

Theme: FAITH DOESN'T QUIT

- I. Really, Jesus?
- II. Really Jesus

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” James 5:16 NIV.

When Jesus left there, he withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon. ²² Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came and kept crying out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely tormented by a demon.”

²³ Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples approached him and urged him, “Send her away because she’s crying out after us.”

²⁴ He replied, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

²⁵ But she came, knelt before him, and said, “Lord, help me!”

²⁶ He answered, “It isn’t right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she said, “yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus replied to her, “Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want.” And from that moment her daughter was healed. (CSB)

Worshippers of God,

“When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Many Americans can attest to the truth of the phrase. Henry Ford went bankrupt multiple times before hitting his stride with the Ford Motor Company, the same as Walt Disney with his animation empire. Despite adversity, they didn’t quit. In our text today, tough times bring out the tough faith of a woman with an urgent request for Jesus. Her faith serves as a stark reminder today: FAITH DOESN’T QUIT.

Everything about this account seems backwards. For starters, Jesus is on vacation. You’d think the Lord of heaven and earth could finally get a little R&R on vacation, right? No! A Gentile woman comes to him with an urgent prayer. She calls out to Jesus from a distance: **“Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!”** The way she addresses Jesus shows she knows who he is. Not just **“Lord,”** addressing someone superior, she also calls him **“Son of David.”** Somehow she knows about Israel’s Messiah, God’s promised Savior. She asks him for mercy, for help.

Tough times fell on this woman: **“My daughter is severely tormented by a demon.”** Maybe you think demons were very common in Jesus’ day, but this is no ordinary case of possession. This is the only time the Bible calls a demon possession severe. This woman begs Jesus to help her. She knows who she’s asking. If there is one person on planet earth who can help her, she’s found him. But Jesus turns a cold shoulder. Actually, a cold shoulder would be an improvement. Jesus doesn’t even acknowledge her existence. If this woman had it rough before, her situation just took a turn for the worse. The one person who can help won’t even pay attention.

We want to say that isn’t the Jesus we know. Jesus is always quick to help. He always saves the day. Too often, we know what it feels like to be ignored by Jesus, too. We pray he would take the cancer away, but it comes back. We ask to go home from the hospital, but we end up in the nursing home. We beg him to end the virus, but it hangs around. We plead with him to let our children live; he takes them. He’s the only one who can help. Does he care? Of course he does, but then why does he allow this to happen? It seems like Jesus quits. How can we say FAITH DOESN’T QUIT?

Maybe we've caught Jesus practicing "selective listening." But that can't be the case. This woman "**kept crying out.**" She won't be stopped. The disciples won't have it, either. They ask Jesus to "**send her away.**" The word indicates the disciples aren't as cold-hearted as Jesus appears to be. The word "send away" literally means "release her." Release her from her suffering, Jesus. Just give her what she wants because she's causing a scene. The disciple's FAITH DOESN'T QUIT. They're confident Jesus *can* cast out the demon, but everything's still backwards. The disciples aren't perfect, but they're looking better than Jesus!

Jesus responds to them, not the woman, with cruel-sounding words: "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" Not my problem. What a heart-rending blow! Is Jesus racist, insensitive, hard-hearted? Has he just gone off the deep end on vacation?

How would you ever have learned to ride a bicycle if you gave up the first time you fell? Instead, you kept at it, and eventually you learned. To become an expert at anything, you can't quit at the first sign of failure. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

So why do we so often give up on God at the first sign of defeat? You pray once, ten times, a thousand times. God doesn't give you what you want. So you decide God doesn't want what you want, and you shake your head in frustration. We give up. Jesus said he only needed to concern himself with the lost sheep of Israel. Surely he wouldn't have a problem with me staying inside my comfort zone, talking only to people who think like me and ignoring all the other people around me. We give up on loving others, at least this once. I wish I could say my FAITH DOESN'T QUIT, but when the going gets tough, I trust the doctor, the scientist, the technology more than God. It's not like I've given up on God; I just make him the magic charm who grants my wishes only if I do my part.

We don't trust God with that unwavering faith. But it might just be that the story isn't over yet. God knows better than anyone or anything how to bring our struggles to a good resolution.

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." The Canaanite woman took those words to heart. Her FAITH never QUIT. She came to Jesus desperate. He could help her. She would not leave until he gave her what she needed. Yes, she's asking for herself, but you can hear the motherly concern for her child. She, like God, wants what's good for her child. And FAITH DOESN'T QUIT on God. It holds God to what only he can do.

So this woman, after being ignored by Jesus, after hearing Jesus say she's none of his concern, refuses to go home. Jesus has noticed her. Now's her chance. Her posture, kneeling, shows she recognizes he is no ordinary person. She lays it all on the line: "**Lord, help me!**" Jesus, I need you, only you. Make it right.

The woman has gained a hearing from Jesus, but he doesn't give her much. "**It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.**" Just when you thought Jesus couldn't be more savage, he now compares this woman to a dog—an unclean animal, a pest in the 1st-century world. He's already ignored her, claimed she's not his responsibility. Now Jesus openly insults this woman. Hadn't he given her enough of a beating already? Now he has to verbally abuse her, too? Did he dial back to the age of insensitivity?

But for this woman, this is all she needs. Her FAITH DOESN'T QUIT. Jesus spoke to her. That's an improvement. In calling this woman a "dog," Jesus didn't use the regular term for dog. While Jews would hear Jesus talking about an unclean animal and treating this woman as an outsider, this woman sees it differently. He called her a "little dog," a house pet. No, she isn't a member of the family, but she still has a place in the home. That's all she needs. Jesus has opened the door a crack. Now this woman, whose name we never learn, will blast it open by a mile.

"**Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table.**" This woman doesn't argue with Jesus. He told her she's not one of the children. She knows she doesn't have a right to

claim a place in God's family. She isn't asking for him to move heaven and earth, though. She's talking to Jesus, Lord of the universe, Savior of the nations. For him, casting out a demon, even a terrible demon, isn't a monumental task. All she's asking for is a crumb. Whatever leftovers Jesus has on hand. That will be enough for her. She won't back down. Her FAITH DOESN'T QUIT.

"Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." You lift five, ten, 200 pounds with arms, legs, all around. You subject your body to pain to make you stronger in weight training. Similarly, Jesus has forced this woman to exercise her faith. That desperate faith won't back down. FAITH DOESN'T QUIT.

Then, and only then, do we see Jesus' heart. As God, Jesus knew from the beginning what he would do for this woman. First he needed to chisel away some layers. Does God show favoritism to one race of people over another? This woman, with her persistent faith, proved regardless of her heritage, she was part of God's family. Chip that layer away. Does God take a break from our problems or care less about some struggles? No, Jesus devised a test to teach his disciples and us how much he cares. Cut it off! Is God deaf to the cries of his children? Absolutely not! And what's left is a golden display of this woman's faith, for the disciples, for us to see.

Even Jesus marvels. His words ring with emotion: "**Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want.**" A glowing review from the Savior. This woman was right. She wouldn't back down.

Neither did Jesus. He always wanted to give her what she wanted. Jesus didn't back down from healing her daughter any more than he backed down from saving you. Time and time again we give up on God, but Jesus never gave up on us. That meant bitter agony. Being ignored by God on a cross of wood. Insulted from his own people. Countless millions still ignore him; some even believe he never existed. He endure it all to forgive those faithless moments when we think God has forgotten us. He paid for the times when we play favorites with others. Jesus suffered the punishment we deserved. So the heart of God will never turn away from you.

So never quit. Storm the throne of God. If he doesn't give you what you need, ask. And ask. And ask again. And again. Ask until you're tired of asking. God isn't tired of being asked. He may just be teaching you to trust in him. He will use your struggles to show others in your life what he can do. Like this woman, your faith is on display to the people around you. FAITH DOESN'T QUIT. So don't give up. God will make it right, either on this side of heaven or the other.

"When the going gets tough, the tough get going." Thank God Jesus never quit when things got hard! He endured thorns, whips, nails. "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." But the cross did kill Jesus; it makes you and me stronger. It makes us part of God's family. The Jesus we know didn't quit. The Jesus we know loves. When what he's doing doesn't match the Jesus you know, trust the one who knows how the story ends. He will make your faith shine forever in heaven. He will use that faith on earth to bring others to heaven. Don't quit. FAITH DOESN'T QUIT. Why? Because Jesus didn't He lives forever for you. Amen.

"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." (NIV)