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Matthew 15:21-28

By Pastor Wayne Halldorson
“An Example of Great Faith”

1. *Trusting*
2. *Humble*
3. *Persistent*

I'm sure you understand the concept of **“Tough Love”**. You've probably experienced it, and maybe shown it. Typically we think of **“Tough Love”** in the realm of discipline – but you also see it with training. Coaches and teachers tend to be harder on those who are gifted – not to beat them down, but rather to build them up – to help them realize their potential and be their best.

Now, hang on to that concept of *Tough Love for the purpose of training and building someone up*. And see how Jesus uses it to bring out the best in a Canaanite woman – a woman he held up **An Example of Great Faith**.

Matthew 15:21-28

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 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.”

23 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.”

24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

25 The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

26 He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

27 “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

28 Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Only twice in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry do we hear him praise someone for having a great faith. One was a Roman Centurion who came to Jesus seeking help for his paralysed servant. And the other is this Canaanite woman who came to Jesus begging him to help her daughter.

Certainly the religious leaders of the day were never praised – they had no faith at all, they blatantly denied Jesus. But the disciples were never praised for having a strong faith. In fact, 6 times in Matthew alone, the disciples are rebuked for “Little Faith” (Remember last week, Peter sank when Jesus called him out on the water).

Yet this lowly, emotionally distraught, Gentile woman is held up by Jesus as an example of Great Faith – a high honour coming from the Son of God! Instead of just granting her request immediately, Jesus lured out of her **3** attributes of a Great Faith: It's trusting, It's humble, and It's persistent.

Notice how Jesus as an expert teacher brings those qualities out in her:

- She came to Jesus trusting that He could help her – He waited and let that trust show itself.
- She kept on shouting, crying out, “Lord, Son of David” – she trusted that He was the Messiah, also the Son of God – having power over all things, power also to drive out the demon who was torturing her daughter.
- Jesus said nothing – he knew she would pass the test and not give up on her faith – he gave her opportunity to show persistence.
- The Greek tenses stress how she kept on crying out after Him – to the point where the Disciples were sick of hearing her, they kept urging Jesus to send her off – but she didn't give up.
- Then, Jesus brings out of her Humility. **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”** Her response: we're told she knelt before him – the word is stronger than that, it's a picture of worship – someone falling down, with her face to the ground out of humble reverence. She still had trust, she was still persistent, she was showing humility.
- She didn't snap back, “I'm just as good/deserving as any Israelite!” No – she humbly begged for mercy, “Lord Help me.”
- Then with Jesus' final statement, he brings out the best in her, **“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”** Her response is striking and it reveals so much about her: **Yes Lord** – Still acknowledging Him as Lord – the one in control. The word YES – “I don't deserve equal rights, I don't deserve your kindness or help, I don't mind being a lap dog while the Israelites are treated like children.”

- “**But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.**” She never gave up, never questioned his power to help, never complained that Israel had first place as God’s chosen nation – she just wanted a crumb; mercy.

Jesus masterfully and lovingly brought these qualities of Faith out in her. He may have seemed harsh, but he had her spiritual best interest at heart. And on top of that, He granted her request and healed her daughter. With Christ, there are no crumbs, he gave her everything she wanted and more – then held her up as an example to countless people of one who has Great Faith.

How do you think the disciples felt? They were telling Jesus to send this woman away! They kept hearing Jesus call them, “ojligovpiste” / “tiny-faith” a word translated: “You of little Faith.” Jesus put them in their place.

How do you stand up next to her? I think she puts me to shame, and probably you as well.

- Do you always **trust** that Jesus can help you? That he can actually cure that incurable illness, that he can actually make a Christian out of that stubborn unbelieving relative? What about the small things: That he actually cares and can do something about the fact that you have a runny nose or an ingrown toenail? He has time for things like that - He is God.
- Am I really **Humble** like this woman? Do I graciously accept my place and role in this world – or sometimes complain that it’s unfair. Do I look at others and want what they have, or humbly thank God for the abundance He has given me? I’m not as humble as she was.
- She’s got us beat when it comes to **Persistence** too! She kept crying out and never gave up until He gave her an answer. We give up too quickly. He wants us to keep on praying, to keep on asking Him – to wait for His answer, whether it’s “yes” or “no”. Rather, don’t we ask once or twice – then just assume the answer is “No”? If, that is, we even find time to pray at all. *She* was persistent.

Looking at her example of Great Faith makes us feel kinda crummy. Mark Twain once said, “**Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.**”

It is hard to take an honest look at yourself and see how you compare to what God wants and demands. It’s hard to expose the unbelief where trust belongs. The pride where humility is supposed to be. The laziness where persistence should be.

But, we have a **Real Solution**. Trying to be better isn’t the answer – that doesn’t help the past and offers no power to change the future. The CROSS is the solution. Go to the cross – there all your sin, unbelief, pride, and weakness are completely taken care of. He took it all away! He poured out His mercy on you and took care of your biggest problem – the one with eternal consequences.

- Jesus trusted his Father perfectly – right through his crucifixion. “**Father into your hands I commit my Spirit**” He gives that perfect trust to you – He earned it for you.
- His Humility. The Almighty King of the Universe, the One who designed human beings right down to the smallest detail – was silent while they spit in his face and punched him. He gives that humility to you – He earned it for you.
- His unbelievable persistence. The hours spent in prayer, the time he sweat drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane – That persistence he gives to you – He earned it for you.

The cross is the only place to go when we feel guilt, shame or unworthiness – for there we see all that Christ so freely gives us. Guess what that makes you, you are – **An Example of Great Faith**.

You get to go out to the world and show off what Jesus has given to you! People will see how you trust God in all circumstances, how you’re so humble even when treated unfairly, how persistent you are in prayer, worship, and doing what is right. And they’ll feel pretty crummy – but then you get to point them to the cross and show them what Jesus has given you.

It wasn’t easy for that Canaanite woman to undergo Jesus “*Tough Love*.” But the results were worth it – He brought out the best in her and held her up as an example. He does the same for you. He gives you challenges, burdens, suffering – not to crush you, but to build you up, to bring out the best in you. And when you fail – He brings you to the cross, and sends you away forgiven and restored. He sends you out into the world as a witness; an Example of Great Faith.

God help us be great examples, and lead others to the cross!