



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 15:21-39

Topic

Jesus surprises everyone by referring to a Canaanite woman who has come to Him for help as a dog

Title

"Be Aware of Dogs"

Introduction

You may have noticed some of your Facebook or Twitter friends adding "Whosoever" to their screen name - either as a middle name or a last name.

It's trendy if you're a Christian. There are Whosoever bands and churches and websites and youth groups. There is Whosoever merchandise.

It calls attention to the fact that you are a "whosoever believeth in him [who] should not perish, but have everlasting life."

1 of 14

Matthew 15:21-39

"Be Aware of Dogs"

Jesus was preparing His disciples for their mission on earth after His death, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven. They'd be taking the Gospel to the Jews, of course, but also to non-Jews, whom the Bible calls Gentiles.

They'd be going to "whosoever."

"Whosoever" were not popular among Jews in the first century. Most of them despised Gentiles and reneged on their Old Testament commission to bring the knowledge of God to them.

Think Jonah and you'll understand the Jewish mindset.

The two episodes in our text prepare the disciples to minister to Gentiles, serving as illustrations to them that "whosoever calls upon the name of The Lord will be saved."

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Listen Carefully To The Whosoever Around You, and #2 Look Compassionately Upon The Whosoever Around You.

#1 Listen Carefully To The Whosoever Around You

(v21-28)

Jesus was being rejected by the leaders of the nation of Israel. It would set up a situation in which He would return to Heaven without establishing the kingdom on the earth that God had promised to Israel.

The promise was not voided. Jesus will return a second time, be received by Israel as their Messiah, and the kingdom will be established.

Jesus' disciples, all Jews, would be the first ones to be tasked with preaching the Gospel between the two comings. They'd take the Gospel to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles.

The question that would immediately arise was, "Did Gentiles need to convert to Judaism in order to be saved?"

We know, from reading the Book of Acts and the New Testament letters, that the answer is, "No." In this age between His two comings, Gentiles do not approach God through Judaism, and are certainly not expected to convert.

You see this dramatized in Jesus' weird but wonderful encounter with a Canaanite woman.

Mat 15:21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

This verse is telling us that Jesus was, for the only time we know of for sure, fully outside of Jewish territory. He'd been among Gentiles before, but only within the borders of Israel.

It's significant to the disciples. It's anticipating the time they'd be taking the Gospel beyond Israel's borders to the whole world.

Let's read the entire account of what happened before commenting on it.

Mat 15:22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

Mat 15:23 But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."

Mat 15:24 But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Mat 15:25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

Mat 15:26 But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

Mat 15:27 And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Mat 15:28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

As I said: Weird.

It stumbles people that Jesus talked to her this way. He referred to her as a "dog." A lot of commentary space is dedicated to trying to explain that either Jesus was not really being harsh; or that He was being harsh but that's OK because He's Jesus.

Jesus seized the opportunity of her coming to Him to teach the disciples something about their upcoming mission and about the relationship of Gentiles to Israel in terms of the Gospel.

Think of Jesus' dialog with the Canaanite woman as a dramatic representation of what the disciples needed to learn about taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

If we bear that in mind, thoughts of harshness will give way to a sense of wonder at just how perfect an illustration this is for the disciples.

She was "a woman of Canaan." By the first century, Gentiles weren't called Canaanites very much. Matthew's choice of the word is therefore quite deliberate.

The Canaanites were the Gentiles that the Jews were supposed to have totally eradicated in their conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua.

You might say they were extreme Gentiles. If Jews hated Gentiles, they *really* hated Canaanites.

Her daughter was "severely demon possessed." Hers was an extreme case. A worst case scenario.

She had heard about Jesus and His power over Satan and came seeking His "mercy" on her little girl.

Notice how she first approached Jesus. It's the key to understanding this exchange. She approached Him as "O Lord, the Son of David."

She approached Him as a Gentile seeking the covenant blessings that belonged to the ethnic subjects of King David.

You might say she approached Him as a Gentile willing to convert to Judaism in order to appropriate God's blessings.

And that is precisely why Jesus said nothing to her. He's going to help her, but not until she understands that she's not a Jew and, further, that she need have nothing to do with Judaism.

We might put it like this: Jesus, not Judaism, can help her.

She was persistent and the disciples couldn't take it. They urged Jesus to "send her away," presumably after having granted her request.

Something important was happening. Something important always is, if you're walking with The Lord. Be more patient and let things unfold.

Jesus said, to them but in her hearing, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Jesus was sent to the Jews first. Through the Jews, God intended to bless all the other peoples, nations, tribes and tongues on the earth.

Israel was in the throws of rejecting Jesus, and the mission of the disciples in His absence would become, "to the Jews first, **and then to the Gentiles**" (Romans 1:16).

The Bible goes on to describe the time between Jesus' comings as "the fullness of the Gentiles." It was critical that the disciples understand the relationship of Jews and Gentiles, and of the relationship of Gentiles to Judaism.

How much of this the Canaanite woman understood we can't say. But when she approached Jesus a second time, she did so as a Gentile with no direct claim to God's promises to Israel.

Mat 15:25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

"Worshiped" means she recognized Him as God. She came only seeking help as a creature. Would Jesus help her now?

Mat 15:26 But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

Why wasn't He helping her? The lesson wasn't complete. Even though the Jews would reject Him and the Gospel would go out to the Gentiles, God would not renege on His promises to Israel. There would still be a kingdom.

The kingdom is represented by the children eating bread - meaning they were seated at a banqueting table feasting.

The "children" represent the nation of Israel feasting in the Millennial Kingdom.

"Dogs" was a derogatory name Jews called Gentiles. When they said it, they used the specific word for mangy, wild, rabid dogs.

Jesus was referring to "little" pet household "dogs," *not* mangy scavengers. His specific choice of word offered hope and the Canaanite woman seized upon it.

Mat 15:27 And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Heartened by Jesus' comparison of Gentiles to household pets, she stated the obvious. Who hasn't fed their dog table scraps - or sometimes the whole meal?

The kingdom on earth is often represented by a feast. In fact there will be feasting - real feasting with food and drink - in the kingdom. Israel had seats at the table, so to speak, as God's chosen nation. Gentiles feast thanks to Israel.

As Gentiles we owe the Jews a great debt of spiritual gratitude. In Romans 11:17-18 we read,

Rom 11:17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,
Rom 11:18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

The "olive tree" being described in these verses is a picture of the nation Israel, and the "wild olive tree" is the church. Everything you and I have spiritually is rooted in the fact that God called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that out of the nation Israel He brought Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord.

Paul puts it a bit more bluntly in this passage from Ephesians:

Eph 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh...

Eph 2:12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Eph 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

It's Israel's table, it's their feast. We've been invited to it, and we share in its bounty, but not apart from them.

Think of the Canaanite woman. She had been "far off," but was "brought near" by Jesus.

This weird conversation is a flawless illustration to the disciples of exactly what would take place after Jesus' return to Heaven: Even after the national rejection of Jesus, the Gospel would go to the Jew first, but then to the Gentiles, who would worship God and receive His blessings, but definitely **not** need to approach Him through Judaism at all.

On what basis would the Gentiles approach God and enjoy the full spiritual benefits of a relationship with Him?

On the basis of faith alone.

Mat 15:28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

It took a while for Jesus to get her to the point where she and the disciples could see that it was by faith alone that He was available to her.

After Jesus ascended, the church would struggle mightily against Judaizers who went around teaching that Gentiles must convert to Judaism in order to be saved. In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul called them "dogs," and *not* the household pet variety.

Christians might think of themselves as whosoever, but let's not forget to think of nonbelievers that way. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of The Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

We most likely aren't going to encounter whosoever who think that they must convert to Judaism in order to be saved.

But people do have their own ideas about how to approach God. For example a lot of people I've invited to church over the years have told me that they needed to clean up their lives first. They think that they must approach God by their own good works.

They're talking about reforming themselves and, while it may be a good thing for them and those around them, it cannot save them.

You must be transformed, from within, by an encounter with the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Like this Canaanite woman, come as you are, acknowledge He is God, and ask for mercy.

Other whosoever might not realize it but they are counting on what we'd call universalism. They think everyone will be 'saved' in the end - although they don't know what that means.

You can deduce this from some of the weird comments people make while delivering eulogies at funerals. They're always sure we will all be together in the end with the Big Guy in the Sky.

Listen carefully to what whosoever believe and be ready with the Gospel.

#2 Look Compassionately Upon The Whosoever Around You

(v29-39)

One Canaanite woman and her demon possessed child could be an anomaly. Jesus therefore went deeper into Gentile territory and performed many miracles, and one notable miracle, that showed the extent to which the Gospel would go out to the Gentiles between His two comings.

Mat 15:29 Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there.

Mat 15:30 Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them.

Mat 15:31 So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

Jesus had healed Gentiles before; but these were **all** Gentiles in Gentile territory. We know that because of the wording, "they glorified the God of Israel." You'd never describe Jews that way; only Gentiles.

To the Jew first, then to the Gentiles, was the first lesson for the disciples. Now Jesus was re-emphasizing that Gentiles would receive all the spiritual blessings of Heaven, by faith, without converting.

It was a lesson that was hard for these Jewish boys. Peter, for example, would balk at taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. Even after God mightily used him among Gentiles, he would revert back to eating separately from them and need rebuking from Paul.

Mat 15:32 Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."

"Compassion" is one of the emotions of Jesus most mentioned in the Bible. If it was great in Him, it must be great in us by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

Mat 15:33 Then His disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?"

I'm not going to criticize these guys. Sure, it seems as though they ought to have more faith by now. They'd been in a similar spot before, with an even larger crowd and less resources.

I only know that in my life there are often little nuances that make similar situations different enough for me to wonder what God is up to.

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

Mat 15:35 So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

Mat 15:36 And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude.

Mat 15:37 So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left.

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

Mat 15:39 And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala.

Earlier Jesus had fed five thousand not counting women and children. One thing I can point out about both the feeding miracles: Each time the leftovers were greater than what they started with.

I don't understand heavenly math. I just know that if I give, I get a lot more in return.

I'm not drifting into the health and wealth teaching. What I 'get' in return isn't usually in the same currency. In other words if I give something physical, like money, I likely receive something intangible that is spiritual.

We should never give in order to get something. But we won't get anything if we don't give. By definition the Christian life must involve sacrifice.

After all, Christ came into the world to give His life a ransom for many. How can I be Christian, which means Christ-like, if I do not sacrifice?

In these two episodes you have an illustration, a representation, of the mission of the disciples to the Gentiles after Jesus' ascension.

On a purely human level, lurking behind these verses is the reality of poor health and other terrible sufferings as we await the return of The Lord. How are we to approach our sufferings while we are carrying out the Great Commission?

Samuel Rutherford once said, "It is faith's work to claim lovingkindness out of all the roughest strokes of God."

I'd modify the quote only to say that many of our sufferings, though certainly permitted by God, are not **His** "strokes" but are the result of living in a fallen world where the devil remains on the loose.

Still, it can be, as the Psalmist said, "good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes" (Psalm 119:71).

Charles Spurgeon said, "let us accept the worst that Scripture gives us, and still find in it an argument for hope."

We can do all this because of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the blessed hope of the Lord's imminent return.