

Great Faith and the Great Commission

Matthew 15:21-39

June 10th, 2018

Big idea: Desire great faith that is defining, accurate, persistent, and humble.

Intro –

We are justified by faith

Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

We are to live by faith

Romans 1:17b "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

We are to walk by faith

2 Corinthians 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight—

But what characterizes faith? More specifically, what characterizes “great faith?”

Jesus talks about those of “little faith” 4 times in Matthew.

In this passage today he talks about someone of “great faith” for the second time.

1. Great ***Faith*** Demonstrated (15:21-28)
 - a. ***Defining*** (15:21-22a)
 - i. She was a Canaanite woman from a Gentile region.
 1. Tyre and Sidon are coastal cities along the Mediterranean Sea, northwest of the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Gennesaret where Jesus had been ministering. You can go there now. Both cities are part of Lebanon.
 - a. At times Jesus interacts with gentiles who found themselves in Jewish lands. This is different Jesus, for the only time we know about, left the ancient borders of Israel and went into gentile land.
 2. Jesus withdrew – it could just be a statement about his travel but Mark’s account shows that He wanted some solitude but didn’t find it.
 - a. **Mark 7:24** Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know *of it*; yet He could not escape notice.
 - b. Again trying to pull back from the opposition, not that He was afraid of the conflict but perhaps for some rest and solitude. Perhaps putting some distance between himself and Herod who, as reported in Matthew 14 had John the Baptist beheaded and now thinks Jesus might be John resurrected.
 3. Canaanites were a historic enemy of the Israelites.
 - a. They were in the land at the time of Abraham (Genesis 12:6)
 - b. They were in the land when the Israelites exited Egypt (Ex. 3:17)
 - c. They were living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan (Nu. 13:29)

- d. They routed the Israelites when they tried to enter into the land after God had told them they would be delayed 40 years because of their lack of trust in Him (Nu. 14:45)
 - e. Battled in Numbers 21
 - f. They were told to destroy them in Deut. 20:17 because their wickedness was so great it would infect the Israelites
 - g. They fought throughout the book of Joshua as the Israelites were moving into the land but they did not drive them out completely (Joshua 17:12)
 - h. At times during the period of the Judges the Israelites were oppressed by the Canaanites (Judges 4:2-3)
 - ii. She would have had her own gods as a pagan living in a pagan land.
 - 1. And yet she came to this Jewish teacher who clearly she had heard about.
 - 2. Like Ruth the Moabite said to her mother-in-law Naomi
 - a. **Ruth 1:16** But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you *or* turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God.
 - 3. That's not to say our cultural origins are erased, only that they are no longer our most defining characteristics if they clash with our identity in Christ.
 - 4. An Arab man who comes to saving faith in Christ would still retain much of his cultural identity – food, clothing, music, mannerisms – but his primary identity is as a follower of Christ.
 - 5. Likewise a proud American can still be a patriot but his first allegiance must be to Christ.
 - iii. Great faith is willing to no longer be defined by some other identity as your primary identity.
 - 1. She could have said – "I'm a Canaanite and we have fought the Israelites for 2,000 years. I don't care how desperate I am, I won't come to a Jewish Messiah."
 - 2. There is a radical change at conversion that accompanies great faith. You may reset and reorganize your parenting, your views on money, your views on sexuality.
 - iv. There may be a better word for this – repentant, costly
- b. **Accurate** (15:22b)
- i. She calls him, "Lord, Son of David" –
 - 1. Lord could simply be a term of respect, but "Son of David" is much more specific. She recognizes Him as the prophesied descendant of David who would come to save.
 - 2. We're not told how she knew this – perhaps she had listened to him in some other context. Perhaps word had gotten to her.
 - ii. Important thing, it's not faith in faith, or faith that somehow in some way things will work themselves out for the good.
 - 1. It's not even a generic faith in God as in a higher power.
 - iii. It's faith in Jesus as He really is.

1. Difference between jumping out of a plane with a parachute that was carefully packed and doubled checked and you are confident in vs. jumping out of a plane with no parachute and simply saying, "I believe!"
2. MacArthur – the first is an act of faith the second is an act of stupidity.

c. **Persistent** (15:23-27)

- i. She began to cry out (v. 22) indicating that it was a persistent, ongoing request. The disciples response confirms it – "send her away, she keeps shouting at us."
 1. But she persists.
- ii. She persists through His silence.
 1. Very unlike Jesus. His pattern when people cry out for help is to stop, interact, and help. Often while His disciples try to quiet or dismiss the people.
- iii. She persists when He answers (either her or the disciples)
- iv. She persists when he answers further in a way that could feel insulting.
- v. Why does Jesus make her go through this ordeal?
 1. He doesn't usually do that. Usually He simply heals. Even other Gentiles (as with the centurion's servant in chapter 8).
 2. So with the crowds that will come to him in vv. 29-31 that also appear to be Gentiles.
 3. He seems to be pulling out from her a clear expression of persistent faith, not merely a desire for a quick miracle. He's had others that have been healed and not returned, expressed faith in Him, or saw beyond the sign to something bigger.
 - a. 10 lepers were healed in Luke 17, only 1 returned to give thanks to God
 - b. He fed the crowds with a miracle in John 6 and Matthew 14 but they followed Him only to get more food and when they were confronted on it they left Him.
 - c. He warned about the 4 types of soil, only one of which would go on to bear fruit and persist in the faith.
- vi. Why does He seem to rudely dismiss her in favor of ministering to the Jews?
 1. He has a clear mission in His brief earthly life that required focus.
 - a. His mission was to the house of Israel. Later, in the Great Commission at the end of Matthew He commands that they go and make disciples of all the nations. It doesn't start there though. It starts with the Jewish people, even though there are hints throughout that He is looking beyond them to the nations. Moments like this and the rest of chapter 15.
 - b. The analogy of the children and the dogs was one of priority and precedence, not arrogance or demeaning.
 - i. In fact, the word used for dog was not the term for a wild, dirty dog that roamed the streets but a pet dog in the house.
 2. She recognizes that priority and is willing to fit within that so Jesus gladly grants her request.

- a. Doriani – example of a college band getting started, realizing they need to hone their craft, polish their skills, reach the college age audience, and then they can expand. Aunt Tess offers to pay them to do a garden party at her home. He can use the money but declines because he needs to concentrate on the main task – write songs, honing our sound. She follows up and says, “listen, I’m not asking you to play the theme from Gilligan’s island. We know you have been influenced by . . . and she lists off several obscure, relevant bands. We want the sound you are working on and we’ll pay you \$500 for 100 minutes of music.

d. **Humble** (15:25-27)

- i. She asked for mercy, which by definition is in contrast to demanding based on merit.
 - 1. RC Sproul, “The only merit we have before a holy God is demerit.”
 - ii. She bowed before Him in v. 25
 - iii. She didn’t balk at his reference to his focused mission or even his analogy of the children and dogs.
 - iv. Great faith is always humble. It recognizes God as God and comes before Him asking not demanding.
- e. Parallel’s with the centurion in Matthew 8:5-10
- i. Both were gentiles but were not defined by that
 - ii. Both called Jesus “Lord”
 - iii. Both recognized their unworthiness

2. The Great **Commission** Foreshadowed (15:29-39)

- a. Jesus continues with two more scenes that show Him serving the Gentiles.
- b. He went along the Sea of Galilee, which is primarily Jewish on the western side and primarily Gentile as you move east, especially into the area known as the Decapolis (literally “10 cities”) because it contained 10 prominent gentile cities.
 - i. In Matthew we see hints that he is on the gentile side – the newly healed crowds praise “the God of Israel” which would seem unnecessary to say in that way about a Jewish crowd and the place is very remote (v. 33), which would not be true of the western side.
 - ii. Mark makes it very clear, specifying that He went to the region of Decapolis.
- c. And the crowds came to him for healing, and He healed – lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others.
 - i. If these are the crumbs that fall off of the table, they are significant crumbs indeed!
- d. He duplicates the large feeding miracle now with the gentiles
 - i. Some have wondered if this is the same event as the feeding of the 5,000. Some have even pointed to this as an evidence that the Bible was written long after the time of Jesus and contains the fuzzy memories of people so this one story of Jesus feeding people was recorded in some blurry fashion later and actually included twice.
 - ii. Clearly two separate events
 - 1. He mentions both events in chapter 16

- a. **Matthew 16:9-10** "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets *full* you picked up? ¹⁰ "Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets *full* you picked up?"
 - 2. They were in different locations around the shore of Galilee
 - 3. There were differing amounts of food at the beginning and the end.
 - a. Both have bread and fish because those were the staple foods.
 - 4. The people were gathered for different lengths of time.
- iii. Certainly similarities,
 - 1. Jesus' compassion on the people
 - 2. Most notably the disciples' response that seemed to wonder at where the food would come from.
- iv. Why wouldn't they have remembered what Jesus had done in the other miracle and assumed He would do the same here with these hungry people?
 - 1. RC Sproul wrote of that, "I have no earthly idea why they didn't remember."
 - 2. 5,000 was of the Jewish people and so they might not make the same connection here with the Gentiles
 - 3. The crowd was rebuked by Jesus after the feeding of the 5k because they simply wanted more food so perhaps they were gun shy
 - 4. Mostly, we shouldn't underestimate the human ability for disbelief and functional forgetfulness.
 - a. We see it all through the OT as God delivers the Israelites and they are back in bondage again later.
 - b. We see it in our lives when God provides for us in one tight month but we doubt in another similar month, when God forgives one sin but we doubt whether He will forgive another.

3. Recurring themes in Matthew

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Like a melodic line in song or a chorus, there are some themes that pop up over and over again in Matthew's gospel and we'll learn to watch for them. You can see them all encapsulated in the Great Commission at the very end of the book as the now resurrected Jesus gives a final charge to His disciples.

- a. All **authority**
 - i. Jesus is presented as THE King.
 - ii. The family lineage of King David in ch 1
 - iii. His statements in the Sermon on the Mount in 5-7

1. You've heard it said, but I say to you . . .
 - a. Claiming to be for the torah, but greater than the torah. For the OT, but greater than the OT.
 2. Entrance in to the kingdom is related to Him
 3. **Matthew 7:28-29** When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; ²⁹ for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes.
- iv. He has authority to forgive sins (9:6-8)
 - v. Authority over demons (10:1)
 - vi. Here He has authority to heal, authority even over nature in His miracle of multiplying bread and fish.
- b. All nations
- i. This gospel is clearly targeted at a Jewish audience, showing how Jesus fulfilled the OT prophecies of the Messiah but . . .
 - ii. His genealogy will feature Israelites as well as Canaanites, Hittites, and Moabites (ch. 1)
 - iii. Heals a Greek soldier's servant and commends his faith (ch. 8)
 - iv. Here He heals a Canaanite woman's daughter, heals many other gentiles, then provides a massive meal motivated by compassion.
 - v. Culminates in the call for the gospel to go to all nations
 - vi. By Acts 21 there were disciples gathering in Tyre
 1. **Acts 21:3-6** ³ When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. ⁵ When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until *we were* out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. ⁶ Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.
 2. Was this Canaanite woman now in her old age among them? Was her daughter one of the wives mentioned? We have no idea. But it's possible.
- c. All allegiance
- i. "Observe all I have commanded you to do" - related to His authority
 - ii. Compares the one who listens to His words and acts on them as a wise builder who constructs his house on a rock (ch 7); Those who call Him Lord follow Him.
 - iii. This woman does this – she calls him, "Lord."



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