**THE FORGING OF MEGA FAITH**

**(Matthew 15:21-28)**

When homeschooling is done well, it allows for creative learning opportunities that kids would not be able to have in larger settings. A case in point is what Lance, Sarah, and Gemma got to do this last Thursday. Ruth Ann contacted a man who has a portable forge. He set up his forge on the north side of the parsonage in the shade of the trees. He also set up his anvil and taught the kids how to work and shape iron. He stayed from morning ‘til mid-afternoon. It was all quite impressive and highly educational.

On the morning he came, I was working on my Sunday evening message. Tonight’s message deals with practical ministry, the kind where the rubber meets the road. As I was thinking through the message, I remembered a book where the author uses the phrase “real world faith” in the title of his book. I found the book in my library, and I had to chuckle when I re-read the title, which is, *Forging a Real-World Faith.* The book was written by Gordon MacDonald 30-years ago. On the first page of his first chapter, he wrote about his one and only time visit to a blacksmith’s shop:

The smithy I came to watch was a robust, sweaty man dressed in coveralls who worked in intense heat near an open fire called a *forge.* In his hand was an enormous hammer, the most frequently used tool in the process of *forging.* His “desk” was a black iron anvil, and upon it he rested a thick, superheated metal rod. I watched as he repeatedly struck the almost-molten piece with his hammer, creating a spectacular shower of sparks.

The kids not only got to see our guest do those things, but they themselves repeatedly got to heat up the iron rod until it was red-hot, and they got to hammer and shape that iron into a useable keepsake. I have to confess, “I am more than just a bit envious.”

In my favorite chapter of MacDonald’s book, he tells about a time that he hired a cement and gravel man to come dump a load of crushed rock on a muddy spot near his New Hampshire home in the woods. It had rained for several days straight. When the fellow named Bill arrived with his dump truck, he got too close to the muddy area, and the eight rear wheels of his dump truck sank up to the axels in that mud. That truck wasn’t going anywhere without a significant amount of help from an outside force.

Gordon drove Bill back to his place of business where Bill loaded his bulldozer onto a flatbed truck, and both returned to Gordon’s house. Gordon watched as Bill attached the stranded dump truck to his Caterpillar dozer with a heavy chain. The dozer had adequate power, but the New Hampshire mud proved to be stronger than the chain. It was clear they needed a heavier and stronger chain.

Once again, Gordon took Bill back to his shop, and they returned with a chain suitable for the job, and in Gordon’s words, “The dump truck obediently came forth.”

Gordon found within the experience a parable. He said that all of us face muddy moments in life. They come in the form of doubts, fears, difficult decisions, painful afflictions, and troublesome circumstances. God has the sufficient power to bring us out of the muddy problems in which we get stuck, but **there has to be something to link His Power to our problem. Our faith is the chain that links the two.**

Is your chain strong enough or will your muddy problem prove to be stronger than your faith? How can we go about forging a strong chain, a strong faith?

We are in Matthew 15. In the previous chapter, Jesus told Peter, the only one of the disciples to get out of the boat that his faith was little. In the next chapter and two additional times in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus characterized the faith of His disciples as being *little.* In this chapter, however, Jesus addresses a woman and commends her for having **great** faith.

There is only one time in all of the Scripture that the noun *faith* and the adjective *great* is used together, and it is found in today’s text—Matthew 15:21-28. The word great which Jesus used is the word from which we get the word *mega.* Maybe you have shopped in a mega mall or have worshiped in a mega church. My download speed at the house measures 100 megabits per second. A city that boasts a population of more than a million is a megacity.

When used as a measurement, *mega* means one million. Most often it just means large or really big. That was what Jesus was saying about a certain woman’s faith—it was unusually large. Let’s read the story.

Jesus needed some time away from the crowds; so, He leaves the land of Israel. As far as we know, this was the only time He had been away from his homeland since He was taken to Egypt as a baby. Jesus leaves Jewish territory by traveling to the Phoenician land of Tyre and Sidon just to the north and west of Galilee. Jesus knows the Jewish leaders would not dare to look for Him there. That would take them into the land of the Gentiles, and they wouldn’t do that.

1. **MEGA FAITH BEGINS WITH A BIG NEED.**

We are not told how the woman in the story learned of Jesus’ presence in her district. We know from Mark’s gospel that the multitudes that followed Jesus included people from Tyre and Sidon. Presumably, either this woman had seen Jesus before or someone she knew recognized Him and pointed Him out when He arrived. Regardless, she knew who Jesus was, and she knew Jesus was near, and she came to Him with her request.

This woman had a big need involving her daughter. We are not told the age of the daughter, but the mother claims her daughter is demon-possessed. It doesn’t appear that the girl is with her mother. Apparently, the mother left her in the care of someone else and came to Jesus begging Him to heal her little girl. She didn’t make one simple, dignified request. In the Phillips translation, it says that she came “crying at the top of her voice.” In his commentary, R. T. France translates v. 22 as, “kept shouting.”

Over and over, again and again, this distraught lady loudly begs Jesus to do something for her daughter.

David Dykes compared what this woman was doing with you crashing a party and then going up to the guest of honor and asking if he was jumper cables because you need help starting your car. What she was doing was inappropriate. It was unwanted. She was being a nuisance. The disciples are getting tired of her incessant shouting and ask Jesus to just send her away (v. 23).

The woman is obviously desperate. Dykes said in a sermon on this passage:

I’ve often said God always meets you at the P.O.T.D. That stands for the Point of Total Desperation . . . God brings us to these points of desperation because He knows some of us are so hardheaded that we will only seek Him in times of desperation. Vance Havner used to say the problem with unanswered prayer is that “the situation is desperate but the saints are not.” Are you desperate enough to cry out to Jesus?

It is when we are desperate that God knows we mean it. That is when we He knows we are serious. Read the Book of Psalms. Notice David crying out to God, begging for God to deliver Him, to rescue Him. God met David at his point of desperation, and He will meet you at yours.

It will take desperate times of need for you to forge a strong chain of faith that won’t break when you connect God’s power with your problem.

What desperate need do you face? What muddy hole do you find yourself in that you can’t get yourself out of without His help? Is it financial, relational, medical, vocational, educational, spiritual, or just circumstantial?

David praised God in Psalm 40:2 that God had delivered him out of the miry clay and had set his feet upon the rock. Ask and let God do that for you.

1. **MEGA FAITH IS PROMPTED BY BIG LOVE.**

It was her daughter that was demon possessed, but the woman in our story asks Jesus over and over again, “Have mercy on me.” That is the love of a parent. When your child is sick and ill, you literally hurt and ache for your child. When your child is delivered, then you are delivered. Until your child is delivered, you are not.

This mother was able to say to Jesus, “Have mercy on me,” because her life was bound up with the life of her daughter. That is the love of a parent and especially the love of a mother.

It is interesting how pain and love often intersect one another. To love another person is not just to risk pain; it insures pain. If you love truly someone you will most certainly undergo pain. Sometimes they may do something that pains you, but more often, you will feel pain because the one you love is doing through a difficult time. That means you will either be pained by the one you love or you will be pained for the one you love. Either way, we need a strong chain of faith to help us out of a muddy moment.

In his book *The Problem of Pain,* C. S. Lewis wrote: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

The desire to forge a mega faith often is the result of loving someone else to the point of pain. Embrace the pain, embrace the love, and let it spur you on to a greater experience of faith.

1. **MEGA FAITH PURSUES A BIG SAVIOR.**

Mark tells us in the 7th chapter of his gospel account that this woman was a Syrophoenician. She was not a Jew. Her people did not worship the God of the Hebrew Scriptures; yet, she did not pray to the idols that her people worshiped. She knew there was something special about this Jesus. She knew that her only hope lay in Him. Maybe she was there on the shores of Lake Galilee when she saw Him free demon-possessed individuals. Maybe she had friends who told her the stories of what Jesus had done. We don’t know how she knew, but it is clear she knew Jesus was the only answer.

The bigger your God becomes the greater your faith will be. Those who have a small God have a small faith, and those who have a big God have a big faith. The largeness of your faith is determined the by the bigness of your God.

Some years ago, John Ortberg preached a sermon he entitled, “Big God/Little God.” In his message he emphasized the fact that the size of our God directly determines our ability or inability to live the Cristian life well. He talked about the danger of reducing the size of our God. He said:

When human beings shrink God, they pray without faith, worship without awe, serve without joy, suffer without hope, and the result is a life of stagnation and fear, a loss of vision, an inability to persevere and see it through. It’s against this backdrop the writers of Scripture never tire of telling us that we do not live with a little tribal God. Whatever we need, God is bigger. Whatever our weakness, God is stronger.

He concludes his sermon with these words:

God knows . . . about your worries. He knows about your kids. He knows what you’ve lost. He knows about the divorce. He knows about the crumbling marriage. He knows about the affair. He knows about the abortion. He knows about the job failure. He knows. He knows. He knows about where you are stagnant. He knows where your dreams have died. But He has better dreams for you. If you just ask him, He will be a bigger presence in your life than you have known.

When you find yourself in a muddy moment that turns out to be far more than a moment, you are going to ask yourself, “Why am I still here stuck in this mud?” You may be tempted to doubt the ability of God to extricate you from what you got yourself into. That is not where the problem lies. Check the strength of your chain of faith.

We teach kids the little song:

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty

There’s nothing my God cannot do

Us big kids need to learn that song and believe the truth of that song. That will help us forge a strong faith.

1. **MEGA FAITH OVERCOMES BIG HURDLES.**

In our story, Jesus does some surprising things, things you wouldn’t expect Jesus to do. First, He ignores her. He won’t answer her. He remains silent. Does God ever give you the silent treatment? If God’s seeming silence causes you to become silent, your faith is way too weak.

Jesus’ silence causes her to fill the void with ever louder cried for mercy. She doesn’t allow His silence to silence her.

The disciples have had it up to here with her; so, they tell Jesus, “Just send her away.” I think what they mean is, “Just go ahead a heal her daughter so she will leave us alone.”

Finally, Jesus speaks, but He doesn’t give her the answer she was hoping to hear. Basically, He says, “I didn’t come to help people like you. I am on mission to the Jewish people, and you aren’t Jewish.”

This woman, however, doesn’t back down, and she doesn’t back off. Instead of addressing Him as the Son of David, this time she calls upon Him as Lord. The Greek word for Lord could be used in two ways. First, it could be used as a term of respect, much they way we might say, “Sir.” Second, it could be used as a recognition of deity. Since this woman knelt before Jesus as she called Him “Lord,” I suspect that she is owning Him as her Lord. She’s not giving up.

Jesus seems to still be testing the strength of her faith. Once more, he seems to throw water on the burning candle of her faith. Look at v. 26. In Jesus’ statement, *children* refers to the Jewish people. *Bread* refers to His blessings. Guess who the *dogs* are? She is one of the dogs. Would you be offended if someone called you a dog?

There was great enmity between the Jews and other races. Jews referred to non-Jews as Gentile dogs. In the ancient word, dogs were often scavengers. They ran free. They were unclean animals.

Some have pointed out that Jesus didn’t use the normal word that was used when insulting someone by calling them a *dog.* He used the diminutive form which means *little dog* or *puppy.* Maybe Jesus was throwing a bone to this little dog. Maybe He said what He said with a wink rather than a scowl.

Regardless, this little dog picked up that bone and ran with it. She responded, “Well, even the little dogs get scraps from the Master’s table. Maybe I don’t qualify to be one of Your children, but I’m happy to be little dog if You will let me eat the crumbs of Your kindness.”

This woman showed both persistence and humility. God responds to both. The Bible teaches that while God opposes the proud, He draws near to the humble.

For the mathematically minded, Dykes provided an equation we would do well to remember: DESPERATION + PERSISTENCE + HUMILITY = GREAT FAITH.

1. **MEGA FAITH RECEIVES THE LORD’S BIG YES.**

Jesus’ silence seemed to say, “no.” Jesus’ declaration that He had come for the Jews seemed to say, “no.” Jesus’ statement that she was a dog and not one of the children seemed to be a “no.” The woman kept on and Jesus said, “yes.” In v. 28, Jesus called her *woman* instead of dog, and He paid her the highest compliment Jesus ever gave to another person regarding her faith. He called it *mega faith.* Then, He said to her what she longed to hear, “Be it done for you as you desire.”

She knew her daughter was going to be just fine because that was her desire, and she took Jesus at His word.

What do we do when we never do get the “yes” we were hoping for and praying for and looking for?

* What does it mean when the tests come back and says the cancer is inoperable?
* What does it mean when the bank forecloses on our loan and we lose the house?
* What does it mean when the person we love, the one we thought loved us, walks out and never comes back?

Does it mean that our faith just wasn’t strong enough? Does it mean that God doesn’t love us as much as we thought? Is He to blame? Are we to blame? Did the Devil win?

I read a story about a young coal miner. He was a believer, a strong Christian, but then one day he was injured in the mines. Due to his injuries, he was never able to work again, never able to return to the mines. He became an invalid. Over the years he watched through a window beside his bed as life passed him by. He watched men of his own age prosper, raise families, and have grandchildren. He watched, but he did not share the rewards or the joys of others with whom he had once worked. He watched as his body withered, his house crumbled, and his life wasted away.

Then, one day a younger man came to visit him. The guest said, “I hear that you believe in God and that you claim He loves you. How can you believe such things with what has happened to you? Don’t you sometimes doubt God’s love?”

The old man smiled and said, “Yes, it is true. Sometimes Satan comes calling on me in this fallen down old house of mine. He sits right there by my bed where you are sitting now. He points out my window to the men I once worked with who are still strong and active, and Satan asks, ‘Does Jesus love you?’ Then Satan casts a jeering glance around my tattered room as he points to the fine homes of my friends across the street and asks again, ‘Does Jesus love you?’ And, then, at last Satan points to the grandchild of a friend of mine—a man who has everything I do not—and Satan whispers in my ear, ‘Does Jesus really love you?’”

“And what do you say when Satan speaks to you that way?” asked the young man.

The old miner said, “I take Satan by the hand, and I lead him in my mind to a hill far away called Calvary. There I point to the thorn-tortured brow, to the nail-pierced hands and feet, and to the spear-wounded side, and I say, ‘Look how Jesus love me!”

Jesus loves us. That’s what we need to hold onto by faith.