

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – Matthew 15:21-28 – August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020

2020 has been a difficult year, hasn't it? We have been through one thing after another, after another. Sometimes it might even start to feel like God is hiding his face from us. What do we do when we feel like God is hiding his face from us?

I think we can find some help and inspiration when we look at the woman in our Gospel for today. This woman had a problem. Her daughter was demon possessed and was suffering terribly and so she went to Jesus for help. The thing that impresses me most about this woman is that she just did not give up. She was relentless.

Think of how many obstacles she went through! First, Jesus ignores her. It says, **“He did not answer her a word” (Matthew 15:23)**. But she didn't give up. She kept crying out after him. In fact, she cried out after him so much that the disciples became annoyed and said, **“Lord, send her away, for she keeps crying out after us” (Matt 15:23)**. But Jesus replied, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel,” (Matt 15:24)**. I don't know if the woman heard Jesus say this. If she did. It didn't stop her. She came and knelt before him and said, **“Lord, help me” (Matt 15:25)**. And we would expect Jesus to grant her request and heal her daughter. Instead Jesus says: **“It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs” (Matt 15:26)**. But not even this stops her. Instead she replies, **“Even the dogs eat the crumbs” (Matt 15:27)**. This woman stopped at nothing. She was relentless.

Another surprising thing about the story is how Jesus acts. Jesus ignores her. And then says “It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.” What do you think Jesus is doing? Perhaps Jesus is trying to bring out her great faith. Think about this way: If Jesus had simply granted the woman's request right away, would we be hearing this story and marveling at the woman's great faith? Probably not.

Jesus wanted to teach his disciples and us: This is what great faith looks like. Great faith is relentless.

Think again about the obstacles that this woman overcame. First, Jesus ignored her. Do you ever feel like God is not listening to you? We've asked God quite a bit to deliver us from the Coronavirus. But he hasn't delivered us yet in the way that we hoped. Let's not give up. Let's have a relentless faith.

Another obstacle that this woman faced was when Jesus said, **“It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs” (Matt 15:26)**. She overcame this obstacle, not by going over it but by going under it. She shows humility and says, “Yes, Lord. I know that I'm not part of your Old Testament people Israel, but even the dogs get something. Even the dogs get the crumbs.”

We have to show the same humility that this woman did, for two reasons. First: we also are Gentiles. We are not part of God's Old Testament people Israel. We are not physical descendants of Abraham. We are just like this woman. The only reason that we are part of the people of God is by grace.

And secondly, we are sinners. We have rebelled against God in our thoughts, words and actions. We don't even deserve crumbs. We deserve to be shut out of the heavenly banquet. And when we hear God's Word say that we are sinners, our pride puts up an obstacle to our faith. But when you encounter the obstacle of pride, don't try to go over it. Go under it. Show humility because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

In the end Jesus gave this woman a great honor. He said that this woman has "great faith." It has been pointed out that only two times does Jesus say that someone had great faith and this woman was one of them. This woman is a great example for us of unrelenting faith.

When you start to feel discouraged or when you start to think that God is not listening to you, remember this woman. Jesus ignored her, but she didn't give up. When it seems like God is hiding his face, he's trying to grow in us an unrelenting faith.

Why was this woman so unrelenting? She was unrelenting because of who she believed Jesus was.<sup>1</sup> She believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. She called him, "**Lord, Son of David,**" (**Matt 15:22**). And even though she was a Gentile, she believed that Jesus would help her.

Why is our faith so unrelenting? Our faith is unrelenting because of who we believe Jesus is. Jesus is the Son of God and we believe that Jesus can and will deliver us from whatever trouble or sorrow we find ourselves in. Our faith is unrelenting because we know how much Jesus cares about us. He came into our world to take all of our sorrow and all of our sin upon himself and take it to the cross. He rose again to show that he is the Victor over sin and death. And someday he will come back to take us to his heavenly kingdom. Our faith is unrelenting because of who Jesus is and what he has done.

The woman said, "**have mercy**" (**15:22**) because she believed that he would have mercy. She said, "**help me**" (**15:25**) because she believed that he would help. Cling to Jesus with a relentless faith asking him to have mercy and to help.

When it seems like God is hiding his face, he's growing in us a relentless faith. 2020 has been a tough year, but cling to Jesus with a relentless faith, because Jesus will have mercy and he will help. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> I owe this insight to Jeff Gibbs, Concordia Commentary, *Matthew*, vol. 2.