



gracefellowship

Series: ~~un~~Worthy: Calling the Outcasts
Date: September 17, 2023
15:21-28

Title: Determination of a Dog
Passage: Matthew

Scripture Reading: Matthew 15:1-20

This teaching series has been focused on stories in Matthew that highlight the way Jesus interacted with and embraced those who were considered outcasts or unworthy (at least in the eyes of the religious leaders). I hope you're being challenged to think about your own views toward people that maybe you've considered as being unworthy of the gospel. Jesus came to bring salvation to all mankind! We need to stop seeing people as outsiders and consider how we might move toward people with the light of God's love.

With that in mind, we are going to see a really unusual encounter today between Jesus and a Gentile woman. On first reading it's going to sound incredibly unkind, but I hope as we talk about this today we will be able to see what Jesus was doing in this exchange.

:: Matthew 15:21-28

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

²⁷ "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

A few minutes ago we read Matthew 15:1-20 together and heard the story of Jesus confronting the Pharisees over their traditions that had superseded God's law. When Jesus chastised them the disciples came to Him and said, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended...?"

Then the next thing we read is that Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Frequently when we see the word "withdrew" in the Bible it is used in response to a threat or potential danger.

- Mary and Joseph withdrew to Egypt to escape Herod.
- The Wise Men escaped by a different route home
- After John the Baptist was beheaded, Jesus withdrew from the region

In this case, Jesus withdraws to the region of Tyre and Sidon. At one point in time this was a strategic partnership for Israel. During the reign of Solomon the King of Tyre supplied materials for the building of the Temple. The way partnerships were formed in those days was for marriages to solidify the relationship between countries. After the reign of Solomon the Kingdom of Israel split into two sections- the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. King Ahab from the Northern Kingdom, married Jezebel from Tyre and Sidon. Jezebel introduced extreme idol worship in Israel. You may recall the story of Elijah and the Prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Those were the prophets of Jezebel. By the time of Jesus, Tyre and Sidon were not popular among the Jews- especially the religious faction. So, Jesus withdrew to this Gentile area to get some time out of the spotlight and to let things die down and to take some heat off him. But the things that got Jesus in trouble in Matthew 15:1-20 are going to play into the events we are looking at today in 21-18. Matthew will often take stories and put them side-by-side in order to draw parallels and connect the dots to a larger point he is trying to make.

- *How did this woman know of Jesus?*

While Jesus is in Tyre and Sidon we are told that a woman comes to him and starts asking him for help. Word of Jesus had spread all over the region, even into Gentile territories. A couple weeks ago we saw that people from Syria and the Decapolis were coming to Jesus. So, even when Jesus escapes to this area, He is known.

- *What does this woman want?*

When she comes to Jesus there is a pressing need. Her daughter is demon-possessed and is suffering terribly. We don't know what's going on with this little girl specifically, but in other places in Scripture when children are demon-possessed they affect their physical well-being by making them mute or throwing them into fires or throwing them into water to drown. We aren't told what this little girl is facing, but she is suffering at the hands of demonic possession.

If you're a parent you can probably imagine how desperately you would want to find help for your child in a situation like that. Now watch how Jesus responds to the woman asking for help:

23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

Jesus didn't say a word! He just let the woman cry out. And the disciples give us some insight that she just kept crying out over and over. The wording in the Greek gives the perspective that she was screaming like a raven!

Question: Who do you cry out to God for?

She doesn't come for herself but her daughter. Each of us probably have people in our life who are not walking with Jesus. Are you crying out to Him on their behalf? And then are you being persistent in that crying out? This Mom didn't give up just because Jesus didn't answer immediately! She kept crying out.

Illustration: D.L. Moody was an evangelist and Pastor in the mid-late 1800s. He famously kept a list of 100 names of people he was praying for so they may come to faith in Jesus. When someone became a Christian he marked them off the list. For most of his adult life he prayed for those 100 names. By the time of his death 96 people had become followers of Jesus and the last 4 gave their lives to Jesus at his funeral! D.L. Moody lingered in prayer and didn't give up. Even after his death people came to faith in Jesus because he prayed and did not give up!

This woman had that same kind of mentality- just keep asking for what you want! Finally the disciples come to Jesus and say, “Just send her away- she's annoying!” (My translation)

Have you ever known someone who wouldn't take “no” for an answer? My little brother was like that. My Dad always said that the word “no” to my brother was a definite “Maybe!”

In the OT we see Jacob wrestle all night with the angel of the Lord. He just wouldn't give up! At daybreak the angel touched his hip and dislocated, but he commended Jacob for his persistence.

In the NT Jesus tells a story about a woman who was looking for justice for her son. Every day she would go to the judge- who was not a righteous man- and she would ask for justice. Day after day she heard, “No,” but day after day, she went back and asked for justice for her son. Finally, the judge gave her the verdict she wanted, not because he was righteous, but because she was persistent!

Be persistent in prayer!

Jesus doesn't send her away like the disciples wanted, but he does have an awkward exchange with her.

24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

25 The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

26 He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

I want us to think about these two statements in terms of a test. Jesus often uses tests to see what people will do. And in the greater context of Matthew’s gospel, remember the story that happened just before this. Jesus tested the Pharisees and had some really harsh truths he levied at them, specifically that they were putting more emphasis on their traditions than God’s Law. Rather than responding to the truth Jesus presented, they became angry and were offended. There was no willingness to turn around. There was no humility demonstrated that they may be wrong. They became offended Jesus would call them out. And apparently it was bad enough that Jesus withdrew to a Gentile area until things cooled off!

Now let’s see what Jesus has to say to this Gentile woman. First Jesus tells her that He only came for the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus obviously came to save the whole world- in fact, just a couple weeks ago we talked about how Jesus healed the servant of a Roman Centurion- a Gentile. In telling this woman He only came for the lost sheep of Israel, he is saying that His primary mission was to God’s chosen people and then they would be responsible for spreading the message of Jesus after He left. But for a Gentile to hear this, it might have shut down the conversation immediately. Would she get offended, like the Pharisees, and walk away? She doesn’t!

:: Matthew 15:25

25 The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

She knelt before Jesus, which was a posture of humility and even worship, and asked for help. It’s almost as if she says, “I know I’m not your target audience and you have a different mission, but I need you.”

We might think at that point it’s enough, but Jesus goes a step further with her:

:: Matthew 15:26

26 He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

There is a lot of debate among scholars about what Jesus means and even how he says this. It sounds insulting and even derogatory, but that would be unkind and since kindness is a fruit of the Spirit, I don’t think Jesus can be insulting and maintain His deity. As I studied this week, many scholars think the best translation of this is “little dogs,” which refers to a pet that you take care of and feed, not a wild dog in the street who doesn’t have a master caring for it.

Again, when Jesus said this, would the woman be offended or embarrassed and walk away, or would she persist? Here’s her response to Jesus:

:: Matthew 15:27

27 “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

Remember, in the story of the Pharisees, they were bent out of shape because the disciples didn’t wash their hands when they ate. This lady says, I know I’m an outsider, and unworthy, but I’ll eat the left overs, even if it’s off the ground! She doesn’t ask Jesus to abandon His mission, but to let her experience grace from the excess of what He has to offer.

And because of that response and her persistence, Jesus answers her request.

:: Matthew 15:28

28 Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Let me briefly speak to two groups and then give a few observations to apply.

Outcasts/unWorthy

If you think of yourself as unworthy or an outcast for some reason, take a lesson from this woman and be persistent in faith, crying out to God. It doesn’t matter what misguided religious people have said to you in the past; it doesn’t matter how you’ve been treated in the church; it doesn’t matter what you’ve done that you makes you feel unloved or unworthy in the eyes of God- He loves you and hears you when you come to Him in faith. There is room at God’s table for you!

Disciples

For those of us who follow Jesus as His disciples, there was a test for them in this story, too. When the woman was crying out for help would they petition Jesus to meet the need she has, or would they send her away? How do we respond when we see people crying out for help? Do we move toward them in compassion, or do we dismiss them as someone else’s problem as fast as we can?

Jesus pushed back at the woman, but when she demonstrated faith, he pushed in and met her need.

Let me leave you with a few closing thoughts for application:

- 1. Build a consistent prayer life for those far from God.**
- 2. Don’t give up in prayer- the breakthrough may be coming!**
Faith is demonstrated in persistence.

3. Trust God's sovereignty. He hears you even if He doesn't answer like you hope.

Daniel 3 The image of gold and the fiery furnace: Our God can rescue us, but even if He doesn't we will not bow down.

4. Great faith can be found in any package.

The Centurion, the Syrophenecian Woman- you never know where you are going to find someone who needs Jesus, but you can know that God wants to use you to bring people to Him rather than pushing people away.

Our Next Steps:

As a church we are trying to reach all kinds of people with the gospel of Jesus. In the next couple months we have service opportunities that will allow us to connect with unwed moms (Mission Agape), prisoners (Kairos), homeless men and women (Model Love), and families in Sullivan Gardens (Trunk or Treat). Be praying for God to use us to help people know His goodness as we serve our community this fall.

Closing Prayer:

**Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.
Amen.**

Life Group Discussion Guide:

Read Matthew 15:21-28

Head:

1. What is the need in the story?
2. What is the response to the need by the disciples and Jesus?
3. How does the woman react to what Jesus says?

Heart:

4. Who are you persistently pleading for in prayer?
5. What needs exist in our families and community that we should be more diligent to pray for?

Hands:

6. We heard on Sunday about service opportunities coming up in our community. How can we get involved to be part of one or more of those missional opportunities?
7. What is the Holy Spirit calling you to do in response to His Word this week? (Is there a conversation you need to have, a person you need to serve, someone you need to ask forgiveness of, someone you need to share the gospel with?)

