

A VERY GREAT FAITH

A study on believing the promise of God

by

KEN CHANT

Text: Matthew 15:21-28.

(1) Lord Byron visited Newfoundland in 1808, and there saw in a cemetery a monument that bore this inscription – "Near this spot are deposited the remains of one who possessed beauty without vanity, strength without violence, courage without ferocity, and all the virtues of Man, without his vices. This praise, which would be unmeaning flattery if inscribed over human ashes, is but a just tribute to the memory of Botswain – a *dog*."

- much moved, Byron wrote a poem, *Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog*, which contains the lines –

*The poor dog; in life the firmest friend,
The first to welcome, foremost to defend.*

- probably, from those lines arose the saying: "A man's best friend is his dog!"

(2) But that early 19th-century sentimentalism was not the opinion of the ancients, who saw dogs mainly as filthy scavengers

- hence one of the worst insults was to call someone a dog!
- for that reason many readers are (and were) offended by Jesus' words, which do seem rude and harsh
- how many pastors would dare to use such language today?

(3) Yet the lady herself was not offended! Why?

- she saw something special in what Jesus had said, seized upon it, and demonstrated the very thing Christ was most looking for – "**great faith**"!

(4) What is this great faith? It arises from the way a person relates to ***the promises of God***.

(A) CONNECT WITH THE PROMISE OF GOD

(1) See vs. 26-27

(2) It is not so bad as it first sounds. This mother would have noticed three things –

- Jesus used the Greek word for a domestic dog (like us, the Greeks were ambivalent about dogs)
- he brought the dog into the family
- he fed the dog from the table.

(3) *Here is the lesson:* in every situation, if you look for it, you can find some promise of deliverance!

- the ear of God is never closed!
- boldly search for that promise, despite the seeming contradictions in scripture and in life!

(4) Notice also how Jesus equated "healing" with "bread".

(B) CONTEND FOR THE PROMISE OF GOD

(1) Martin Luther, in 1534, preached a sermon from our text, and illustrated it by the story of Joseph's dauntless faith – "For about 13 years Joseph cried and continued to pray God to help him. But the longer the worse: the more he prayed, the worse he fared. To this day, this is what happens to Christians. When they have called and cried for a long time to God, they feel no improvement, but things grow worse, as they did with Joseph.

"If God had liberated Joseph when he first asked he would have remained a shepherd. However, since help was delayed so long, he became lord over all Egypt!

"Thus God still intends to deal with us. After he has denied us our petition for a long while and always said no, but we firmly cling to the yes, it shall finally be yes, and not no, for his Word will not lie.

"But our reason is highly offended by this delay and would gladly have God answer us promptly. So it is necessary not to be offended. Let our God say no and suspend the answer to our petition for a year, two years, three years, or longer still and let us only watch that hope and faith in his promise are not torn from our heart. Something will come of our prayers in the end, and God will give far more than we asked him to give!"

(What Luther Says, selection 3483.)

(2) Here we confront one of the mysteries of the life of faith – sometimes God seems like **a man asleep** (Ps 44:23); and sometimes like **a beaten warrior** (Je 14:9).

(3) Thus our widow faced a terrible barrier – not in her case one of long delay, but of fierce insult

- how would you have reacted to Jesus' words?

(4) But she saw an **opportunity** not a **rebuttal**, and she pressed in –

- she came crying again and again (vs. 22)
- Jesus ignored her (vs. 23) – the disciples rebuffed her
- she pressed upon Jesus, but he turned his back (the sense of the Greek idiom is that she kept on coming around from behind him and kneeling before him – vs. 25)

- she cried aloud, "*Lord, help me!*" – he insulted her
- but still she persisted – ***so she got her miracle!*** (vs. 28)

(5) You may say that you have cried out to God, and that again and again you have fallen on your face before him - but without result

- well, call upon him again; never give up!
- the promise is still there today, just as it was yesterday, and will be tomorrow!

(C) CONFIDE IN THE PROMISE OF GOD

(1) People say, "*If only Jesus himself were here, then I would surely be healed!*"

(2) Yet they are probably wrong -

- suppose Christ were to come into this meeting only to rebuff you as he did this mother ?

(3) Notice also two vital factors –

(a) of only ***two people*** did Jesus ever say that they had "***great faith***" – the Roman Centurion, and this Widow.

(b) one thing was common to both of them – they believed that Jesus could heal at a distance, ***by his word alone!***

(4) ***Christ is in his word; if we have the promise of God, that is all we need***

- here are your pardon and righteousness!
- here are your health and prosperity!
- here are your riches and success!
- here is your triumph over death!