

In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus, dear friends,

One of the morning news shows had Olympic swimmer Amy Van Dyken on this past Friday. You may know that she was in an ATV accident and paralyzed. At the time of the accident, she said she saw light of some kind that made her believe that there is some higher power. She was asked if she was a “spiritual” person and she responded that she is now. I don’t know any more than that about what that means for her. She gave no details and I couldn’t track down any information about her having faith in Jesus.

Many people claim to be “spiritual” these days. There is generic talk about “faith” and even an emphasis on “super-spiritual” people. There are plenty of weird ideas about faith that don’t come from the Bible. And in some *Christian* circles there is much made of what kind of spiritual gifts a person has that make them much better than other people. There is confusion about who has a “great faith” and what a “great faith” even is. Don’t let the world give you misinformation. Jesus does talk about GREAT FAITH and in the account from Matthew 15, we get to see what Jesus’ idea of great faith is and see it in action. But this is not just a history lesson, it prompts the question

**DO YOU HAVE “GREAT FAITH”?**

1. “Great Faith” humbly asks Jesus for help (21-23)
2. “Great Faith” perseveres in seeking a blessing (24-28)

Jesus was leaving the city of Capernaum to get away from everything for a while. Things had been hectic—John the Baptist had just been beheaded, the crowds of people—missing the whole point of the feeding of the 5,000—wanted to make Jesus their earthly king, and the Pharisees were actively opposing him. In Mark’s gospel we hear that Jesus just wanted to get away and enjoy some quiet time with his disciples. Unfortunately, it didn’t quite work that way. Word got out that the miracle-worker was there in the area of the cities of Tyre and Sidon.

This Canaanite woman finds him and says some interesting things. First she says, ***Lord, Son of David...*** Understand that this is a Gentile woman, a non-Jew, yet in GREAT FAITH she knew well who he was—the earthly descendant of King David. She also calls him “Lord” acknowledging that he was God’s Son. She says to Jesus, ***have mercy on me...*** Her GREAT FAITH knew of his mercy and compassion. Then comes her request, ***My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.*** The GREAT FAITH of the woman told her to trust in the power that Jesus was becoming well-known for—power over physical ills, demons and even death.

What about you and me? Do we also have GREAT FAITH? Well, we also know who Jesus is, don’t we? We also acknowledge that Jesus is the promised Son of David, the Savior from sin. We also understand his mercy and compassion—especially because he tells us that, even though we were not deserving of it, he forgives all our sins. We also know of his power. The Holy Spirit convinces us through the words of the Bible that Jesus had power over death, rising from the dead on Easter Sunday and assuring us of our resurrection to eternal life in heaven when we die.

A GREAT FAITH knows these things and so humbly goes to Jesus for help. A GREAT FAITH asks humbly because we know our sins. We understand that we are in no position to be demanding of God. But we also know that we don't need to be afraid of going to him for help because he is our merciful Savior.

The woman humbly asked Jesus for help with something that was very important to her—her daughter's health. We do that too. We humbly ask Jesus for help with important things, like when we are sick, when we are emotionally drained, when we're stressed beyond belief, when we worry about our family—or lack of family, when we recognize how awful our sins are. Life presents us with many upsetting things.

Knowing what we know of Jesus, and loving him like we obviously do, we think that he will naturally come to our aid. But listen to what happened when the Canaanite woman humbly asked Jesus for help: ***Jesus did not answer a word.*** Why? Why would Jesus do that? Why would he not even answer her? And what about the disciples? ***So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."*** They didn't want to listen to her either! This couldn't have been easy on the woman.

What about you? Have you ever gotten silence from Jesus? Have you ever, in GREAT FAITH, humbly asked Jesus for help and felt that he left you hanging? That feeling is hard on us too. Or have you ever gotten no help at all from fellow Christians—like those disciples were no help to the woman? It's tough to experience that also. What does a person do when there is seemingly no response from God?

A GREAT FAITH continues to HUMBLY ASK JESUS FOR HELP. Why? Because God's Word tells us that Jesus is all-powerful. Because Jesus has our best interest in mind. Because Scripture promises that Jesus loves us like no one else can. But even GREAT FAITH shouldn't expect everything it asks for to be given just as it is asked for. Jesus is not some genie in a bottle that you can just bring out when you need a wish granted. Perhaps you've heard it said that there are four answers to our prayers—Yes, No, Maybe or Wait, or How about something better? A person of GREAT FAITH looks for any one of those answers, not just the one that he or she really wants. That's what it means to ask humbly.

A "No" answer and a "wait" answer from Jesus look the same to us—all we know is that whatever we asked for isn't happening right now. But GREAT FAITH PERSEVERES IN SEEKING A BLESSING.

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One thing we must always do is recognize Jesus' mission. To the Canaanite woman, Jesus had to say, *"I have come to the lost sheep of Israel primarily—first to the children of Israel, then to the Gentiles--the non-Jews."* Once Jesus came to God's chosen people of Israel as the Savior they were expecting, then God's love and forgiveness for all nations on earth could spread out from there. The Canaanite woman had to be reminded that Jesus came to Israel first—that was the mission given by his Heavenly Father.

To us Jesus also says, *“Recognize my mission when you ask me for help. My mission to you as your Savior is to do whatever will benefit you spiritually. I will answer your prayers in the best way for that to happen.”* Jesus’ mission is to care for our souls, first and foremost, THEN comes the other stuff we may want. Have you ever noticed that the things we ask for are often not spiritual things? We pray to God and say, *“Please Lord, I really want that special someone—someone to share my life with.”* We ask, *“Please, Lord, money is really tight—I need a job or a higher-paying job than I have.”* Or *“Please, Lord, I really need some good friends; there’s no one for me to count on right now.”* Or *“Lord, I’m just starting college and I’m still a little nervous about it.”*

You recognize that those are not the same as asking God for a stronger faith...or to give us a nudge on Sunday morning so that we make it to church...or to remind us to read our Bible...or to show us ways that we can use our talents and treasures for the benefit of God’s people and the spreading of the kingdom. Those are spiritual things. But you know, those other, everyday things do affect us spiritually. They have an impact on our faith and how we live it. Jesus knows that and so he knows best how to answer us. He also has a timing to things that is perfect for us. Remember, his mission is to take care of our faith, first and foremost.

But oh, how we pray sometimes! Maybe with eyes tightly shutting out the world around us or literally on our knees or hands firmly clenched together. There are times we do pray hard! It is often when we’re in trouble or need something. When we REALLY have something that is important to us, we dial up God on the hotline of prayer and we pleeeeeeaaad!

The Canaanite woman did too as she comes to Jesus again with the same request. Listen: ***The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.*** Why didn’t she just give up when Jesus didn’t answer her? Because she had GREAT FAITH. She even threw herself at Jesus’ feet to ask again. He was going to have to go around her or step over her to avoid her this time! ***He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”***

This was not encouraging. Jesus says that food for the kids doesn’t go to the dogs. And he didn’t mean what many of you go through every night when your little ones throw their green beans down from the high chair to the anxious dog on the floor. No, Jesus is speaking of willful neglect of the children. In his word picture, Jesus calls the Jews the “children” and the Gentiles, which this woman was, he calls “dogs”.

Now before we get too excited about this and say, *“Jesus, how could you say such a thing!”* understand that the Greek word that Jesus uses for “dog” here indicates a “pet dog”. There’s another word for dog which, if used for people, would be derogatory. But not this one. The family dog is often considered part of the family. But even so, pet dogs have no right to be treated the same as the children of a household. Children sit AT the table, dogs sit UNDER it. Jesus’ point was simply that it would be improper to give Israel’s blessings to those who do not belong to Israel.

But this woman of GREAT FAITH persists: ***Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.*** Does this woman remind you of anyone? She's a little like Jacob, isn't she? Remember that very interesting Old Testament story about how Jacob wrestled with God and hung on until God gave him a blessing? Or maybe you think she's kind of like Abraham and the way he went back and forth with God, pleading with him to spare the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of the few righteous people in those towns.

Here GREAT FAITH was on display as she PERSEVERED IN SEEKING A BLESSING from Jesus. And how humbly she did it! She completely understood and agreed with Jesus that her place, as a Gentile, was "under the table" so to speak. But that DID NOT prevent her from getting the "crumbs", the blessings that Jesus could give her without depriving "the children" of anything. She knew that the Lord could answer her prayer without taking any blessing from the Jews.

Are you that persistent with God? Do you PERSEVERE IN SEEKING A BLESSING from Jesus? Are you willing to wrestle with God, to ask repeatedly, to show your faith in that way? Do you keep on praying for healing? Do you keep on praying for reconciliation with a friend or loved one? Do you keep on praying that God will provide strength against a particular sin? Do you keep on praying for a greater faith? Do you keep on praying that God will bless your church and the spreading of the gospel? You can be persistent in prayer and God will listen. That is evident in Jesus' response: ***"Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.***

The woman HUMBLY ASKED FOR JESUS' HELP and PERSEVERED IN SEEKING A BLESSING from him. She proved her GREAT FAITH in her words and actions. And so, not only did she receive praise from Jesus for her GREAT FAITH, she also got a "Yes" answer to her prayer that her daughter be healed. The all-powerful Savior said the word and healed her suffering daughter.

The woman believed that Jesus was the Lord. She believed that he was the promised Son of David. She believed in his mercy. She believed in the power of his word. She believed that he would not refuse her, even though she was a Gentile. She believed that Jesus was the Savior of the whole world, every nation—including hers. She had GREAT FAITH!

You have it too—if you also believe those things. You have it if you believe that Jesus, when he died on that cross, shed his blood for the sins of all people, all over the world, through all time. You have that GREAT FAITH too if you believe that Jesus is the Savior of the whole world, but also of one individual—you.

The only way to attain GREAT FAITH is to continually hear and study his Word so that the Holy Spirit can work in you the kind of faith seen in this woman who trusted wholeheartedly in Jesus. Our GREAT FAITH will also show itself as we HUMBLY ASK FOR JESUS' HELP and PERSEVERE IN SEEKING HIS BLESSING. Amen.