

Matthew 15:21 – 28

^{15:21} Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 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.’ 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.’ ²⁴ But he answered and said, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ ²⁵ But she came and began to bow down before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’ ²⁶ And he answered and said, ‘It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ ²⁷ But she said, ‘Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.’ 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.

Mt.14:13 – 33	Mt.14:34 – 15:20	Mt.15:21 – 28	Mt.15:29 – 39	Mt.16:1 – 12
From the towns (Mt.14:13)	Gennesaret (Mt.14:34), likely the Gentile side	Tyre and Sidon (Mt.15:21), Gentile lands	Along the Sea of Galilee (Mt.15:29, called ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ in Mt.4:15; the Decapolis in Mk.7:31)	Magadan (Mt.15:39), which is uncertain but along the Galilee
Jesus feeds the 5,000	Jesus disputes with Pharisees	The Canaanite woman asks for healing	Jesus feeds the 4,000	The Pharisees come to ask Jesus for a sign
Jews	Jews	Gentiles	Gentiles	Jews
5 loaves of bread; 12 baskets leftover	Defiling comes from the heart and is therefore universal – both Jew and Gentile are defiled	The ‘children’s bread’ is thrown to ‘the dogs.’	7 loaves of bread 7 baskets full leftover	Jesus reminds his disciples to beware the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees

Cultural Background

- Jesus had just said that we should watch out for what comes out of our mouths, for it reflects the heart: ‘But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.’ (Mt. 15:18 – 20)
- Most Canaanites were hostile to Israel, historically. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote, ‘Of the Phoenicians, the Tyrians have the most ill-feeling towards us.’ (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 121). Israel opposed their child sacrifice and other sins (Gen.4:16 – 25; 22; Lev.18:21; 1 Ki.16:34; 2 Ki.3:27; Mic.6:7). Israel, however, welcomed the conversion of Canaanites: Judah married Shua (Gen.38:2), learned to accept Tamar (Gen.38); Shaul (Ex.6:15); a ‘mixed multitude’ (Ex.12:38); Caleb (Num.32:12); Rahab (Josh.6:17 – 25). The conquest of Canaan is a full discussion in itself. See my presentation(s) on that for more info, located on this page: http://newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/archives_question_goodness_of_god.htm
- Dog: a term Jews commonly gave to Gentiles. Typically, Jews used the Greek term *kusin* (e.g. Mt.7:6), referring to street dogs, as a label of exclusion, for ‘in those days the dogs were the unclean scavengers of the street.’ (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p.122). However, Jesus used the diminutive term *kunariois* (15:26), which were not the larger street dogs, but smaller household pets (ibid, p.122). R.T. France cautions that there is no evidence of a distinction between the two types of dog in the Aramaic language (France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Matthew*, p.250). However, it is extremely likely that this conversation was in Greek, as Jesus and the disciples, having grown up in the Galilee area, probably spoke Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; and the woman, living in a Greek territory, spoke Greek as well. Thus, my judgment is that this conversation probably happened in Greek, and that the distinction between the terms is very significant.

Questions

1. Optional Introduction: What are some ethnic groups on campus that our fellowship has a hard time engaging with the gospel? Why?
2. What questions do you have about this passage? (Typically, what will come up are:
 - a. Why does Jesus call her a dog? Is he agreeing with the racist view that Gentiles were dogs?
 - b. What does the bread symbolize?
3. What comes out of the disciples' mouth in 15:21 – 28 now that they're with the Canaanite woman? Prejudice, ethnocentrism.
 - a. What questions do you have about this passage? (Typically, what will come up are:
 - i. Why does Jesus call her a dog? Is he agreeing with the racist view that Gentiles were dogs?
 - ii. What does the bread symbolize?
 - b. A lot of what happens here might be 'between the lines.' Maybe it was partially dependent on the facial expression of Jesus – a raised eyebrow in humor, etc. There is no clue as to the non-verbal communication, admittedly. But there's enough here for us to try to figure this out.
 - i. Mark calls the Canaanite woman a 'Syrophoenician woman' (Mk.7:26). Why does Matthew refer to her as a 'Canaanite woman' (Mt.15:22)? What did that ethnicity mean for a Jewish audience? Historic enemy. Recall that Matthew wrote for primarily a Jewish audience. What issue is Jesus dealing with in them?
 - ii. Why do you think Jesus is silent in 15:23? To wait for the disciples to jump in and say something.
 - iii. What else could they have said? 'Jesus, why don't you heal her daughter?'
 - iv. What does their response say about them? They don't like the Canaanite woman.
 - v. What did Jesus say about what comes out of the mouth in 15:18 – 19? 'But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders...' THAT is what comes out of the mouth of the disciples.
 - c. So why does Jesus call her a dog?
 - i. It's something the disciples would have thought. He's doing it because of their prejudice.
 - ii. He's giving the woman a 'way in' and changing the meaning of that term. Notice: What term did Jews normally use for Gentiles? The term *kusin* for the large stray dogs that live outside the house. But notice that Jesus uses the term *kunariois*, for the little pet dogs. What is he inviting her into?
 - iii. How does she reply? With a development of Jesus' parable. Jesus seems to appreciate the guts and wit of the woman. She picks up on this and says, 'I'm part of the family!' That's what it means when the dogs are part of the master's family. Notice that she's also called Jesus, 'Lord, Son of David.' She's counted herself in, as his.
 - iv. Jesus is restoring the wide definition of 'Israel' as well – Israel as a FAITH community, not an ETHNIC community. That was the debate between Jesus and many Jewish leaders of his day: the nature of Israel.
 1. Paul in Galatians 6:16 uses the name 'Israel' to mean 'Jew and Gentile in Christ.'
 2. Paul also uses the term 'Israel' to probably mean that in Romans 11:26, a very significant usage.
 3. So when Jesus says, 'I have come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Mt.15:24), what was he saying? He is clarifying that Israel was never meant to be an ethnic community. It was always a faith community. How much more so with the King of Israel?!? She, believing in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, is part of Israel.
 - v. Jesus and the woman together reverse the 'exclusion' of the dog image that Jews commonly put on Gentiles.
 - vi. How does Jesus honor her 'wish'? What does her wish suggest?
 1. He does heal her daughter, as much as he healed any other Jewish person.
 2. He responds to her faith.
 3. He also seems to suggest that her 'wish' or 'desire' (Greek *theleis*) reflects something good that remains in her heart, despite the evil and corruption that is also there (Mt.15:18 – 20). That is what drew her to Jesus, and he honors it.
 - d. Application: Jesus takes us with him into his mission, and when he does, we find out what our heart problems are: our limitations, prejudices, hatreds, apathy, callousness, etc. are. That's when Jesus starts to work with us on those things, too.

- e. Application: Sometimes when you go to another culture, you see the sins of your own culture better. When has that happened for you? Is Jesus giving you an opportunity to go with him in loving a certain person? Or people group?
4. So why is it easy to focus on Temple-like traditions rather than reaching the outsider?
 - a. Traditions tend to be centered around a gathering place: Temple or synagogue (or church service). Consider tithing – it's not actually biblical; it was an Old Testament practice that involved feasting with God, the poor, the alien, and the Levite; in the New Testament, all wealth belongs to God.
 - b. It takes us going out as well! If we don't follow Jesus into 'Canaanite' neighborhoods, then we don't see the sin in ourselves. If we don't lead new Christians into 'Canaanite' neighborhoods, we don't see the sin in them either. We develop a sense of holiness based on a 'Temple-like tradition' that has very little to do with the mission of Jesus.
 - c. Lesson: Jesus takes us with him into his mission, and when he does, we find out what our heart problems are: our limitations, prejudices, hatreds, apathy, callousness, etc. are. That's when Jesus starts to work with us on those things, too.
 5. Is Jesus giving you an opportunity to go with him in loving a certain person? Or people group?
 6. How does Jesus seem to be training his disciples in 14:13 – 16:12?
 - a. To engage both Jews and Gentiles in this section.
 - b. To *serve* 4,000 Gentiles as much as they serve 5,000 Jews. Notice that the Jews believed that the Messiah would conquer the Gentiles and kick their butt. But Jesus role modeled *servicing* others, including the Gentiles.
 - c. Baskets: 12 symbolizes Israel, 7 symbolizes the world in its completeness
 - d. When Jesus warns the disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees, do they understand what he means?
 - i. What is the teaching of the Pharisees? Ethnic purity and ritual purity laws. Collectivist, ethnocentric nationalism with religious markers.
 - ii. Why is it important for the disciples to reject the Pharisees' views? Because they'll never be able to carry out the Great Commission with a Pharisaic attitude. Remember that Jesus is building his disciples up to carry out the Great Commission.
 - e. How is Jesus training us to reach others who are different or unlikeable?