

Matthew 15C

- Our scene is moving away from the Jewish side of the Galilee to a new region, a place Jesus hasn't visited as yet
 - In fact, our story today involves two different journeys, to two out-of-the-way places, so Jesus can teach a new lesson to His disciples
 - Both of these places are important to correcting another misconception these men had about Kingdom Program ministry
 - And yet this lesson also raises old issues that Jesus' disciples have yet to appreciate
 - And if they've had trouble embracing the previous lessons, this new one is going to be even harder to accept
 - The lesson that prompts Jesus' journeys today may be the most difficult Kingdom Program truth for a Jew to accept
 - Last week, Jesus challenged His disciples to ignore the Pharisees because they were imposters
 - And we know that would have been difficult to accept, because the Pharisees were greatly esteemed and feared by Jewish culture
 - But now Jesus will show these men that they must rethink one of their strongest and most dearly held beliefs
 - They held to a uniquely Jewish bias that was incompatible with ministry in the Kingdom Program
 - And because this thinking was so entrenched, Jesus must bring the men face-to-face with their prejudice
 - Into locations that were out of the way and rarely visited by Jews...

Matt. 15:21 Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Matt. 15:22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed."

[Matt. 15:23](#) But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us."

[Matt. 15:24](#) But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

[Matt. 15:25](#) But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

[Matt. 15:26](#) And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

[Matt. 15:27](#) But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

[Matt. 15:28](#) Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

- Our previous scene took place near Gennesaret along the western side of the Sea of Galilee
 - But now Jesus withdraws, Matthew says, into a far northern, Gentile area of Judea
 - You remember I told you that sometimes Jesus would retreat into Gentile areas to escape the Jewish crowds
 - Previously, Jesus traveled to the eastern side of the lake which was dominated by Gentiles
 - But this time Jesus travels northwest by the coast and into a region of the Phoenicians
 - Matthew says Jesus went to the district of Tyre and Sidon
 - Tyre and Sidon were ancient Phoenician cities along the Mediterranean Sea (present-day Lebanon)
 - This region was best known as the home of Jezebel, the evil wife of King Ahab
 - By Jesus' day, Rome had made Phoenicia a part of their Syrian province so the territory was accessible to Judeans
 - But historically this region was an enemy of Israel, because the land was part of the grant God gave to Israel
 - The Jewish tribes assigned this region never conquered it as God directed, and so the Phoenicians remained a thorn in Israel's side

- Mark tells us Jesus traveled here so He could be alone with the twelve

Mark 7:24 Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice.

- Jesus enters a house in the region of Tyre hoping to keep a low profile for a while
- And you would think Jesus could enjoy some peace and anonymity there, but it wasn't meant to be
- Even in this remote area, Jesus' fame preceded Him
 - Mark says He could not escape notice, and soon Gentiles flock to Him seeking to be healed
 - And one particular woman among the crowd catches Jesus' attention
- Matthew says a Canaanite woman from the region came out crying to Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter
 - Matthew refers to this mother as a "Canaanite" but not in a specific sense
 - Canaanites descended from Ham's grandson, Cain, who settled in this region following the flood
 - The line of Ham was cursed by God in Genesis 9, and as a result these people were marked out for destruction
 - In the providence of God, the Jewish people were appointed to fulfill the curse by dispossessing the Canaanite people from the land
 - But Israel failed to obey the command Joshua gave them
 - So now centuries later, descendants of the Canaanites, like this woman, still occupied the land
 - And because of that history, the Jewish people loathed the Canaanites and Gentiles in general
 - In fact, the Jews called Canaanites and other Gentiles "dogs" as an insult
 - To a Jew, dogs were savage, brutal, unthinking creatures that tore their prey apart and lived in filth
 - Which is proof that the dogs of the Bible were all poodles!

- This particular Gentile woman comes to Jesus seeking healing for her daughter who was possessed by a particularly cruel demon
 - Now, in earlier lessons we discussed demon possession in some detail, and so I won't repeat that here
 - But it's worth noting how in Jesus' day demon possession was a generally accepted and legitimate diagnosis
 - Today our world views such a conclusion as superstition and myth, having no place in an age of science and reason
 - But that's not how the Bible presents demon possession...the Bible presents it as a common reality of the human experience
 - In virtually every case where a person points to demon possession as the cause of their condition, Scripture backs them
 - In fact, there is only one example in all the New Testament where someone's claims of demon possession is shown to be false:
 - When the Pharisees lied in claiming that Jesus was demon possessed
 - This pattern suggests that demon possession is a more present reality than many would consider or accept today
 - So this woman comes begging Jesus to free her daughter, but notice Jesus didn't answer her a word, Matthew says
 - Jesus is waiting to see whether this woman is seeking healing as a way to demonstrate faith
 - Because following His rejection, Jesus only heals people who demonstrate faith first, generally speaking
 - And it doesn't require faith in Jesus to cry out for healing...everyone was doing it
 - Many people pray to Jesus for things they want...and they also pray to Buddha, Mother Earth, Allah, their dead ancestors, etc.
 - These are equal opportunity worshippers...because in the end they don't care which deity gives them what they want
 - They only care about having their need met, and that's the chief conceit of false religion...it's a worship of self

- False religion masquerades as an act of devotion to a god, when in actuality it's a pursuit of selfish interests
- So Jesus ignores this woman for a time waiting to see if she demonstrates true faith in Him as Messiah...and in the process He also tests the disciples
 - First, notice she calls Jesus the son of David in v.22, which is one of the titles of the Messiah
 - It's a reference to the prophecies of the Old Testament that tell us the Messiah would be a descendant of David, as Jesus was
 - That was insightful on her part as a Gentile, suggesting the woman had received insight from the Spirit
 - Secondly, notice how persistent she is...the woman continues to beg Jesus for healing despite Him ignoring her
 - Ignoring someone for a time was one of Jesus' favorite ways to identify a true believer within a crowd
 - Only if the person persisted in their pleading would Jesus finally relent and engage with them
 - While that is a terrible parenting technique, it's an excellent way to identify true believers
 - Because those simply wishing for some deity to give them what they want will only give so much time and energy to that pursuit
 - Sooner or later, they tire and assume the deity isn't there or doesn't care, so they move on to other options or simply give up
 - They return to old patterns, which elsewhere Jesus compares to a dog returning to its vomit or a pig to the mud
- True believers in Jesus will behave differently...we persist in crying out to Jesus
 - Elsewhere in Luke's Gospel Jesus tells a parable of a widow who receives justice because she persists in appealing to a judge
 - By that parable, Jesus teaches that the mark of the elect, of believers, is persistence in our appealing to God
 - We never give up on God and start looking for some other deity to solve our problem

- The pattern of truth faith is never relenting, never abandoning, always seeking for Jesus
 - That doesn't mean we pray when we should or as much as we should or that we don't have moments of doubt
 - That doesn't mean we get our answer immediately or even that we get the one we wanted in the end
- The point is we keep coming back to Jesus despite our laziness and doubts
 - Because we know in our hearts that He hears us and has compassion for us
 - And because we know there is no other God to hear us anyway...so where else would we go?
- So Jesus lets her begging go on for a time to test the woman's faith, and while this is going on, her persistence becomes a test for the disciples
 - They become annoyed with the woman's shouting at Jesus, so they ask Jesus to send her away
 - Wasn't it just a short time ago that these guys got into trouble with Jesus for sending the needy away?
 - Let me remind you of that moment...it was when they saw the hungry crowd near Bethsaida

Matt. 14:15 When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

- Send the crowd away...send her away...if these guys had their way, ministry would be so easy...no one would ever bother you
- The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 exposed the disciples' selfish perspective, and we hoped it taught them to think differently
 - Instead we learned from Mark that the disciples hearts were just hardened, which led Jesus to put them in a boat at night alone
 - But now we see that the storm on the sea didn't teach them either, so here we go again

- The disciples didn't hear the woman's cries as an opportunity for ministry...they saw her as an inconvenience and bother
 - This woman was like a lost sheep bleating for its shepherd, and so their reaction said more about them than it did about her
 - To a shepherd's heart, the sound of a sheep bleating in need isn't annoying...it's the sound of purpose, of a mission to be fulfilled
 - Be aware of shepherds who think that a sheep in need is an interruption to ministry rather than the point of ministry
- Jesus rightly ignores His disciples' advice and does the exact opposite of what they suggest...rather than sending her away, Jesus begins to engage with her
 - The woman's persistence led to an opportunity to show Jesus her faith, and so Jesus begins to test her
 - And to understand how this conversation is a test, I want you to imagine one of those cheesy spy movies with two secret agents
 - The agents must rendezvous at a prearranged location, but first they test each other to be sure they have found the right person
 - First one will say a special phrase, then the other agent must respond with a matching phrase
 - That's what Jesus is doing here with this woman, at least in a sense
 - He makes a provocative statement to test her understanding of the Messiah
 - And then He waits to see how she responds
 - Jesus begins saying that the Messiah was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel...which is true
 - The Messiah was born a Jew and sent to Israel in fulfillment of God's covenant with the Jewish people
 - The Gospel eventually goes to Gentiles also, but Jesus never presented Himself as King to Gentiles during His time on earth
 - The offer of the Kingdom went exclusively to Jews in Jesus' day and only later through the apostles did it reach beyond Israel
 - So Jesus' statement is true, but it's also a test to see if the woman had received divine insight

- True faith is rooted in God's word, and the testimony of the Scriptures was that the Messiah was promised to Israel
- Someone following Jesus for selfish reasons would be offended by His statement thinking He's saying they were unworthy
- But someone who understood the Scriptures would acknowledge the truth of the statement
- The woman's initial response is unclear, though she is certainly not offended
 - In v.25 Matthew says she comes and bows down before Him and pleads with Jesus to help her
 - There's that persistence again, which suggests faith, though it could be nothing more than desperation on her part
 - So Jesus tests her further
 - In v.26 He says that it wouldn't be right to give dogs the food meant for the children
 - Jesus turns up the pressure even more...He uses a play on words that only a person of true faith would understand correctly
 - Jesus uses an idiom that says you don't give the children's food to the dogs, meaning you don't favor a pet over a child
 - What Jesus meant was that everything in God's program must happen according to His plan, in a certain order, and according to certain priorities
 - And in the plan of salvation, the Lord appointed that the Jewish people would have a place of prominence
 - In John 4 Jesus says to the woman at the well that salvation is of the Jews
 - Which means that everything we know about God and Christ comes through the Jewish people
 - Paul says it this way:

Rom. 9:4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, Rom. 9:5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

- The Jewish people were the first adopted as sons of God, and they received the glory of the covenants and the Law and temple
- They received the promise of Christ and they gave birth to the Christ in the flesh, so truly salvation is of the Jews
- So Jesus tests this woman by saying that the healing He offered was intended only for the sons of God, the child in His idiom, and not for the unbeliever
 - But Jesus provocatively chose a dog to represent the unbeliever so He could play on the animosity between Jews and Gentiles
 - If this woman was an unbeliever, she wouldn't have understood the analogy Jesus was making about a Jewish Messiah
 - Instead, she would have heard the word "dog" and assumed Jesus was insulting her
 - Once again, the test was whether she became offended and gave up
 - Instead, she responds like a secret agent giving Jesus the second half of the coded pass phrase
 - She says even the dogs get crumbs from the master's table
 - First, the woman acknowledges the Scripture's teaching of a Jewish Messiah sent to Israel
 - She wasn't offended at the notion, she simply understood it to be true
 - When the Lord is offering you forgiveness for your sins, you can criticize Him for the way He chose to bring you His grace
 - But then she embraces Jesus' reference to dogs by using it in the conventional sense to describe herself and all Gentiles
 - She reminds Jesus that the plan of salvation always anticipated that the Gentiles would receive God's grace too
 - The crumbs of the table refers to the leftovers, the excess of God's love
 - She was saying to Jesus that she wasn't asking for what belonged to Israel, she was asking for what belonged to Gentiles

- That God so loved the world – not just Israel – that He sent His only begotten Son...
- And when God promised to bring a savior through Abraham, He also promised to bless all nations by that same Savior
- The woman proves her faith to Jesus, and so He acknowledges her faith in v.28 and heals her daughter from a distance
 - Mark reports that when the woman went home she found her daughter free of the demon
 - Notice even the miracle happened quietly, privately, because Jesus wasn't trying to gain attention from the crowds any longer
- I wonder how the disciples felt about this moment? Do you think they celebrated this Gentile woman's faith in Jesus?
 - Do we suppose they regretted trying to send her away? We don't need to guess, because the next scene reveals their hearts

Matt. 15:29 Departing from there, Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up on the mountain, He was sitting there.

Matt. 15:30 And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them.

Matt. 15:31 So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

Matt. 15:32 And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way."

Matt. 15:33 The disciples said to Him, "Where would we get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?"

Matt. 15:34 And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few small fish."

Matt. 15:35 And He directed the people to sit down on the ground;

Matt. 15:36 and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

Matt. 15:37 And they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, seven large baskets full.

Matt. 15:38 And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.

- If you feel a little déjà vu coming on, it's understandable
 - Because just a chapter ago we saw something almost identical happen
 - So before we look at the events here, let's answer the obvious question – Why is this happening again?
 - And in fact, let's be clear that this is a second occurrence of the same miracle
 - It's a different location, different crowd but the same basic storyline
 - And the answer is that with God, when you don't learn your lesson the first time, you get to repeat the class
 - In the first occurrence in Bethsaida, Jesus tried to show His disciples how Kingdom Program ministry worked
 - People who are burdened with problems are not to be sent away...they are to be cared for and ministered to
 - But since they didn't learn that lesson, Jesus now repeats the lesson, though there is a significant difference this time
 - Matthew doesn't tell us the location this time, but Mark does

Mark 7:31 Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.

- Jesus left the region of Tyre and went to Decapolis
- The Decapolis was the name given to a region of ten Greek cities, mostly east of the Jordan river
- These cities were almost entirely Gentile, so Jesus has left one Gentile region for another
- And that means that the crowd here are Gentiles, not Jews as we saw before
 - Now if in the first case the disciples objected to caring for a large crowd of hungry Jews, I can assure you they were even less interested in caring for hungry Gentiles

- The Jew's bias against Gentiles ran very deep in Jewish culture
- Jews were taught from birth that God only favored Jews and that all Gentiles were lost and unloved by God
- So Jews felt justified in looking down on Gentiles and treating them with contempt
- After all, if God had contempt for Gentiles, they thought, then it must have been a righteous perspective to take
- So here we have a mountainside filled with crippled, lame, blind, mute and desperate Gentiles somewhere in the Decapolis
 - If one Gentile woman shouting was enough to disturb them, how do you think they felt about this scene?
 - It must have made the disciples' skin crawl
 - But this crowd is exactly the type of gathering that these men would one day preside over as the leaders of the church

[1Cor. 1:26](#) For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

[1Cor. 1:27](#) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

[1Cor. 1:28](#) and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

[1Cor. 1:29](#) so that no man may boast before God.

- So then the miracle proceeds exactly as the previous one, beginning with Jesus healing the crowd
 - Remember our exception to the rule when it comes to healing? Sometimes Jesus will heal the masses out of compassion
 - And when an exception is taking place, Matthew alerts us by telling us that Jesus felt compassion
 - Look in v.32 Jesus says He feels compassion for the crowd below
- And then He asks His disciples to feed the crowd again, because they had been there for 3 days and nights without food

- So by that point, the crowd can't leave to find food...they were too weak to travel
 - And once again, the disciples make the same mistake of seeking to know the "how" before answering Jesus' call to serve
 - They say, where will we find food?
 - You might have thought that at about this point one of them would have noticed the pattern
 - "Hey guys, I think I've seen this movie before."
- And especially when they took inventory of the available food
 - When someone said we have seven loaves and some fish... surely they noticed the connection?
 - But once again, Jesus had to direct their steps, and once again they act as waiters for a crowd of many thousand
 - And once again, they receive their supply from the leftovers, putting the disciples at the end of the priority list in ministry
- Obviously, these guys didn't internalize the earlier lesson about service in ministry, but more importantly they haven't yet figured out the love of God
 - They didn't recognize that love bears all things and endures all things
 - It is kind, patient, does not seek its own
 - And in this case, the love of God extends beyond the Jewish people to any who call upon the name of Jesus
- We can sum up the meaning of Jesus' two journeys with His disciples by two points:
 - First, Jesus came to Israel but He also came for the world, and the Church must maintain that focus
 - And when I say world, I don't mean simply geographically...I'm meaning ethnically
 - The Jews of Jesus' day weren't opposed to ministering across the globe...the problem was they would only minister to other Jews

- But Jesus wanted His disciples to embrace faith wherever it presented itself
 - A Gentile woman crying out for relief had equal right to be heard as a Jewish mother crying for her child
 - And prejudice and bias is part of the pride and sin of the human heart, and we all bear it to a degree
 - Our Christian witness demands we set aside prejudice in all its forms to see every human being as a potential child of God
- The disciples held that woman's background against her, as evidenced in Matthew's description of her as a Canaanite woman
 - They felt that the curse she knew as a descendent of Canaan meant she was undeserving of their mercy
 - But they failed to consider that all of us live under a curse, the curse God pronounced in the Garden for sin
 - And if He redeemed you by His grace, He can redeem anyone
- In fact, did you notice the change in the number of the crowd?
 - In the first miracle, the number was 5,000, and 5 is the number in the Bible for grace
 - Christ was teaching His disciples what acting in grace looked like
 - But this time the number is 4,000, and the number 4 in the Bible stands for the world, the whole earth
 - Which was intended to teach the disciples that their ministry isn't just to Jews...it's to the whole world
- Secondly, when the Lord wants to teach us something, we would do well to learn the lesson the first time, because otherwise we have to repeat it
 - As you've heard me say, there's an easy way and a hard way to follow Christ
 - The easy way to learn lessons is to live with eyes wide open
 - We appreciate that everything we experience and everything that happens to us is a lesson sent to us from God for our benefit

- And we also recognize that the best lessons in life can only be learned through trial and difficulty
- In fact I like to say that if you're experiencing a particularly bad trial, it's a sign that the Lord has an especially important lesson He wants to teach
 - Consider the woman...had she never experienced her daughter being cruelly demon possessed, would she have met the Messiah?
 - And the same is true for us in our trials whatever they are
- But if we live with our eyes down, on this world, then we may have to repeat lessons over and over again
 - Like the disciples who fed a second crowd of 4,000 so they could learn the lesson of sacrifice and service again
 - The Lord will use patterns in our life to get our attention and reinforce the point He's making
 - So if you find yourself repeating the same trials over and over again, ask yourself, what is the lesson you're not learning?
- Our goal in this life isn't merely surviving trials or even avoiding trials
 - This life is passing...the next life is the one we should be preparing for
 - So our goal in this life is to learn as much as we can, and thereby to please Christ as much as we can
 - So we can be as ready as possible for the Kingdom life to come