

**Introduction:** Praise and thank God for yet another new month of March this year, 2015. Welcome to the Lord's Table this morning.

Based on the gospel text, Matt 15: 21-28, I title my sermon as "**Great faith of a gentile woman in the midst of suffering and shame**".

Faith is an important element in any religion and it plays a vital role in the context of human salvation. Let me ask you the basic question-what is Christian faith all about?

Bible defines Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen: Heb 11:1. Bible says faith is the gift of God [Eph 2:8], and faith is fruit of the spirit [Gal 5:22].

In the Bible we observe various kinds of faiths: **1. little faith:** Jesus said to Peter-o you of little faith why did you doubt? **2. Not only little faith but peter had doubting faith.** **3. Dead faith:** James writes faith without works is dead. But today Jesus is talking about something different from these three: It is **Great faith.**

In the gospel records, only in two occasions we see Jesus acclaimed/praised publicly the faith of gentiles as 'great faith'. One occasion when Jesus saw the faith of the centurion, he said "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel": [Matt 8: 10b]. Second occasion was this when Jesus said to Syrophenician women: "o women your faith is great..."

Let us meditate briefly why and how the faith of this syrophenician women/a gentile woman is great?

Who is this woman? Matt records- she is a Canaanite women[no name mentioned] from syrophenician race from a district of Tyre and Sidon, the border of Israel. Mark records- she is a gentile women, is a Greek. When she knew that Jesus had come to the borders of Tyre she came to meet Jesus, crying out to heal her daughter who was demon possessed. Jesus healed her daughter, praising "your faith is great".

The elements of her great faith are evident in this narrative.

**I. GREAT FAITH IS CLEAR SIGHTED:** This woman saw that her daughter was possessed and cruelly tormented of a devil. She may have come to a conclusion that the cure for her daughter is not within the hands of ordinary physician's skill but by the power of God. That power she sought in Jesus. When she called him

"Lord," she meant more than the complimentary **Sir**. She identified him as the Christ; for such is the meaning of the title "Son of David." She saw it in the mercy of God. The Messiah of prophecy is full of mercy. By coming to Jesus for her daughter's healing, her faith is clearly seen/sighted.

## **II. GREAT FAITH IS HUMBLE:**

### **1. Humble in conduct.**

(1) This woman cried for "mercy." Here was no plea of right. Her hope was in the sympathy of a merciful heart.

(2) First she cried after the disciples but the disciples did not heed her cry. Yet she did not leave them or Jesus. Then she cried "after" Jesus (ver. 22) - followed at a distance, as unworthy to come too near. It was a humble cry. As a daughter of Canaan, a gentile woman, her behavior accorded with the condition of a servant because Jews have no dealings with the gentiles: like with the Canaanites and with the Samaritans.

(3) When she did come near, "she came and worshipped him/bowed down before Him [v25] saying, Lord, help me." In her the humble attitude of worship expressed truly its humble spirit.

### **2. Humble in temper.**

(1) She consented to the title of "dog." "Truth, Lord,"/yes, Lord" was her humble reply. "Dog" here is opposed to "sheep." The clean animal in the Law was the type of the Israelite; the unclean, of the Gentile. She was a "Greek" or Gentile, "a Syro-Phoenician by race". She accepted the title of "dog" in its spiritual as well as in its ceremonial signification. Note: the state of unworthiness of a gentile.(Matt8:8).

(2) She was not an idolater. Hiram, a king of her nation, had a hand in building the temple of Solomon, and was a lover of David, and blessed the God of Israel (see [1 Kings 5:7](#)). Many Gentiles in those parts respected Judaism, and looked for the promised Messiah.

### **III. GREAT FAITH IS EARNEST:**

#### **1. It will not miss an opportunity.**

(1) Here was a golden opportunity. Jesus was "in the parts of Tyre and Sidon." He was "a Minister of the circumcision for the truth of God" ([Romans 15:8](#)), yet went to the limits of his commission to cast a look of pity over the boundary.

(2) Hearing of his vicinity she "came out." She did not wait until Jesus should cross over the border land. Had she done so, she would have missed her opportunity.

(3) Abram had to come out of Ur in order to inherit Canaan. This woman had to come out of Phoenicia to inherit the blessing of Israel. So must the sinner leave his sins in order to find salvation? Do not miss any opportunity.

#### **2. Its heart is in its cause. Look at how earnestly she appealed on her daughter's behalf.**

(1) This woman made her daughter's case her own. Her cry was, "Have mercy upon **me**." Her plea was as though she herself was sorely vexed with/cruelly tormented by the demon that possessed her child. So she sought relief as for herself. "Lord, help **me**."

(2) Her repeated requests moved the disciples to plead for her: "Send her away; for she crieth after us." As if the voice of her prayer troubled the disciples? We never read of **Jesus** being troubled with the cry of the poor and needy. And this shows her earnest faith.

### **IV. GREAT FAITH IS PERSISTENT:**

#### **1. It refuses discouragement, suffering and shame: notice her persistent faith.**

(1) To her first plea Jesus "answered her not a word;"[v23] still she cried. He knew the quality of her faith. She did not give up her faith. Someone said, God **proves** that he may **improve** our faith.

(2) To the second request Jesus refused the intercession of his disciples for her; still she cried. But "He answered her and said, I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This silenced the disciples; not so the woman.

(3) Notice her third effort: Jesus "entered into a house, and would have no man know it," apparently to avoid her importunity/persistent bothering. But "he could not be hid," for this woman followed him, and then "fell down at his feet" (see [Mark 7:24](#)).

(4) For the fourth time Jesus said, "It is not good/lawful to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs." This was the culminating point. They are the Words of abuse and utter shame, comparing the gentiles with the dogs. Yet she was not discouraged. In all these 4 discouragements or times of rejection and shame, she did not give up her faith but she was persistent in her faith.

## **2. In the very heart of discouragement she finds encouragement.**

(1) Never for a moment did she lose sight of her great argument, viz. that hers was the appeal of misery to Mercy itself. The more sensibly we feel the burden the more resolutely we pray for its removal. Christ himself in his agony **prayed more earnestly**. This plea of misery to Mercy remained in undiminished force.

(2) The quickness of her faith[v27] could even discover the presence of that mercy in the tenderness of tone behind the sternness of expression. The children are familiar with the little dogs, and have no objection to their eating the crumbs that fall from the table. It is, moreover, crumbs falling from "their master's table." It cannot go ill with the dogs. "There is bread enough [for the children] and to spare" for the servants and the dogs (see [Luke 15:17, 19](#)). A crumb of Christ's mercy is sufficient to expel a malignant devil.

(3) Finally faith triumphed. Jesus said-"O woman." By faith the dog is already transformed into the woman. "Great is thy faith." "Jesus admires this faith to the end we may admire and imitate it" (A. Clarke). "Be it done for you as wish." There is faith in willing. "And her daughter was healed from that hour." Healed at her home ( [Mark 7:30-37](#)).

**Application:** Friends! We can exhibit our faith when everything is fine, when circumstances are favorable. But in the midst of adverse situations, times of

suffering, opposition and shame, how do we show and practice our faith? Let us learn lessons and follow the model of this great faith of a gentile woman.

1. what kind of faith do you have in your spiritual life? Little faith? Doubting faith? Dead faith? Or an active and great faith?
2. How persistent you are in your faith when discouragements come or when your faith is challenged by sickness and shame?
3. How many times we missed the golden opportunities of practicing earnest faith?
4. Is your faith humble before the Lord who sometimes tests?
5. Is Christ Lord of your life? Or Master of your family?

Let me close with this great quotation. “Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.” [Saint Augustine](#)

“We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.” – [Martin Luther](#)

“Faith is not something to grasp, it is a state to grow into.” – [Mahatma Gandhi](#).

Friends! As we take part in the Lord’s Table, let us approach Christ with great and unlimited faith by which all our sins may be forgiven, our sicknesses healed or problems solved.

May the good Lord guide us all to imitate the kind of great faith in our spiritual lives that this gentile woman manifested. Amen.