And it is this.

[35 : 54] Broken hearts. Hearts that look to the Lord seekingly in faith. And never be satisfied with anything less, with anything short of the Lord himself.

Whatever advice ministers, elders, friends may give. That by itself is never enough. Think of Mary Magdalene.

There she is weeping at the sepulch. And she meets someone who counsels her. Who gives her advice.

Words of comfort. And it's no less than an angel. An angel who speaks to her and says, Why weepest thou woman? He is not here.

He is risen. But that can never mend by itself. The tail, the rent, in that woman's heart.

[37 : 04] They have taken away my Lord. And I know not where they have led. And until she again and her Lord meet face to face.

What are the words of an angel? Compared to the word that comes to her from his lips. Maybe. You and I may be burdened here today.

Maybe it's something to do with a loved one just as was the case with this woman. Maybe you've never truly known what it is to come to him with your burdens.

Believingly, seekingly, seriously. Maybe you've never actually known what it is to meet with himself personally. Maybe you're in the position of one who does know that but who has gone back.

Who has led all these days, months, years even sleep. And you've never come again to unburden yourself to the Lord.

[38 : 10] To find again the warmth of his face. I may give you advice from the pulpit.

An elder might give you advice in his Christian experience. Christian friends may give you advice and all of that advice, advice put together, may be good, may be profitable, may be encouraging.

Maybe something that you can carry through and profitably. But you must never stop short of this.

To meet again with Christ himself. To pursue against every difficulty that is set in your way until you have come to have the burden of your heart relieved.

Until you know again that in face to face with Christ, you and he are reconciled.

[39 : 14] Are in fellowship together with him. Because here is a woman who stands as an example forever more of persistent faith.

Begging for crumbs. And yet, when we come to find a crumb from Christ, there are not crumbs at all, are they?

But a fullness of blessing. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. Woman greatest I feel.

He never gives meagrely. He never gives a half blessing. But a fullness of life. And a fullness of blessing. That will be yours also.

And that you will experience. In the persistence and the pursuit of your faith. Of your faith. Don't be put on.

[40 : 21] Make your way to Christ. Because that is the reference point for all faith. The Lord himself.

And until you have reached that point. You will never know what it is. To have heart satisfaction. But having met with himself.

You will never want satisfaction. Anywhere else. Because you know. That it is never anywhere else. But in himself. Lord. You have me.

And I will have satisfaction. We bless thy name, O Lord. For thy readiness to receive us. We bless thy name, O Lord. For thy readiness to receive us. We bless thy name, O Lord. For thy readiness to receive us.

We bless thy name, O Lord. For thy readiness to receive us.

[41 : 24] We bless thy name. That thou art in all things. Able to deal with our burdens. And we thank thee. That we can go to no other.

In a way that will truly satisfy us. For we know that when we try so much of what the world affords us. When we take our burdens elsewhere.

It can but lead to bitterness and disappointment in the end. And O Lord, help us today, then we pray thee. To truly come to thyself.

With the burdens of all our hearts. Knowing that thou art able to deal with each one. Even when we all come. In the one moment.

We thank thee for thy capacity. That it is that of the almighty one. And pray that thou would manifest thyself to us. In a way that would strengthen our faith.

[42 : 26] That would enable us to continue. And to persevere. Against all that we may have in our lives. That we may imagine.

It will close us out for us. Even fellowship with thyself. Be pleased, we pray thee. To enable us to use these things. In a way that would strengthen us.

And enable us to go onwards. Looking unto Jesus. The author and finisher of our faith. Hear us, we pray.

In his name and for his sake. Amen.