

**Sermon:** *Great is Your Faith!*  
**Text:** *Matthew 15:21 – 25*  
**Date:** *August 17, 2008 AM*  
**Place:** *Jesup First UMC*

During the dark days of World War II, when the Germans occupied France, a Jewish family found refuge in the home of a French family. For months the family hid away in a secret room in the family home. And when the war was over and America had liberated France, this inscription was found on the wall of the secret room: *“I believe in the sun even when it doesn’t shine. I believe in love even when it is not given. And I believe in God even when He is silent.”*

Wow! What a statement of faith! I believe in God even when He is silent. Now, most of us have very little trouble believing God in the good times, when life is good and things are going our way. We might even believe God in the difficult times when we call upon Him and we can see how He is working in our lives. But what happens when God is silent, when the answer doesn’t come?

In our text this morning, Matthew tells us the story of Jesus and the Canaanite Woman. One day, the Pharisees came to Jesus and said: **“Why don’t your disciples obey the teachings of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat.”** And Jesus confronted them; He said: *“You hypocrites! You don’t understand your own traditions. You turn them around and use them as excuses not to do what God really calls you to do, like honoring your mother and father.”*

And so, the disciples came to Jesus and said: *“Jesus, you really offended the Pharisees by what you said; and to be honest with you, we don’t understand what*

*you're talking about."* And so, Jesus tried to explain: *"It isn't what goes into a person that defiles them; it is what is already in the heart of a person that defiles them and eventually what is on the inside will come out."*

Now, Jesus needed to get away. The Pharisees were after Him. And everywhere He went the crowd followed. And so, He decided to leave Israel for some R and R in a quiet place. And Jesus and the disciples went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And as soon as they arrived, a woman came to Him with a need. She said: **"Son of David, have mercy on me. My daughter is possessed by a demon and she is in terrible shape,"** but Jesus ignored her. And so, she kept calling out to Him and soon, the disciples came to Jesus and said: **"Send her away; she's too noisy."** And Jesus said: **"I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel."** And the woman came and fell down at Jesus' feet and said: **"Help me, Lord."** And He said: **"It isn't right to take the children's food and feed it to the dogs."** And the woman said: **"Yes, Lord, but even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table."** Jesus said: **"You are a woman of great faith!"** And the bible says: **"Her daughter was healed at that very moment."**

Now, this isn't an easy story. In fact, most people don't like this story very much because we don't like to see Jesus ignoring people. And we sure don't like hearing Jesus refer to somebody as a "dog." But what an awesome story! This story teaches us a few things that are vitally important to living the Christian life that God has called us to live.

## **1. IT'S NOT WHAT'S ON THE OUTSIDE BUT WHAT'S ON THE INSIDE THAT COUNTS.**

The Pharisees were sure that they knew what made a person clean or unclean. People had to keep the traditions of the elders. They had to wash their hands; they had to stay away from foreigners, especially Canaanites. This is what the disciples are concerned about too. They don't want to make the Pharisees angry and they don't want to be bothered by Canaanite women. But ultimately, Jesus looked beyond the surface, beyond her race, to what was on the inside.

What is it about us that relies so much on the external attributes of people? We concern ourselves with a person's race or how they dress and sometimes we can't get beyond the external to see what's really on the inside.

One day, Tom came to my office. He said: *"Tucker, something has bothered me for a long time and I've been thinking about it a lot lately."* You see, in the 1960s, Martin Luther King came to Albany. Now, Dr. King had vowed to integrate the churches and sure enough, on Sunday morning, a group of African-Americans walked up the front steps of the church, with their bibles in their hands, coming to worship. And Tom said: *"Tucker, I was ushering that morning and I met them at the door and refused to let them in. And the bad thing is: I didn't care why they were there. I only looked at the color of their skin. And I decided they weren't welcome at my church."*

You see, it is really what's on the inside that counts. And ...

## **2. WHAT'S ON THE INSIDE OF THIS WOMAN IS FAITH!**

Verse 28 says: "*So Jesus answered her, 'You are a woman of great faith.'*" You know, the ironic thing about this is that Jesus only said this about a few people in the whole New Testament. One was a Roman Centurion and the other was this woman; both of them were foreigners and both of them were enemies of Israel.

But there was something about her faith that got Jesus' attention.

***First, her faith overcame the obstacles.*** To her, it didn't matter that she was a Canaanite and He was Jew. It didn't matter that He was a holy man and she was a pagan. It didn't matter that He was ignoring her and that His disciples wanted nothing to do with her. It didn't matter that He insulted her. She believed Jesus could heal her daughter and she came to Him for help. And Jesus said: "*You are a woman of great faith.*"

Her faith overcame the obstacles.

***Second, her faith was expressed in persistence.*** She was like the Ever-ready Bunny; she just kept coming and coming and coming. When a person of lesser faith would have turned around and went home, she didn't. When a less desperate person would have said, "*I guess it just wasn't God's will,*" she didn't!

Sometimes I think we give up too quickly. We aren't persistent enough.

Her faith was persistent.

***Third, her faith was expressed in asking.*** She kept asking Jesus, "*Son of David, have mercy on me. My daughter is sick, please heal her!*" James 4:2 says: "*You have not because you ask not.*" You see, sometimes when we're facing situations in our lives, we think the best thing we can do is try to work it out by ourselves, but James tells us: "*Ask in faith.*"

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "*Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*" And the verbs here literally mean, "*Ask* and keep on asking ... *seek* and keep on seeking ... *knock* and keep on knocking." Persistence in prayer!

Her faith was expressed in asking!

***Fourth, her faith was expressed in humility.*** She didn't come to Jesus demanding anything. She came asking. And when Jesus gave her the cold shoulder and when He said, "*It's not right to take the children's food and give it to the dogs,*" she accepted what Jesus said and kept seeking help.

You know, the truth is we don't deserve anything from God. Everything we receive from God is by grace. It's not because we earn it; it's not because we deserve it; it's because God is good. So, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "*When you pray, pray in private*" and "*when you pray, don't use a lot of fancy word.*" Just talk to God.

Her faith was humble.

You know what, brothers and sisters? There are times in each of our lives when we are like this Canaanite woman; we find ourselves in a situation that's beyond our control. It is then that we must seek the Lord, humbly crying out to Him in faith.

What is your need this morning? What situation are you facing today? Turn to Jesus!