

Relentless Faith

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today.
- A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good.
- They don't need God's grace, and no one's so bad that they can't have it. And so that's why we turn week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.
- We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark, and you'll remember that the Gospels tell us the story of Jesus in His life and His death and His resurrection. If you've looked at this morning's passage, you may have noticed something strange, which is that we ended chapter 6 last week, and suddenly we've jumped to verse 24 of chapter 7.
- And so you might be thinking, what happened to 7, 1 through 23? And the answer is we did cover it. We just covered it a little bit early. When I was gone on vacation and Wes Cowton came here as a guest preacher, he preached 7, 1 through 23.
- [1 : 1 4] And so I figured I would spare you hearing the same passage preached twice in a six-week period. And so that's the reason we're moving to verse 24.
- Now, in the last couple portions that we've looked at in the Gospel of Mark, we've had these negative examples. We talked last week about the negative example of the disciples and the fact that they were hard-hearted.
- They did not understand that Jesus was the good shepherd who had come to care for them. And when you looked at 7, 1 through 23, there was also the negative example of the Pharisees who were consumed, not with hardness of heart, but self-righteousness.
- They believed all that mattered was what was on the outside. Jesus rebukes them and tells them that it's what's on the inside that's actually important. And so now, after those two negative examples, we're finally going to have a positive example of what it looks like to have great faith in Jesus.
- The disciples had too low a view of Jesus. The Pharisees had too high a view of themselves. Here we have a woman who, in the parallel passage in Matthew chapter 15, Jesus says, O woman, great is your faith.
- [2 : 2 7] So we have just a simple question as we come to this passage this morning, which is this, how do we have great faith? We're not going to be like the Pharisees or the disciples.
- Instead, we want to be people who see Jesus for who he truly is. And so it's for that reason we're going to turn now to Mark chapter 7.
- As we turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb, which is why we read now starting at verse 24.
- And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden.

But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

[3 : 37] Verse 27. And he said to her, Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

But she answered him, Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. And he said to her, For this statement you may go your way.

The demon has left your daughter. And she went home and found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

Our Father in Heaven, we praise you and thank you again for the miracle that you speak to us. You're not a God who's far away and distant, but you're a God who's close and near.

And one of the ways that we know that is that you've given us your Word, that we could hear and learn. And so we ask for that this morning, that you would use these words from hundreds of years ago to make an impact on us and our lives, that you would encourage us, you challenge us, but even more than that, you would help us to see Jesus for who he truly is and respond to him with joy and love and gratitude.

[5 : 01] Now, we ask these things thankful again that we don't have to earn them or deserve them, but instead we simply ask them in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I'm wondering what you would say if someone asked you, what are the major challenges that Jesus faced in his ministry here on earth?

Some of you might immediately think, well, he had this opposition from the Pharisees. We might also think of the ways in which the disciples failed to understand him. They abandoned him in his darkest hour.

And those things would be true. I don't want you to miss another challenge that Jesus had, though at least here in the Gospel of Mark, we see Jesus had trouble finding time to eat. And we've seen that a couple times.

Back in chapter 6, remember things were so bad, they were so hectic, after his disciples returned from the mission that he had sent them out on, that they didn't have time to eat. And that was when he pulled them away and meant to go on a retreat, and the 5,000 came and he had to feed them.

And so there's a certain irony here that we didn't talk about, the fact that Jesus' disciples can't eat, and what they end up doing is having to feed other people in the midst of that. That's not the only time we saw that, though.

[6 : 13] Remember in chapter 3, the same thing happened. The crowd had gathered around Jesus. They were pressing in so much that he was not able to eat. And that's when his family came, and they tried to stage a little bit of an intervention to rescue Jesus from himself and his reckless schedule.

That helps us understand what's happening at the beginning of this passage. Verse 24, we find out Jesus did not want anyone to know that he'd gone away to this region far away from Galilee.

Potentially, Jesus here is still trying to get the break that he's been working at for multiple sections now. And yet, it seems like every time it's impossible for Jesus to escape and have some time to himself because he's constantly followed by these folks who need his healing and his power.

And of course, that's exactly what we see here. Verse 24, yet he could not be hidden. Jesus wants some time away, and more and more that is impossible for him.

Verse 25, immediately, a woman comes to him. She has this problem, which is that her daughter has an unclean spirit, and it sounds like she knows a little bit of Jesus and his power, and so she thinks this will be her answer.

[7 : 36] Now that Jesus has entered the region in which she lives, she will have a chance at a miracle. But we find out something unexpected and different about this woman, that she's a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth.

Now this reference, Gentile, when we see this in the New Testament, it's talking about someone's ethnicity, and it's a way of saying this person is not Jewish. We heard this in the Old Testament.

The phrase would be used, the nations, which is a way of talking about those who are not part of God's chosen people. And it's not just that she's not ethnically Jewish. We also find out she's not Jewish by geography.

She's a Syrophenician by birth. That's a reference to the region in which she grew up, the region in which Tyre and Sidon are located. These are cities that are in the area of Phoenicia.

So she's in this city that's in a larger area that's separated from the land of the people of God. Mark here is driving home the point for us that she is an outsider in multiple ways.

[8 : 38] She is not just non-Jewish by nature. She's also not a Jew by nurture. By ethnicity and geography, this woman is a Gentile.

And so she is the wrong person, in the wrong place, with the wrong gender. And on top of that, she doesn't have an unclean son.

She has an unclean daughter. Mark is portraying for us this overlapping complex of cleanliness issues. There's a constellation of reasons why Jesus would be expected not to interact with this woman.

It's not just that she's in the wrong place, though. Jesus is also in the wrong place. It should be a surprise to us that Jesus has decided to travel to this region, which is northwest of where he was in Galilee.

Jesus almost never plays away games. This is one of only a few times where we see Jesus in Gentile territory.

[9 : 47] We have only seen it once before in the Gospel of Mark. Think back all the way to Mark chapter 5, when Jesus healed a man with a demon who was in the country of the Gerasenes.

We find out later in the story of the Bible, in Acts chapter 10, verse 28, that Jews were not supposed to visit Gentiles. And so Jesus is going outside of the expectations and rules of his people, both in the region that he's visiting and the woman that he's interacting with.

Why? It's not a coincidence that this story comes at this place because in the section right before it, the section that Wes preached on, chapter 7, verses 1 through 23, Jesus has this encounter with the Pharisees where he talks to them about this issue of cleanliness.

And if you think back all the way to when Wes preached on that, he tells them, it's not what's on the outside that makes you unclean, it's what's on the inside. In other words, Jesus here is giving us a text case of what he's just taught.

Jesus, let's see if you actually believe what you just said in the previous passage. Let's see if you're actually going to act on it. And he does. He finds maybe one of the stickiest issues that he can to prove that he believes what he's taught.

[11 : 16] To prove that he's not afraid of being made unclean on the outside, he's more concerned with what is on the inside. And so it's with all of that background that we understand we have a test case here that Mark is presenting us with to show us that Jesus is going to put his money where his mouth is.

We pick up then again in the story, here this woman comes, verse 25 and 26, she immediately enters into this confrontation with Jesus. It tells us that she fell down at his feet, verse 25, verse 26, she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

And the verb tense of this word beg indicates that this is not something that she did once, it was something that she did over and over again. This woman is showing us how desperate she is as she creates a scene right in front of Jesus so that she has the best chance possible of healing for her daughter.

And it's at that moment that Jesus does something unexpected and surprising. Think back to what we've seen before. Chapter six, he sees the 5,000 on this hill and we're told that he believed they were like sheep without a shepherd and he was filled with compassion.

The end of chapter six, our passage from last week, what does he do? He's going out and healing people right after he's had this interaction with the disciples. So our expectation would be that Jesus, of course, would be happy and willing to intervene in this woman's life.

[12 : 51] That he would be filled with compassion and sympathy for her. That he would want her daughter to be healed immediately. We would think after what Jesus just taught us that he would be eager to show that he's not afraid of someone who's unclean.

And Jesus does the exact opposite. He insults this woman for her race. He flips the tables on us as we're expecting this momentum, as we're seeing the direction he's headed, as we think that Jesus is going to make good on his word, he does something that should catch us off guard.

Verse 27, And he said to her, Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

The woman asks for healing. He calls her a dog. Now, some folks have pointed out that the term he uses for dog here would not be a stray dog, but a pet dog.

That makes it less of an insult. That does not stop it from being an insult. Okay, if someone calls you a pet dog, you're not going to think, Man, that's such a great thing they said to me.

[14 : 07] I'm glad I'm not a stray dog. I mean, yeah, it's better to be a pet dog than a stray dog. Jesus just said, She's a dog among humans. You cannot avoid the way in which he's just insulted her.

On top of that, dog was a term that Jews would use to refer to Gentiles. This is a type of slur that Jesus is using against her. And he's actually making a point that we see throughout the Gospels.

He's making this point that he's come first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. So when he says, Why would I do this when the children should be fed first?

What he's saying is, Why would I help you, an unclean Gentile woman in a Gentile territory with a daughter who's demon-possessed, when I have Jews who need me?

Why would I not follow the priority of my ministry? In the parallel passage in Matthew 15, he tells her, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

[15 : 10] That's why, by the way, we don't see Jesus leaving Israel very often. That's why in Romans 1, verse 16, Paul tells us that the Gospel was first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

And yet that doesn't answer the question of why Jesus responds in this way. Because he's just taught us that uncleanness doesn't bother him. He's just demonstrated that unclean areas don't threaten him because he's the one who chose to travel there.

So why is it that Jesus insults this woman? I want you to think about it this way. When I was in my final year of seminary, I was trying to find a job, any job, and so I was beating the bushes to figure out what openings there might be.

And one of the opportunities that I explored is something you all are familiar with if you've been with us for a while, which is to work for our college ministry, RUF. Jonathan Clark preached here maybe a month ago.

He's starting a new college ministry at UCCS. And so I was trying to figure out what would be an opening for me to be able to serve in ministry. And as someone coming out of seminary, if you're a new grad, it's much harder to find jobs than if you're someone with experience.

[16 : 28] And so I was talking at that time to this college ministry about a potential opening at a school in New England. And I called the man who was in charge of hiring for this job, and we had an hour-long conversation.

During that hour-long conversation, that man kept challenging me and pushing me at every turn. He was borderline a jerk for an hour on the phone.

Okay? At the end of the phone call, he says this, I'm sorry if I was hard on you, but if you can't handle me, you can't handle this school.

What was he saying? I was testing you to see what you were made of. The fact that I was a jerk to you was part of the interview because I wanted to see if you were going to be able to push back on me.

I wanted to see if you had the spine to handle the types of students that I know are at this school because if you can't stand up for an hour on the phone, there's no time that I have to talk to you anymore. He was testing me.

[17 : 32] He wanted to see what was there. Now, long story short, that school didn't just not open up for me. It didn't open up for anyone. There still is not an RUF there. But I learned something important about life and about that man in that moment.

People will do things to you to see how you respond. Jesus here, like a good teacher, is testing this woman. He wants to see what she's made of.

He wants to understand the level of her faith. That's the way tests work. If you're a student or in life, tests reveal and show what's already there.

Tests allow a chance for you on the outside to demonstrate what was already on the inside. That's, by the way, part of what happens in the book of Job.

God uses Job to demonstrate Job's faith in the midst of suffering and to show him off as an example to the devil. Here, Jesus is testing this woman's faith to show her off to us.

[18 : 41] A good teacher, right, if they're testing you, they hope that you pass. No teacher who's worth anything sits alone in a room putting their hands together and giggling about how no student's going to be able to mount this test.

No, a great teacher wants you to pass. A great teacher's preparing you throughout the school year to do as well as you can. A good teacher is cheering you on because they want you to succeed.

The test is there so that they can show off what you know. Jesus here is testing this woman so that he can show what she knows and believes.

And so we see in verse 28 that she passes the test. She enters into his illustration and demonstrates her faith by showing that she understands the nature of God's grace.

Yes, I'm a dog. But don't you give good things even to pets? Yes, I don't have anything that should impress you.

[19 : 46] I have no reason to ask something from you. But isn't that the type of person that you are? Aren't you the type of person who gives money and bread without price?

Aren't you the person who cares for people who can't give anything back? Aren't you the type of person who shows mercy even to dogs? And Jesus here, verse 29, is delighted.

He is the teacher who is thrilled to see his student get an A. He says to her, For this statement you may go your way. The demon has left your daughter.

In the same passage in Matthew 15, he says, O woman, great is your faith. Jesus is asking whether she would see and believe and act on his goodness and she does.

Jesus is testing her and she passes. Now I told you at the beginning we were looking to answer the question of what does it mean to have great faith and how can we be people of that type of faith?

[21 : 00] And we see at least a couple things that I want to focus on in this woman. First, her persistence and second, her humility. Now first, her persistence and second, her humility.

One of the characteristics of faith is that it is relentless. And it's relentless not because the person who has faith believes they deserve something, but because that person with relentless faith understands God and his grace and his character.

A person with great faith does not give up easily. That person comes back to God again and again and again. In fact, this is a theme that we see throughout the Bible.

In Genesis chapter 32, Jacob wrestles with God throughout the entire night and refuses to let him go until God blesses him. Jacob is relentless in his encounter with God.

Luke 18, Jesus tells this story about a persistent widow who needs justice from a terrible judge and so she harasses him over and over again until he gives her what she wants.

[22 : 06] And then Jesus says, that's the way you should be in prayer. You should be coming back again and again telling God what you need and want. Same thing happens here.

This woman is not put off by Jesus' answer. She doesn't say, oh, okay, I guess you're not here to help people like me and then walks away.

She has Genesis 32, Luke 18 type of faith that refuses to let go and refuses to give up. And Jesus loves her persistence.

Jesus loves the fact that she is relentless. Remember the disciples in chapter 6, all the disciples had was a lot of fear.

Here instead, she continues to ask for help. brothers and sisters, having great faith means that we keep asking God again and again.

[23 : 12] Having great faith means that we don't give up. Having great faith means that we're like the widow in Luke 18 who keeps crying out for justice.

Keep asking. God invites you to test him. God loves great faith.

And so keep asking. Keep asking that God would change you and your heart. Keep asking God that he would change the hearts and lives of those you love. Keep asking God that he would redeem past failures and sins and mistakes yours and the ones of those you love.

Keep asking God to protect you from sin and compromise. Keep asking God for the wisdom that you know you need and you don't have. Keep asking God to give you purpose in your work that you could sustain and bless others.

If you want to have great faith, keep asking. in the words of Winston Churchill, never, never, never give up.

[24 : 32] And for the Christian, never give up in prayer. Keep coming back to God. God. That raises another question for us though, which is how do we sustain that kind of persistence?

How are we able to stay relentless before God week in and week out, day after day? Well, she shows us the answer for that as well.

We stay persistent in our faith because we rely on God and his character, not ourselves. We're able to remain persistent in our faith because we rely on God's character, not ourselves.

And so we see this tremendous humility that the woman models for us. She is not coming to Jesus based on her status. She's not coming because she's a Jew because she isn't.

She's not coming because she's from the right place because she isn't. She's not coming because she's the right gender because she isn't. She is coming because she knows that Jesus is a man of mercy.

[25 : 46] And so we see that humility in verse 28 when she says, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. In other words, I know I'm a dog.

I know I haven't earned anything from you. I know I don't deserve something from you. And I know that's not what matters. I know what matters in this situation is your mercy and your grace.

I know the kind of character that you have. I'm aware of the fact that you're at least as kind as a regular human is to her pets. And so I'm crying out, I'm calling on you to be that kind as well.

And so that's why I pray every Sunday when I end our prayers together, I say we ask these things not because we've earned them or deserved them. Because we want to be people like the Syrophoenician woman.

We want to recognize before God that we can keep coming back with courage and confidence because we're not relying on our merit. If you are or were relying on your merit, you might as well give up now.

[26 : 56] In fact, I would recommend that you never pray again because you have nothing to offer God. God. This woman knows that.

That's the basis of her claim. What we're saying when we pray in Jesus' name is that we know we can't claim things for ourselves, but God is good and Jesus is good.

We know we haven't earned anything and God tells us he's going to listen and hear. And so what she's doing here is she's appealing to God's character.

She's asking God to act on what he has done and who he is, not what she's done or who she is. And that's the same thing we do when we stay relentless in prayer.

We're appealing to God's character. That's how we're able to keep coming back month after month and week after week and day after day. We're like this woman reminding God of what he has promised in his word.

[28 : 04] We are coming back reminding God of his great mercy and love. I told you a few weeks ago about the importance of God being with us.

And I also shared with you that as I prepare every week to stand before you and present God's word, I ask him over and over that he would be with me and he'd also be with you.

you. And when I pray that I don't say because we are such a great church. And I don't say we need you to be with us because we deserve it.

No, I say we need you to be with us and you should do it because Jesus made a promise in John chapter 14 that he was going to send his Holy Spirit to be with his church.

And so you need to honor your promise. you need to do what you've said you were going to do. It's not because we have earned it or deserved it because you have told us what you're going to do.

[29 : 09] If you're crying out to God and you're asking him for wisdom in your life for the situations that you face that are beyond what you know how to respond to. We don't ask for wisdom because we deserve it or have earned it.

We ask it because God made us a promise in James chapter 1 verse 5 that he would give wisdom to those who ask for it. And so like this woman appealing to God's character and his mercy we do the same.

God we need you to give us mercy because you have said you're going to do it. Honor your promise. If you're a parent and you're crying out to God to help you as you raise your children you can't cry out to him because you are such a great person.

No you cry out to him because God has told us in Malachi chapter 2 that the heart and desire of him is that there would be godly children who would be raised to worship him generation after generation.

And so you come to God and you say this is what you say you want and it's not going to happen unless you help. And so I am throwing myself on your mercy and your grace.

[30 : 19] If you're someone who needs help in work and school you can come to God and appeal to his character and say you're the one in Genesis chapter 1 and 2 who said be fruitful and multiply.

And we're not going to be able to do it unless you're with us. And so we need you to honor your promise and your character. We need you to show up not because we are great but because you are.

God delights in a persistent faith that throws itself on his mercy.

God delights in the persistent faith that cries out and claims his promise and his character. there's a beautiful humble confidence that this woman has.

There's a beautiful humble confidence that comes when we see ourselves rightly and we see God rightly. The humility comes from seeing ourselves rightly.

[31 : 29] The confidence comes from seeing God rightly. We understand our misery and our sin as we confessed earlier this morning and we understand God's grace.

There's a principle in James chapter 4, 1 Peter 5 that tells us God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Great faith is persistent.

Great faith is humble. And that's where God has promised to show up and do his work. That's what we're about to sing together on page 10.

You'll see our closing hymn before the throne of God above. And we're singing about the fact that our plea is not on anything we deserve or earn but on God's grace. Verse 1, I have a strong, a perfect plea because I have a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me.

And then in the second verse we praise God that we're basing this not on our merit but on his grace. When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see him there who made an end to all my sin.

[32 : 41] It's not me, it's God's grace that gives me confidence and hope. How do we have great faith? We keep asking.

And we keep asking not because we deserve it but because God is good. He delights to show mercy to those who know that they need it.

He delights to show mercy to you and me. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and we thank you that we can come and speak to you like this woman.

We ask that you would give us great faith that we would never, never, never give up. and that we're to come from our confidence not in ourselves but in you and in your grace.

It's with that heart that we ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I invite you to stand. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.