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The Charlotte General Assembly will be classed as one of the greatest of all the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. It was fortunate in the place of meeting. Charlotte, North Carolina, is a beautiful and thriving city of about fifty thousand inhabitants, situated in the heart of one of our most prosperous Southern States. It is the center of a vigorous and aggressive Presbyterianism. The First Presbyterian Church, where the Assembly gathered, is located in a beautiful grove, and has ample facilities in its auditorium and in the adjoining Sunday-school building to accommodate a much larger body than the Assembly with all of its committees. The conveniences for the transaction of business could not have been surpassed. The able and attractive young pastor, Rev. Albert Sidney Johnson, D. D., together with his good people, did not spare themselves in their effort to entertain the members of the Assembly, and it could hardly have been better done. Those who were fortunate enough to have been in attendance will not soon forget their distinguished and abounding hospitality. The Assembly itself was composed of carefully selected men, both ministers and elders, who had come as commissioners from various parts of the Church, intent upon giving earnest attention to the weighty matters which it was known beforehand would have to be considered by this

TRIUMPHANT FAITH.

Matthew 15:21-28.

OUTLINE OF A SERMON BY THE REV. PROF. CHARLES R.
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"O woman, great is thy faith." Our Lord did not often speak thus. He rebuked his followers for their lack of faith; he "marvelled" at the unbelief in "his own country." Why was the faith of this woman so notable? What was there in her repeated request to arouse the admiration of the Master? It may be helpful to seek an answer to this question, for it may give us more confidence as we address to him our requests. This incident may give to us encouragement in prayer.

I. *Negatively*: (a) Her faith was remarkable not merely in that she was a *stranger* and never before had seen the Lord. Some have suggested that Jesus praised her because she believed him without having seen his miracles. Such trust in Christ is admirable but it is not unique. She had heard of the works of Christ, and it is of the very essence of all faith to believe on the evidence of testimony. As Jonathan Edwards declared, "The essence of faith is believing what has been revealed." As this woman accepted what she had heard in reference to the power of Christ, so we believe on the ground of testimony which we regard to be credible and sufficient.

(b) Nor was her faith remarkable simply because she was a *foreigner*, a "Greek," a "Syro-Phoenecian." It is true, at this time only, our Lord crossed the boundary of his native land, and many writers have noted with wonder the fact that here was a woman of Canaan who had faith enough in Christ to address him as "the Son of David." Yet this is not unique. We find today as striking examples of true faith among the Christians in China, or Africa, or Japan, as we do in our home

land. This fact need not rebuke us. It can encourage us to believe that faith may be independent of our surroundings.

(c) Others have remarked upon *the boldness of the request*. They have suggested that her faith was great because she was asking that our Lord might cure her daughter who was possessed with a demon, and thus manifest his power over the unseen world of spirits. Yet again this was not unique. Whenever we pray we exhibit a like faith. We ask that results shall be effected in the sphere of the unseen and in accordance with laws which are unknown, and what is more, we make our requests to an unseen Lord.

II. *Positively*: The faith of this woman was great because when it was tried it stood the test. Because of this triumph our Lord answered and said, "O woman, great is thy faith."

(a) Her faith was tested by *the silence of Christ*. When she came to him with her petition, "He answered her not a word." This was startling. She never had heard that the Master refused to heal. She comes to him in her deep distress, but she receives from him no reply. Thus our faith is tested. The answer to prayer is delayed. We cease praying, or are tempted to believe that the prayer will not be answered. It seems hard for us to learn "the patience of unanswered prayer." The silence of our Lord, however, could not silence this loving mother. She only continued to ask with more earnestness. Her faith was too great to allow her to doubt or to cease to ask.

(b) Her faith was tested further by the apparent *refusal of Christ*. As she follows the Lord who is turning from her to pursue his journey, the disciples come to him with the petition, "Send her away; for she crieth after us." They were as unsympathetic as the Lord appeared to be. They merely wanted to avoid a scene on the public highway. "But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He stated a real law of his earthly ministry. For wise reasons this ministry was limited to the people of his own nation. This law apparently made it impossible for him to grant the request of this distressed mother. So our faith is tested today. We are told of the reign of law and of the uniformity of

nature, and are assured that the answer to prayer is impossible; to expect such an answer is "unreasonable." The faith of the woman, however, triumphs over this severe trial. She is not discouraged. "Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me." In spite of the problems involved, even amid the mysteries with which the subject of prayer is surrounded, true faith enables us to pray.

(c) Faith was most severely tested by the apparent *reproach of Christ*, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." We are told that the word means "little dogs." It does not matter. Jesus called this broken-hearted woman a "dog." Of course he meant by that a "Gentile"; but none the less, it was enough to cause her to despair. How could a Gentile hope to receive anything from this Jewish Messiah. We too are thus tempted, not by distinction between Jews and Gentiles, but by the suggestion of our unworthiness. When answer to prayer is delayed, how frequently we feel that the apparent refusal is due to our own ill desert. This woman, however, is not discouraged. Her reply is quick and clever. Luther says that she "entrapped the Lord in his own words." We should rather say that his apparent harshness had intentionally make possible the intelligent and witty reply in which our Lord saw her great faith revealed. "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." She sees plainly that he could grant her request without really breaking the law of his earthly ministry, but she admits her true position; she makes no demand; she confesses she has no claim. This is the true spirit of prayer. We confess our unworthiness. We trust wholly to the grace of our Master. We make no demands. We trust to his goodness and his love.

It is not strange that the Master spoke his memorable word of praise and blessing: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." A similar blessing awaits the triumph of our faith.

Conclusion: Why did Jesus so test the faith of this woman? Not to discover its character. He knew that in advance. It was for her sake; that her relationship to him might be more

clearly defined, and her faith strengthened by its very testing. He did so, too, for the sake of the disciples who heard him and who wondered at his strange reply, but who were prepared now to understand his act of grace. Chiefly it was for our encouragement, and for the sake of the thousands who, through the centuries, have been strengthened by the courage of this woman. If at this present time our faith is being tested, it is not in order that the Lord may learn its quality, but rather that we may receive some blessing; and, that others who, without our knowledge, are observing us, may also be helped, and even that countless lives, of which we are ignorant may receive through us some abiding good. Even eternity cannot measure the helpful influences of a real victory of faith. May God grant "that the trial of your faith being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."