

THE BIGNESS OF A MOTHER'S FAITH (Matthew 15:21-28)

The Bible was written in a patriarchal culture. There are about 3,000 men mentioned by name in Scripture, but there are less than 170 women whose names appear in the text of the Bible. Nevertheless, some of the great stories of the Bible feature women.

Eve was the last living thing God created. He had already created all the animals. He had already created Adam. God obviously saved the best for last.

Through the Bible we find numerous women of faith—women such as Sarah, Rahab, Ruth, Hannah, Deborah, Esther, Elizabeth, Mary, and many others. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, the last letter of his that made it into the NT, he wrote, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well" (1:5).

As with Lois and Eunice, throughout the history of the church, it has been women who have passed on the faith to the generations that have followed them. They have done so by teaching the Scriptures to their children and by living out the truths and claims of the Bible.

I read that there are 93 women in the Bible who are quoted in the Bible. We are told what they said. Of that number, 49 of them are named. That means 44 are not, and it is one of those 44 women who speak but are not named that we will listen to this morning.

We are going to look at a passage in which a woman, a mother, is quoted, but we are not told her name. Let's look at Matthew 15:21-28. Today, I am going to do something I think I have done only one other time in the almost 5 and ½ years I have been your pastor. I am going to preach to you a sermon I have preached to you before. I have altered that message slightly, but I preached this message back in September of 2019. The reason I chose this text is that of all the women mentioned in the Bible, this woman was praised highly by Jesus, and she was not a Jew. She was Gentile like you and me.

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 is what Jesus was saying about this 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.

A Mother's Mega Faith Does Battle with Big Needs

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 repeatedly asking if he was jumper cables because you need help starting your car. What she was doing was clearly 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 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 connect God's power with your problem.

What desperate need do you face? What need are you doing battle with today? 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. What muddy hole do you find yourself in that you can't get yourself out of without His help? Ask God to extricate you, and let Him set your feet

upon a rock.

It is one thing to do that for yourself, but mothers who have a big faith do that for others. They do it for those in those in their family, for those they know and love. Their strong faith causes them to intercede for others.

That leads us to a second truth.

A Mother's 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 extract 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."

Will you love someone else to the point of pain and beyond? Mothers who have a big faith do that, and because of their big faith, they take that person's case to the Lord.

That leads us to the next truth.

A Mother's Mega Faith Pursues a Big Savior

Mark tells us in the 7th chapter of his gospel account that this woman was a Syrophenician. 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 Christian 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 have gotten yourself into.

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.

A Mother's 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 cries 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 and 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 the 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 often referred to non-Jews as Gentile dogs. In the ancient world, dogs were scavengers. They weren’t pets. 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 your 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.

We come now to the fifth and final truth.

A Mother’s 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, however, 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 are we to do when the tests come back and the doctor says the cancer is inoperable?
- What are we to do when the bank forecloses on our loan and we lose the house?
- What are we to do when the person we love, the one we thought loved us, walks out and never comes back?

Not only, “What we to do?” but we also must ask, “What does it mean?” 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 just get a big 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. Despite all of that, he didn’t lose his faith.

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. I hope you have or had a mom who believed that and lived that and taught that. More importantly, I hope that you have embraced Jesus by faith and that by faith you will teach others that Jesus loves them. May Jesus give you and grow you into becoming a person of mega faith.