

A knock arrived at the front door of Open Bible. I went to the door and saw a woman with tattered hair, tattoos on both arms, jeans with holes in them. A car from the 1970's with several dents and some duck tape on it was parked under the overhang. I opened the door. She told me that she needed help. I pointed her to my office. She related how she lived in the Ocala Forest in a tent with her daughter and boyfriend. She needed food. She needed gas for the car. Her daughter was very sick. Her eyes were bugged out, and strange voices were coming from her. The lady looked at me and said, she needed me to pray over her daughter. She thought maybe she had a devil. But I said nothing. I just stared blankly at her. Meanwhile, two church councilmen from Open Bible walked by. Les Stauske and Greg Wendorf saw the woman in my office since the door was open. Les said, "Pastor just buy the tramp a gas card and be done with her." Greg Wendorf said, "Just get that woman out of here. Her clothing is going to dirty the office chairs." Finally, I looked at the woman and said. "I was called to serve the lost sheep of the Villages. I only reach out to people over 55 who live in gated communities." The woman looked at me, "Please Pastor, Help me." I responded: It is not right to give the bread which is reserved for Villagers, and to give it to the pet that live with families in the Ocala Forest". The woman looked at me and said, "But even those pet dogs in the Ocala forest, get the scraps from the master's table. Some popcorn here, some bites of leftover fish or chicken there". I looked at the woman and said, "You have an unbelievable persistence and trust in me that I will help you. I will get you gas, some food, and go out and pray for your daughter."

This story may seem like it would be impossible to take place, but just such a story took place in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The woman was not from the Ocala Forest but from the land of Canaan. Only two people in the ministry of Jesus Christ were complimented by Jesus for having a great faith, a Roman Centurion and a Gentile woman from Canaan. Today, we want to be number 3. And so we ask Jesus, "Give Me a Great Faith!"

The woman in our lesson today was facing an unbelievable trial. No it wasn't taking care of her husband who had dementia. No it wasn't taking care of her husband who had suffered a stroke. Rather, a young daughter, who was demon possessed. Yes, real live evil angels possessing her child. Where does she turn for help? A psychiatrist? A Roman Catholic priest? The state mental health board? No she turns to Jesus.

She approaches Jesus and says, "Have mercy on me, Oh Lord, You Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. This woman knew Jesus could help her. Her faith was so strong that she did not bring the child to Christ nor did she ask Christ to go to her child; but she came to Jesus knowing that a Word from Him would heal her daughter. The fact that she called Him "You Son of David" shows she regarded Jesus as the true\_Savior. Her need drove her to Christ. Had her daughter been well, she would never have come to Christ. Thus the Lord still drives people to Him today. He knows that\_their soul is the most precious possession that they have; and when He finds them falling away from Him, drifting away from church, forgetting to say their prayers, neglecting to read their Bible, or not living the Christian life, then He at times sends adversity, sickness, affliction, trials and tribulations, in order to drive them back to Himself. God, in His great love, must at times use the big stick of affliction on our body in order to save our priceless soul. Yes, when darkness looms in your life, turn to Jesus.

But in verse 23, we find Jesus doing exactly the opposite to what we think He should. He does not rush to her aid. He does not agree to follow Her home. He does not soothe her heart with words of encouragement. No, it says he remained silent. “He answered her not a word.”

Is this the Jesus we know? The lips that were accustomed to say kind words were sealed. The ears that were ever open to the faintest cry for help were deaf to this woman’s plea. The hand that was always willing to help was withdrawn from her. The fountain of love seemed frozen. Has it happened to you. You have called out to Jesus for help, again and again, but it seems that no one is at home. No one is listening. When answers do not come when we expect them, it is easy enough to just lose hope and give up. Why was Jesus silent? He was silent in order to test her faith, to see whether it was genuine or simply like sounding brass. Thus Christ also tests us today. His delays are not denials. They are *like acid that tests the metal to see whether it is genuine gold or common brass.*

Then, having tested her faith, He decided to strengthen it by offering it resistance. Just as a weight lifter builds his muscles by lifting heavy weights that offer resistance to him, so Jesus strengthened this woman’s faith by offering her resistance. Yes, he also did this to encourage us to pray and not to faint. He does not want us to give up after the first rebuff. He wants us to persevere in prayer, to keep praying until he helps us.

And now the silence of Jesus becomes so oppressive that the disciples intercede for this woman. They said, “Send her away!” In modern words we would translate that as, ‘She is a pain and she is annoying, so get rid of her!’ And to make matters worse, Jesus did not rebuke his disciples for being so selfish. I can’t tell you how many times Satan will try to make you feel as if you have been bothering Jesus, especially when you pray over, and over and over again.

Finally Christ breaks the silence. He tells his disciples, “I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Oh how this must have puffed their pride. And it was true. Christ was not sent to the heathen. He came to minister first to the Jews. Later on the message would be preached in all the world, but now it was to be localized in the Holy land .

This was the poor woman’s darkest moment. Her own pleading had failed. The intercession of Christ’s friends did not help. She was a lost sheep, that was true, but she did not belong to the chosen house of Israel. But still she remained undaunted. She fell at Christ’s feet and worshiped him. In deep agony, she cried out, “Lord, Help me.” Often the more intense the feeling, the fewer the words. This beautiful little prayer, Lord help me, will help us over many a difficulty.

But did her humility and perseverance help her? Apparently not, for what does the Son of David answer her? It is not right to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to the dogs.” By that our Savior meant to say, “It is not right to take My word and my miracles that belong to the children of Israel and give them to you heathen dogs.

Wow. First he ignores her, then he tell his disciples that her nationality was at fault, and now he insults her by calling her a dog. However the original language of the Bible here let’s us know that Jesus doesn’t call her a stray dog. He uses a different word that suggests a little dog, a pet, a housedog. We may view this remark as final rejection, but the woman somehow sees a glimmer of hope in Jesus’ words.

She replies, in verse 27, “Truth Lord but the dogs eat from the crumbs that fall

from their masters' table." Don't miss this, don't miss this! You see the Jews had called the Gentiles dogs all the time but never this kind of dog. They were always stray dogs but never housedogs. She in essence says, you call me a pet dog and I'm fine with that. I've got no problems with that. But if I am, then I've got a master. You see those stray dogs are left on their own to fend for themselves. They must go digging here and there to find a bone. But not a housedog. A housedog has a master. So Lord, give the children in the family the bread, but give me the crumbs that belong to me as the family dog. Thus, she took hold of the hand that was put forth to push her away. All these obstacles just made her faith stronger.

One time a boy went with an elderly farmer to cut young hickory trees for ax handles. As they walked through the woods, they noticed many strong looking young hickory trees. The boy said, "They look good for ax handles. But the farmer replied, "Let's go to the top of the hill where the trees have been exposed to more severe weather. We will find the trees much stronger there where they have been rocked back and forth by the wind. Those trees will make much tougher ax handles. Is it not true that when we are exposed to the storms of sickness, sorrow, trials, when we are rocked back and forth by the fierce winds of adversity, we are driven to the Word and thus become much stronger Christians? No wonder Christ in a burst of admiration told this woman, O woman, great is your faith; be it as you say. At last Christ is himself. Now Jesus is all love, all grace, all mercy. And he praises this woman, not for her perseverance, not for her wisdom or her cleverness, but for her faith, for this was the fountain from which all these other virtues flowed. Her faith was genuine

Oh, how wonderful it would be if Christ would praise us, as He did this woman, for our faith. For what good is it if Christ praises us for our knowledge or our wisdom or our money or strength or fame? Fame? How fleeting? Fifty years from now tourists in Washington will not know which statesman cast in bronze helped us through some present crisis. Riches? What good will it do to have people point to our grave and say, "There lies the richest man in the cemetery? Beauty? Beauty is only skin deep. Beauty is the first present God gives to women, and the first he takes away. But faith in beneficial in this life and reaps reward in the life to come. Faith is the hand that reaches through the black clouds of despair and lays hold of the promises God gives in His Word. Therefore in view of her faith Christ says, Be it to you as you will. He says in effect, "Here is the key to the storehouse. Don't take a crumb, but take as many loaves as you like." Oh, my friends, nations can go to school at the feet of this mother. What lesson have you learned? Have you learned to persevere in prayer and not to faint? This woman was not discouraged by the silence of Jesus. She did not lose hope when the intercession of the disciples failed. She did not despair when Christ called her a dog. We must likewise persevere in prayer. Have you also learned that success in prayer comes by accepting the judgment that Christ pronounces upon you? This mother did not argue when Christ called her a dog; instead she said, true Lord, and pleaded her cause on that ground. When God speaks to us through His Word and says, You are a sinner, then answer, it's the truth Lord. When he says, You have broken my laws, say, it is true Lord. You have helped crucify my Son, you have grieved my spirit, you deserve to be cast in hell, then answer, it is true Lord. It is all too true, but God of mercy so is this: You never said, seek my face in vain. You said, seek me and you shall live. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be

as wool. The blood of Jesus Christ, His son, cleanses us from all sins. True Lord. It is all true. We are great sinners, every last one of us. But the bread of your mercies far outweighs the crumbs of our shortcomings. This woman was successful in her prayers through her faith. We also shall be. No quitters here, Lord. Give us all a Great Faith!