

A Faith that Won't Quit!

- **Matthew 15:21-28**

21 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.

Have you ever known someone with whom you didn't get along well? Maybe it was someone you had just met and you simply didn't "click." Or maybe you were taught by your family not to like certain people. One of the most famous family feuds in American history is the conflict between the Hatfield's and McCoy's. The Hatfield's, led by their patriarch Anderson "Devil Anse" Hatfield lived on the West Virginia side of the Tug Fork River, and the McCoy's, led by Randolph "Ran'l" McCoy, lived on the Kentucky side. Both families were in the lucrative timber business and the animosity went back long before the feud began. Rumour has it the Hatfield's were pretty well off and prone to brag (of course this rumour probably was started by the McCoy's). Even though the evidence is a little murky, the story indicates the deadly feud began when Ran'l McCoy accused Floyd Hatfield of stealing one of his hogs and took him to court. A few weeks later, on Election Day, Ellison Hatfield died of wounds received at the hands of three of Ran'l McCoy's sons. The leader of the Hatfield's, "Devil Anse," took matters into his own hands and had the three sons killed. The feud only grew from there. More than 12 years in the late 1800s, 12 members of these two families lost their lives to the feud.

Israel vs. the Canaanites

In this passage about the faith of the Canaanite woman, we are reminded of a similar feud that took place on a much larger scale. It was a well-known fact the people of Israel did not like Canaanites - just read the first six or seven books of the Bible. The Canaanites were the pagans who lived in the Promised Land before Israel came to live there. At the time, the people of Israel nearly killed off these Canaanites, but many who survived - even in the time of Jesus, Israel was not lacking for people who believed they should have *finished the job*. We can see this in writings from Jesus' day that described Canaanites as people with, "inborn wickedness," and as "an accursed race from the beginning."

A Canaanite's Great Faith

However, the Gospel of Matthew offers us a different take. This passage is about the faith of a Canaanite woman. As a matter of fact, it is about the "great faith" of a Canaanite woman. This would not be such a big deal if Jesus went around applying this compliment loosely, but this woman was unique in two ways. She was the only Gentile woman Jesus healed in Matthew's gospel, and she is the only person Jesus said had "great faith." Compare that with the five times he reminded the disciples of their "little faith," and you can see how unique she is. For the disciples to hear about her great faith would be like a Hatfield learning about great faith through a McCoy!

1. Desperation that leads to true faith

The story doesn't begin with us knowing about her great faith; it begins in desperation, where great faith often begins. The Canaanite woman, whose name we never hear, has a daughter whom she describes as "cruelly possessed by a demon." We don't know exactly what this meant, but it easily could have meant she was afflicted with violently insane behaviour, like the man who lived among the tombs in [Matthew 8](#), or that she had terrible seizures, like the boy who often fell into the fire in [Matthew 17](#). Whatever her symptoms, her mother was desperate for her to be healed - to be free from this terrible state. Her desperation led to hope - not hope in the folk cures and remedies she probably had tried before, not hope in the best medical advice of the day, but hope in the God of Israel, hope in the Messiah, God's Chosen One.

2. Faith without Shame

This hope led to a *faith without shame*. Many times we can be afraid to let our faith be known. Sometimes we don't want to stand out; sometimes we just want to be polite and not "talk religion." Sometimes we just don't want the added scrutiny that comes when people realize we're followers of Jesus Christ. This woman was different; she lived out a faith that came from having nothing left to lose, a desperate faith. She approached this band of disciples and their leader, Jesus. She *screamed* out to them from a distance, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!" She didn't just shout, she screamed - her cries as desperate as the faith she had that Jesus was the One who could make a difference. She didn't care that the disciples didn't approve. She didn't care, even as a woman approaching men who were strangers that she would stand out like a sore thumb. She didn't care about the things that often make us ashamed. She had the faith of a desperate mother - a faith without shame. This should make us think about our faith. Does it come out of desperation? Does our faith rise out of a confidence that Jesus is the only One who can bring meaning to our lives, the only One who can bring true spiritual and emotional healing, the only One to whom our lives are worth devoting? Or, is our faith just a casual thing we do because it's expected? The Canaanite woman's faith was without shame because she knew Jesus was her only hope and she didn't care what others expected.

3. Faith without Fear

She cried out, but Jesus didn't say a word - complete silence. At this point, the disciples (and many of us) get a little uncomfortable. They shuffle their feet a little, finally speak up and say, "Jesus, umm...maybe You could just heal her daughter and she would leave us alone. You know, it's actually embarrassing us to see her acting like this, and You know what people will say seeing her following us around." To this Jesus said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." How do you think they would have responded? Would they have been as shocked as we are that Jesus said this? Or would they have been thinking this: "Well, yeah Jesus...we don't like Canaanites either, but she's driving us crazy." We then see something more about her faith. Not only does she have faith without shame, but her faith was without fear. She was not afraid of Jesus or the disciples. She threw herself down at Jesus' feet in total worship. With nothing to lose, she showed a relentless dependence on Jesus. Without shame and without fear, she fell at Jesus' feet and asked again, "Lord, help me." Is this the kind of utter devotion we have, or are we afraid to pray and ask God something because we might be told no? This woman didn't let Jesus' lack of response stop her.

4. Faith that Won't Quit

On top of a faith without shame or fear, she showed a faith without stopping, a faith that wouldn't quit. As she bowed down at Jesus' feet, He told her something very strange. He said, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Everyone there knew what Jesus meant, the disciples and the woman. He was saying in effect: It isn't good to take the blessing meant for Israel and give it to the Gentiles. Who do we stand with when we hear this? Do we stand with the disciples, who probably agreed and said, "Jesus has a point; we should take care of our own," or do we find ourselves at Jesus' feet with the woman saying, "Jesus, master, as always You're right, but even the dogs eat from the crumbs that fall off the master's table." In other words, on her face in worship at the feet of Jesus the woman said, "Lord, I know Your blessings are for the entire world. I know Your blessing is so great that I'll gladly take the leftovers and be satisfied." At this final response from the woman whose faith won't quit, I can see the scene. Jesus' serious face broke into a smile; He reached down, grabs her by the hands, helped her off her feet, looked her in the eye and said, "Great is your faith woman, your daughter is healed!"

5. Ask, Seek, Knock - Persistence in Faith

This is where this particular story ends. We don't know what the disciples were thinking. Did Jesus remind them of what He previously taught? In [chapter 7](#), Matthew wrote about one of the lessons Jesus taught, the only other time in this gospel when Jesus mentioned dogs. He said, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, verse 6" and then in the very next paragraph, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." Here, from one they never would have expected, - the Canaanite woman, the disciples

saw this kind of faith lived out. They got a living lesson on **asking, seeking, and knocking**. They saw great faith embodied a faith that didn't quit with asking, a faith that wasn't ashamed to seek diligently after Jesus, a faith that wasn't afraid to keep knocking even in the face of no response.

This woman, who did not really fit the profile. If we were to meet her on the street we would not spare a thought for her great faith. She didn't look the part, she didn't speak the language, and she did come from the right side of the track. She was part of their religious group. Yet she had great faith.

Questions for you and me!

Do we have a faith that won't quit, or do we have a faith that gives up when we don't see a quick response? The disciples left that place after having seen a faith that wouldn't quit, a faith they imitated as they spread the gospel later on in the face of persecution.

The tradition of the church tells us nearly every disciple died a martyr's death for his or her faith in Christ. Could it be that the great faith they carried until death was learned from the Canaanite woman? May God grant us such faith, a faith so great that it won't give up even in the face of uncertainty, a faith so great that it seeks Jesus Christ relentlessly, a faith so great that it believes God's blessings are too big for one nation, a faith so great that it never quits. May God grant us the faith of a woman who had nowhere else to turn except to worship at Jesus' feet.