

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness” is not only one of my favourite hymns but its author Thomas Obadiah Chisholm, wrote the text in 1923 as a personal testimony to the unchanging faithfulness of the Lord across the ordinary seasons of life. Chisholm was born in 1866 near Franklin, Kentucky, and his life followed a path familiar to many believers. He worked as a teacher, newspaper editor, and insurance agent, and for a time served as a Methodist minister. Chronic health problems eventually forced him to leave full time pastoral ministry, but this limitation did not weaken his faith. Instead, it deepened his awareness of God’s daily provision. Chisholm later explained that he had experienced no extraordinary miracles, only the continual evidence of God’s care, which he believed was more than enough reason for praise.

The scriptural foundation of the hymn comes directly from Lamentations 3:22-23 “It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” These verses were written in the midst of national devastation and sorrow, yet they affirm God’s unchanging mercy. Chisholm drew from this passage to express a confidence that does not depend on circumstances, but on the character of God.

What distinguishes this hymn from many other hymns is its focus on everyday grace. Rather than emphasizing dramatic deliverance or emotional intensity, the hymn points to the faithfulness seen in nature’s seasons, daily bread, forgiveness of sins, and the hope of future grace. Lines such as “Morning by morning new mercies I see” echo the lived experience of believers who wake each day dependent on God’s mercy.

In direct contrast we hear of the Canaanite woman's plight in our Gospel reading. Her daughter has been troubled by an evil spirit. She comes to the disciples in the hope of seeing Jesus but they are not empathetic yet Jesus reminds them that this is the very kind of people that God has sent him to be with however noisy, troubled and shouty they are. They meet together at a point of need. Her desperation and that of her daughter's illness are paramount and this is a divine encounter as Jesus is going about his every day life. The Canaanite woman does not argue with being called a dog. She just points out that, however low the status of dogs within a household may be, they do have a place. And, by his reaction to her, Jesus acknowledges that she has a point. In that moment Jesus recognises the woman's faith and says "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.

The Gospel word translated here as "faith" (*pistis*) can also be translated as "trust". God trusts us. We trust God.

Reflecting on these two stories of Chisholm and the Canaanite woman we can ask ourselves the question when do I trust God ?, when do I notice that God brings moments of grace in my life and the lives of those I love? When do I hold the hope for others when they cannot hold the hope and trust in God for themselves through illness, suffering or death ?

I encourage you all to give thanks to God for God's faithfulness and those grace filled moments when it feels impossible then through prayer to place your confidence in others to do this for you just as the woman did for her daughter. Amen