

Can I have a 'Mega-Faith'?

12th Sun. after Pent. – 8/16/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 15:21-28 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 28 (Literal translation from the Greek) **“Then answering, Jesus said to her, “O woman, yours is a mega-faith!”**”

Introduction

✘ As you can see from that more literal translation, our English versions of Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman in today's Gospel Reading doesn't really do justice to what Jesus wants this woman to hear, especially with the frequency today of us labeling everything from hamburgers to shoes to a friend's comments as being “great”.

➔ The actual word that Jesus used in the Greek is “megalā” (μεγάλη), which is where we get our English prefix “mega-” that means “extremely large or huge”; much more than just “great”.

➔ This word highlights an interesting contrast found in our Gospel Reading today where we find that the smallest possible helping of “bread” – a “crumb” that comes down from the table of our Lord has enough power to create, feed and maintain what Jesus sees within this Canaanite “dog” of a believer; a “mega-faith”.

I. Jesus at a Crossroads

✘ But that's not the only interesting contrast that we find here in this text, because Jesus and His encounter with this Canaanite woman reveals a most unexpected situation as well.

➔ Jesus' disciples in verse 23 bring up the issue first. It's the struggle that you and I, and all people still deal with today in our sin-infected state. I've chosen to create a helpful label for it; the fact that we all struggle with “those-people-itis”. Don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about here, friends, because we all have “those-people” in our lives that we look at as being different or more difficult than us. Maybe it's because of the way we think of them or the way that we believe they think of us. Either one of those still comes back to us; to you and me! It can be about race, sex, social status, economic levels, education, personal appearance, age, entertainment preferences, ability to communicate, diet and so much more.

➔ The “those-people-itis” issue that the disciples had with the woman before them could have been a number of things that made them want Jesus to “send her away” (v.23). 1) She was a woman; 2) she was a Canaanite and therefore not part of God's “chosen people” Israel; 3) She was a beggar; at the bottom of both the economic and the social ladder.

✘ Yet Jesus is the one that made a specific point to leave Judea and go to the pagan and Gentile “district of Tyre and Sidon” northwest of Galilee. He went because the people to whom He says in verse 24 that He “was sent”; “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” have now soundly rejected Him to the point that the Jewish leaders were even making murderous threats against Him.

✘ So, why is it that Jesus seems so soundly to even refuse to listen to this foreign woman's prayer for mercy in verse 26? I mean, shouldn't we expect Jesus to be eager to immediately engage in ministry among the Gentiles?

➔ You see, what we're witnessing here is Jesus standing at a specific turning point in His ministry where He's got one foot in each of the two key directions mapped out for His earthly ministry. Even though His people in Israel are intensifying their rejection, He still loves them; He still wants their salvation. But at the same time He sees that it is now time for Him to expand God's kingdom, not only to “those people”, but to all people who are not geographically or ethnically a part of the house of Israel.

➔ And we are especially blessed that Matthew captured this moment for us in this text; the moment when Jesus begins to experience the great joy of engaging in ministry to all of “those-other-people” that both the Jews and even His own disciples are looking down on as impure; as a scourge on society. And the first of “those people” is this Canaanite “canine” who even identifies herself to be – a lowly “dog” of a person.

➔ It’s here that Jesus begins to excise this terrible sickness of “those-people-itis” by first of all going into a pagan region; secondly, talking with this Canaanite; third by healing her daughter of demon possession, and most shocking of all, by saying that she; that she is the one among them all who has a “mega-faith”!

- ✘ What Jesus is doing here as He lifts up and quantifies this Gentile “dog’s” simple, yet extraordinary faith is also cutting away and removing from the rolls of salvation any and all those who think they are saved because of their works or ethnic or churchly connections or background.

➔ This includes the Pharisees and scribes, any and all within the people of Israel to whom Jesus promised He would come first that now reject Him, and even many members of the Christian Church today who are “Christian” in name only, but in truth, have no faith at all.

II. What defines a “mega-faith?”

- ✘ So, what is it then that Jesus sees in this woman that leads Him to declare hers to be a “mega-faith”. As I look at the text, I see four things; we’ll call them four criteria for a “mega-faith”. Let’s quickly consider them in the order that they come in the text.

A. Confessing who Jesus is rightly

- ✘ The first thing is understanding and confessing correctly who Jesus actually is. Three times this woman does it. Twice she calls Him “Lord,” which literally means “master” in the Greek, and is also the same way that the disciples address Jesus. Not only that, in verse 22 she also calls Him the “Son of David” which shows that she already understands Jesus’ covenant connection to the chosen people of Israel as the promised Messiah.

➔ Most important though is that, when she asks Jesus to “have mercy” and heal her daughter who is “severely oppressed by a demon” she reveals that she believes Jesus is God Himself; the only One who has the power to crush Satan and his evil work; the only One who can save both her and her daughter!

- ✘ Sadly, there are a lot of so-called Christians today who can’t and won’t honestly make this confession about Jesus from the heart.

B. Persistent faith/worship in opposition

- ✘ Second, we see that this woman’s “mega-faith” is characterized by a righteously stubborn persistence even in the face of opposition. Jesus even put her faith to the test in verse 23 where we’re told that “He did not answer her a word” at first.

➔ Then in verse 23, the disciples urge Jesus to “send her away” followed by Jesus telling her, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (v. 24).

➔ Yet, this woman’s faith was deep enough not to “have her feelings hurt” by this, but to hear all of Jesus’ words carefully and to catch that He was sent to the lost sheep of Israel; that is all who are rejecting and not receiving Him as God, which means they are just like the pagans and Gentiles who are lost as well.

- ✘ So, what was her response to these challenges? We’re told in verse 25 literally from the Greek that “coming, she fell face down in worship” to Jesus saying, “Lord (master), help me.” The

Greek verb there describes the most profound expression of humility and entire worship before Jesus as God.

➔ Still Jesus answered in verse 26, “It is not right to take the children's bread (that is what was promised to the Israelites) and throw it to the dogs.” Can you imagine if Jesus said something like that to a woman in public today? Oh, the PC police and the media would have a hay day. They'd be calling for charges of hate-speech and immediate arrest and more. And if the woman were a typical stranger on the street today, she would be dialing up the “strong-arm” lawyer and filing a lawsuit before the end of the hour.

✘ But how does this woman of faith respond? She agrees! “Yes, Lord...,” she says. We'll look at the rest of her answer in just a moment. But she is not offended one bit. She faithfully knows that Jesus' answer is the right answer.

➔ Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”. This woman has done exactly that.

C. Confessing who I am rightly

✘ And then she displayed the third characteristic of a “mega-faith”. She acknowledged and confessed the truth about who she was herself. “Yes, Lord...” you are absolutely right. I am a “dog” – meaning that she recognized #1, that she was not one of the chosen Israelites for whom Jesus came with the promised “bread of life”, and #2, that she was in fact one who was lost and separated from God in her sin, right along with every other human being on this earth.

➔ In the Greek, this particular word for “dog” is not talking about a mangy mutt, but a “little dog;” a “puppy;” a family pet that has the invitation and the privilege of eagerly hanging around, under the master's table and chair. And this woman is perfectly content to be placed in that category; to be like a cherished puppy that is begging for crumbs from her master.

➔ Martin Luther said, “...God is a wonderful lord. His business is to take beggars and make them into lords” (LW 46, 250). “We are beggars. That is true” (LW 54, 476).

D. Belief in the power given in Jesus' “crumbs”

✘ Finally, this woman – and I pray each one of us here as well – is eagerly trusting that, through the crumbs of grace coming down from the hand of our master and Lord Jesus, He will feed and transform us beggar-dogs into beloved children at His feast of eternal salvation!

➔ This is the fourth characteristic of this woman's “mega-faith”; complete trust and belief in the immense power given in the Lord's gifts of grace; knowing without a doubt that even a “crumb” of His mercy and love will work marvelous and miraculous and saving things within, and for us!

✘ And friends, those “crumbs” of grace are all that you and I will ever need as begging “dogs” at the master's table still today. What are those powerful “crumbs” of grace for us today?

➔ Well, it only takes a few small drops of water connected to the Triune name of God in our baptism for a condemned sinner to be immediately transformed into a redeemed saint. In 1 Peter 3:21-22, we're told, “Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ....” Yes, baptism connects us directly to the all-powerful God Himself in heaven.

➔ Equally powerful are the words in what we call the “Holy Bible”. Jesus said in John 8:31-32, “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”.

➔ And then in Matthew 26:26-28, Jesus instituted His very own meal, which He invites all who are taught and are able to rightly “discern [His] body” there to partake of often (1 Cor. 11:29). There in the Lord’s Supper; in just one small bite of bread and one little swallow of wine, Jesus promises, “...this is My body ... this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”. It’s there in that saving power of Christ’s body and blood, given and shed on the cross; there in those “crumbs” that now cross over our tongues, that Jesus strengthens us with His sin, death, and devil-crushing power to live each day with a “mega-faith” in Him and Him alone!

Conclusion

✘ These are the “crumbs” handed down to us “little dogs” each and every day by our Master’s loving design and merciful embrace. So, can I; can you have a “mega-faith” like the Canaanite woman?

➔ Well, do you confess Jesus as Lord; as the Son of David; as Your Savior from sin, death and the devil?

➔ And will you persist in this confession; not to be swayed or influenced by those tempting and pressing you to give up or oppose Jesus?

➔ And do you confess that you are a beggar; a dog – that is a sinful Gentile who cannot save yourself?

➔ And finally, do you believe that Jesus has saved you in your baptism; that He teaches, guides and saves You through the truth of His Word in Holy Scripture; and that He feeds You forgiveness and salvation in the true body and blood of His holy supper?

✘ Then my dear friends, yours is a “mega-faith”; given, nurtured and fully-empowered by Jesus alone! Amen.