

Dr. Jack Graham: The Fierce Faith of a Mother

On the eve of this day set apart to honor the mothers and mother figures in our lives, my mind turns to a woman of fierce faith we read about in the apostle Matthew's Gospel. We do not know her name, but her words and actions were so incredible, so audacious, that they were written down, included in the biblical canon and are studied to this day.

She was a Canaanite woman who had a daughter who was oppressed by a demon, a daughter whom she would do anything for (Matt. 15:21-28). One day, Jesus ventured into Tyre and Sidon, which was Gentile territory. It was there this woman found him.

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David," she said. "My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon" (v. 22b).

Jesus did not respond.

Evidently the mother was persistent, because the disciples complained to Jesus, "Send her away, for she cries out after us" (v. 23b).

Finally, Jesus spoke, saying he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. Undeterred, the woman begged Jesus to help her daughter. Then he called her a dog. To which she replied, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table" (v. 27).

In response, Jesus said, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you desire" (v. 28b).

This mother had been turned down by Jesus twice. But she loved her child, and her faith was fierce. She is a great example to us today, and Jesus himself celebrated her faith.

But why? I think there are two reasons:

Her Faith Was Daring

Although this mother was a Canaanite, she somehow heard about Jesus. Perhaps she thought, *If Jesus is who He claims to be, then He can heal my daughter.* She came to Jesus with the hope he could save her child. And she came in daring faith, falling at Jesus' feet and crying out to Him—she broke all social and religious rules of the day.

But Jesus ignored her.

Ladies, some of you may feel like God has neither heard nor answered your prayers. You wonder if God is real because of his silence.

We know from Scripture that Jesus was never apathetic. His death and Resurrection testify to the mercy and grace that are available to all who call on him. Jesus' interaction with this woman was apparently out of character for Him.

So what was happening at that moment? I think Jesus was drawing out this mother's faith. Healing is about to come, and He is giving his disciples—and therefore all of us who would follow Him—a lesson about determined faith that refuses to relent.

Mothers, do not ever give up on your children or on God, even when believing seems impossible or foolish. Do not ever stop praying—because the answer will come in God's time and God's way. It may be sooner than you think.

Her Faith Was Humble, but Persistent

When Jesus finally did address this mother, he called her a dog. Again, name calling seems inconsistent with Jesus' character—especially since He spent so much time with those who were labeled “sinners.” This is test No. 2.

At this point, I would have given up. But this mother did not.

She did not debate, get angry or walk away. Rather, she stood her ground and humbly reminded Him that what He had was available to her, despite her societal standing.

This may sound strange to some, but I think this is what God wants us to do. He wants us to remind him of His promises, of what He has revealed to us. He wants us to remind Him of His character because, in doing so, we are reminding ourselves.

Hebrews 4:16 (ESV) tells us, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." That is exactly what this mother did. And her faith was rewarded.

Mother's Day is one that is joyous for some and painful for others. I know the responsibilities are heavy, and sometimes it must seem overwhelming to be a mom amid violence, fear and sickness. Your love and your leadership in your family and your community are invaluable. You are shaping this generation and the generations to come. Your hearts, mothers, make all the difference.

One hundred years from now and beyond, your heart for God will still be beating in the lives of your children and your children's children. Many of us, myself included, are testimonies of that truth today. We recognize that it is the heritage of our own family and our own mothers, grandmothers and their mothers before them that has brought us to faith in Jesus.

Keep praying, keep persisting, keep pleading. And in fierce faith, keep believing. {eo}

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