

Even though we spend a lot of time speaking to one another, we do not always cultivate the art of listening to what others are saying. Listening really is an art, because we often hear and understand only what we want to hear and understand instead of listening with an open mind to hear what is actually being said. An example might be the difference between what people hear and understand with the phrase, "It is raining." One might be happy because the plants are being watered and the weather is cooler. Another might complain because of higher humidity, the sun was not shining and there is a possibility for a storm. Two entirely different reactions to the same phrase because of the way the person heard it. In the Word of God before us this morning, we shall see a Canaanite woman who had the optimism of faith, instead of the pessimism of doubt as Jesus spoke to her. Because of this, Jesus said about her, **WOMAN, YOU HAVE GREAT FAITH.** You see, I. Jesus did not seem to hear her request, but we shall also see that II. Jesus never denied her request.

Jesus had withdrawn from the crowds for a time, and was by the border of Tyre and Sidon in the north. A Canaanite woman from that region came to Him with a request for Him to heal her demon possessed daughter. No doubt it tore that mother's heart to see her daughter suffer so terribly, and there was nothing that she could do about it. That was, until Jesus came. So she started following after Jesus and His band of disciples, pleading and crying out for Jesus to heal her daughter. But Jesus did not answer her at all. In fact, He kept walking, ignoring her as though He had not heard a thing. Still, she continued to follow them, pleading and crying for help. It got so bad that Jesus' disciples even came to Him and asked Him to send her away because of the scene she was creating. But Jesus did not do even what they had asked Him. It truly seemed that Jesus was ignoring her and her request.

Some might have seen what Jesus was doing and decided that He did not care, figuring that He was not about to help her. But that would be only because of the way that one who has doubts is prone to think. But this woman had the trust of faith, and therefore she pressed onward with her request, for she was not about to give up, even when it seemed that Jesus was ignoring her request. When the disciples asked Jesus to send this woman away, Jesus had responded, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.**" (24) Again, that might appear to say that He was refusing to help this woman. She also heard those words, but did not believe that Jesus would turn His back on her. So she fell at Jesus' feet, saying, "**Lord, help me!**" Again, Jesus seemed to rebuff her by saying, "**It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.**" (26)

At first glance, it seems that Jesus was being unusually cruel to this woman by not healing her daughter. But Jesus was testing her faith so that it might grow even stronger. You see, this woman did have faith. She knew Who Jesus was — the promised Messiah, calling to Him, "**Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!**" (22) — and that is why she came to Him for help. Even though she was a Gentile, she knew that this Savior was coming for all mankind. She knew His promises, and that He would not turn His back on any of His children. She firmly believed that He could and would help her daughter. Even when it seemed as if Jesus was not hearing her request, she pressed on.

We need to imitate the faith of this woman. At times we bring problems, which are pressing hard upon our hearts, to Jesus in prayer, and it seems as though He has not heard us. It seems as though He is not going to do anything about our requests. It is at that point in time that we dare not let doubt enter into our hearts. Doubt would urge us to give up because it might seem that Jesus does not care about us. How many times has not that happened to us? Our lives have been disrupted by the coronavirus for over six months now. We have gone before Him in prayer many times, and we have not seen much that has changed. At other times, we have become ill, we have had financial difficulties, we seem to be all alone in this world with no close friends to help, we do not seem to have the joy of life, so we have taken these problems to the Lord in prayer as well, even as He asks us to. Then it seemed as though nothing changed in our lives. All of the old problems still remained. It is at that point in time that we dare not lose faith nor become discouraged. It may truly seem that Jesus does not hear our requests. But we have His Word of promise that He will hear and answer all of our prayers, and we are to hold on to that promise. It is because of that promise that we are to continue to pray boldly and confidently, firmly trusting that He will grant our requests.

Each day we also come before Him in prayer, asking that all of our sins be washed away, just as He has promised. Does Jesus hear and answer that prayer? It may appear that nothing has changed. Even after hearing the absolution, there is no visible change in us. Even though we desire to rid ourselves of those sins, we keep falling back into them day after day. Can we be sure that they have been removed from us, just as He has promised? We are to trust that Jesus is always faithful to His promises — that He has heard our requests, and washed away the guilt of all of our sins. We have His word on it!

The words which Jesus spoke to this woman seemed to say that He was not going to grant her request. But this woman listened with the ears of faith. She heard the words Jesus said, and never once did He say that He was not going to heal her daughter. So she clung fervently to His promises and kept returning to seek His help. She knew that Jesus would not reject her. She always had that glimmer of hope that faith brings. In each of the statements which Jesus made, though it appeared that He was not going to help her, there was always that one little exception which she saw. In faith, she clung to that. When Jesus said, **“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs,”** She replied, **“Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”**

Jesus did grant her request. Her daughter was healed. Jesus was amazed at her faith. But her faith did not come from herself, but from the promises which Jesus had made throughout the Bible. Faith clings to Jesus’ promises in the realistic expectation that Jesus will live up to them, because He always does.

While we can always be sure that our sins have been forgiven, at times He will put our faith to the test in regard to earthly blessings, as He did this Canaanite woman. He does this only to strengthen and purify our faith, not to make our life miserable. Like this woman, we need to keep going back to Jesus in prayer, holding Him to all of the promises which He has made to us — promises which He will never go back on. We need to have faith, never letting doubts cloud our hearts, even if Jesus does not answer our prayer immediately.

In this life, we will make many requests of the Lord which He may not answer right away. We may be tempted to think that God is not hearing us if He does not removed the coronavirus as quickly we would like, or if we do not have the friends and pleasures which we may think we expect in this life. We may complain if the Lord does not grant us the balm of healing from our illness as quickly or as completely as we think we need. We may become worried if our financial difficulties are not brought under control in the way that we think we deserve. But none of these things are to make our faith begin to doubt what the Lord has in store for us. We are firmly to cling to His promises, and not doubt. As we cling to His word of promise, we will never be disappointed. He may not bless us exactly as we think He ought to, but we know He will be watching over us and blessing us as He know is best for us.

So let us listen carefully to the Lord as He speaks to us. Let us not come to Him with our own pre-conceived ideas of how He is supposed to hear and answer out prayers, but listen to hear what He wants us to understand about Him. That means listening with the ears of faith which trusts Him always to remain faithful to all of His promises. And then we will hear Jesus tell us as He told this woman, “Great is your faith.”