

Defiled faith

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[0:00] Okay, it's a good evening. Again. So, over the last couple of weeks, we've been in the book of Matthew, and we've been around the region of the Sea of Galilee.

From Matthew 14, 13, we see the activities that Jesus has been up to. We've seen him drawing large crowds because of his miracles.

In fact, Jesus had been drawing so much attention that he was struggling to get time by himself. And this would be because he was healing the sick.

He was feeding large crowds. He fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. And he was doing many more wonderful things.

We also heard how Jesus met his disciples out on the water of the Sea of Galilee. He walked out to their boat. It's no surprise, is it, after all these things that Jesus is drawing so much attention.

[1:03] So, where are we? Okay, so there's where the Sea of Galilee is. And after these things had taken place, they landed in the region of Gennesaret.

That's west of the Sea of Galilee. And here, a great bunch of sick people were healed just by touching the cloak of Jesus.

And it was in this same region where Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees. Pharisees berated him because his disciples were not following the physical traditions of their elders.

They weren't washing before they were eating. And the implication of this was being that they were unclean, not only physically but spiritually also.

So, according to the Pharisees, if you didn't follow their traditions, you couldn't be holy enough to be part of God's kingdom. But more than that, they would have viewed anybody outside of their religion to be unclean, which included anybody that wasn't Jewish.

[2:18] So, these kind of people, they were called Gentiles. At this point, Jesus, of course, corrects them, pointing out that actually they have disregarded the word of God rather than adhered to it.

He called them hypocrites, saying that actually they've got it wrong. As we heard from Jerome last week, Jesus tells us that the true source of defilement or uncleanness is not a physical matter, but it's a matter of the heart.

And that brings us up to our text tonight. So, I wanted, usually I would delve in a little bit more into the context. We've got quite a lot of very difficult texts to get through tonight.

And I really did struggle with this one, but the Lord has helped me. So, this brings us to our text.

And what we'll do is we'll fly over the text and we'll look at exactly what's going on, where the people are, what they're doing.

And then we'll go in verse by verse and make applications as we're going. That's the idea anyway. Okay. So, here's a flyover of the text.

[3:26] Verse 21. Jesus and his disciples leave Gennesaret and they go to the area of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman came to him distressed and requesting healing for her daughter who is demon-possessed.

Jesus is silent. The disciples get agitated and they ask Jesus to send her away. The woman then kneels before Jesus.

Jesus and the woman talk. Jesus commends her faith and heals her daughter. Jesus then goes back to the Sea of Galilee.

And he continues to miraculously heal people. And all the people praised the God of Israel. So, that's a brief outline of the text that we'll be looking at tonight.

We'll mainly be focusing up to verse 28. Okay. So, verse 21.

[4:32] So, Jesus being in Galilee, he leaves that place and heads west to the coast to the area of Tyre and Sidon. So, I want to just pause at this verse for a moment.

I want you to notice there's a key word here. It's very easy to skip over it. It says, Jesus. What did Jesus do? Jesus withdrew.

I've got a note here in front of me that says, Apologize to Maria in advance for my poor Greek speaking skills. So, Maria, I apologize in advance. So, Jesus withdrew.

In the Greek, I believe this is pronounced. I can't read Greek, by the way. I've got it written in phonetics here. Anakoreo. And there's an implication.

Was that right? Yeah? Yeah? Good? Good enough? Okay. So, this anakoreo, the implication in this word isn't just to travel. When it says that Jesus withdrew, he wasn't simply continuing his journey.

[5:37] He wasn't just traveling about, healing people and working. See, he is the son of God. But he, too, was experiencing physical things.

And there comes a point where we all need a bit of time out, isn't there? So, this word, withdrew, is the same word that's used in the previous chapter, where Jesus withdraws to be alone in a boat.

So, he's taking refuge. He's retiring. It's a very interesting word. In Mark's account of this event, he tells us that Jesus had entered a house at Tyre.

And he didn't want anyone to know. So, he traveled to the coast, and he came to this house. And he wanted this time out. He wanted this space.

And it's likely that Jesus withdrew to these areas because they were on the outskirts of Jewish territory. And it's likely a considerable distance from the Pharisees.

[6:45] But Jesus' miracles made him extremely famous. Everybody knew about him. And the text says in Mark that he says, He could not keep his presence a secret, even on those outskirt places.

It's back in Matthew. So, verse 22. A Canaanite woman came to him, distressed, and requesting healing for her daughter, who is demon-possessed.

There's a little photo of her daughter there. So, the point is stressed that she is a Canaanite woman. I've underlined it there on the screen.

In Mark's account, it says that she was a Greek from Syrophenicia. So, why is this being stressed? Why is her heritage so important? When Mark says she's a Greek, what he's saying is that she's not a Jew.

She's a Gentile. She's exactly the kind of person that the Pharisees would probably despise and see as unclean or defiled.

[7:52] In fact, it was against the laws of the religious leaders for Jews to associate with Gentiles. You can see that in Acts 10.28. So, this Gentile woman comes to Jesus and she's begging for mercy.

As her daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly. I want us to look at what does she address Jesus as? How does she address Jesus?

Jesus. Lord, which is master. Son of David, which is of the root of David.

What the woman is doing here is calling Jesus by his messianic title. Let's look at a couple of verses that point to the coming of Jesus as master and Messiah.

This is 2 Samuel 7.12-14. God says to David, the king of Israel, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

[9:06] He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. Part of this text from the Old Testament points to David's immediate son, Solomon.

The latter part points forward to Jesus, who is a descendant of David. It says, I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father.

He shall be to me a son. So, here we have images of an eternal throne, which obviously would belong to an eternal authority, a king.

And his king would be the son of God, the father. Here's another verse that points to Jesus' authority and king. Zechariah 9.9 Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion.

Shout, daughter Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Jesus, as we know from the book of John, came to Jerusalem on a donkey.

[10:18] We'll look at one more from the book of Revelation. It's 22.16. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David and the bright morning star.

So, it's quite astounding, isn't it? This woman isn't just coming to Jesus randomly. I think she knows who she's coming to. The prophesied eternal king.

And that's what she's addressing him as. She's coming to Jesus. She's calling him son of David.

She's recognizing that authority as Lord and Master and as Messiah, the Son of God.

She cries out to her master for help. And what was Jesus' response?

What was Jesus' response? Silence. Silence. That's supposed to be tumbleweed. So, let's build up a picture of what this scene might look like.

[11:38] It's a very unexpected thing to hear from the Son of God, isn't it? When someone pleads for him, for there to be just silence. Verse 23. Jesus did not answer a word.

So, Jesus was at a house. We know this from Mark's Gospel, as we said earlier. It was most likely a big house. On the outskirts, as we said, intended as a place for outsiders or visitors from the region to go and stay.

The woman came to Jesus, who was probably surrounded at this point by a small crowd. We know, at the very least, he's surrounded by his disciples. And as the text says, the disciples urged Jesus to send her away as she was becoming a nuisance and crying out after them.

In the Greek, we have this *kraso*, crying out, and *opesthen*, from behind or at the back of.

Here's a little illustration of what that might have looked like. So, Jesus' response to his disciples.

[12:54] They were crying to him and saying, send this woman away. Jesus responded, I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. There's some strange things going on.

His response to the woman is silence. His response to his disciples is fairly cryptic. I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. You notice that Jesus doesn't agree with his disciples.

He doesn't say, yes, okay, I'll send her packing. At the same time, he doesn't say, no, either. In fact, Jesus simply states the priority of his mission at that specific time.

He says, I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus here is referring specifically to the Jewish people. We look back at the Old Testament. The 12 tribes of Israel, or Jacob, were called God's chosen people, and they were favored by him, out of which came the Jewish people.

So, Deuteronomy 14.2 says this about them. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.

[14:07] Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession. So, in response to his disciples, Jesus is drawing on recent events that have happened, and he's highlighting this distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Jesus is saying that at this moment of history, this specific moment, whilst he is on the earth in a physical body, his mission priority is the Jewish people.

Not that the Gentiles were not important. There was simply a secondary factor at this time. In Matthew 10.5-6, we could see the mission boundaries that Jesus set his disciples.

And we see that familiar language. He says, these 12, Jesus sent out with the following instructions. Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.

It's worth noting that although the woman was behind the disciples and Jesus, she could probably hear all of this that was going on.

[15:23] The disciples complaining, Jesus saying that he was only sent to the lost sheep. So, what does she do? She circumvents all the disciples, doesn't she?

She goes around them all, and she finds her way to Jesus, and she falls at his feet. And the new NIV, I've got the new NIV here.

I don't know what it says in the NIV. It says, she knelt before him. Actually, the Greek uses a much stronger word, a much more interesting word, which means to worship, to revere.

The implication that the woman has really fallen at her feet, and is worshipping Jesus and begging. This isn't simply just kneeling down. And she speaks the words, Lord, Master, help me.

Interestingly, I've read that the root of this word actually comes from a word to mean kiss. So, she may have been grabbing his hand, kissing his hand. Really revering Jesus.

[16:38] So, verse 26. And I think this is part one of Jesus' response. So, Jesus' response to this worship on the surface would surprise all of us, I think.

And it begs the question, is he insulting the woman? Which is a fair question to ask, isn't it? In our modern day language, if someone called me a dog, I probably wouldn't be too happy. I don't think he is. So, let's break that down. He replied, it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.

So, we've heard Jesus use this language of children before, haven't we, in Matthew. And it's often referred to as God's children. Those belonging to his kingdom.

I think Jesus is using this language as a synonym to the lost sheep in verse 24. He's reiterating to this woman that his mission priority at this time, as son of God on the earth, is to be feeding the Jews with the things of the kingdom, miracles, healings, and so on.

[17:53] We could paraphrase what Jesus has to say in this way, I believe. It is not right to, or it is outside of my mission boundaries to the lost sheep of Israel.

Take the children's bread, to give these kingdom things prioritized for the Jews, and toss it to the dogs, to throw it to those outside of those boundaries, i.e. to the Gentiles.

Why dogs? Why not fish? Or porcupines? I think there's a couple of things going on here.

First of all, Jesus is speaking from a foundation of distinguishing Jew from Gentile. Now, I believe he's using a style of speaking that would have maybe been used by the Pharisees.

So the Pharisees would have viewed the Gentiles as not clean, or would have most likely labeled them in some form at some points as dogs. So how do we know that Jesus is not being insulting?

[19:03] That seems to add weight to it, doesn't it? Interestingly, the Greek word used here for dog is not the same word that's used in other places in the Bible to describe the kind of wild, aggressive dogs.

The scavengers, the really unclean dogs. It's actually a different word. It's a variation of the word, and it's closer to puppy. And I think referring more lightly to like a house dog that the Gentiles would have had.

Maybe even saying a companion of sorts. So I believe Jesus is also drawing on her physical posture.

Because if you think about it, she's come and fallen at the feet of Jesus. And she's worshipping him. And that word, as we said, has the implication of grabbing his hand and kissing it.

And much like a hungry puppy will come and lick the hand of the master. I believe Jesus is drawing on some of the things that are actually going on in front of him. And I don't think he's insulting her.

[20:08] Actually, I think he's speaking to the woman firmly. He's saying it as it is. But he's saying it with a sweet compassion that fits the situation. This is not the son of God insulting somebody.

That wouldn't fit with anything we know about him. But approaching the woman in an intelligent, firm way that's compassionate is the son of God that we know.

So this is part one of Jesus' response. And in verse 27, the woman responds to Jesus. So in the version of the NIV that I've got, it almost makes it look like the woman contradicts Jesus when he said it's not right to, by saying, she responds, yes it is.

Actually, the word she uses better translated simply is, yes, or in agreement with Jesus. So I put the two versions up there. Yes, Lord, she said, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

And she's reaffirming her position of recognizing Jesus as son of God and master over not just her, but over matters of the spiritual and physical as she pleads for her daughter's healing.

[21:26] She's also confirming her own position as not being worthy to receive the priority blessing she's asking for as a Gentile.

She's acknowledging that. And this is an act of her completely humbling herself in submission to the highest authority on earth and heaven. It's verse 28.

I believe this to be the second part of Jesus' response. In response, he commends the woman. And he grants her request of healing for her daughter.

Her daughter was healed from that moment. Mark's account adds to this and says, the woman went home and found her child lying on the bed and the demon had gone.

There she is. Jesus had absolute compassion on this woman. And this is the opposite of what it looks like on first read, isn't it?

[22:33] When he uses the language dogs and you see this silence. No, this is Jesus having compassion on this woman. More than that, for Jesus to commend her faith as well is an incredible thing.

This outsider, this Gentile who was unclean and defiled, not worthy of God's blessing, according to the Pharisees and human traditions at least, their human traditions, she had been recognized as worthy by Jesus, the Son of God, through her faith.

She had been made, in a sense, made clean at that moment by him. Which was ironically, the very thing that the Pharisees were lacking. She came to be on the inside of Jesus' boundaries, by faith and through his mercy and his grace.

And I think this projects forward to the relationship that we have with Jesus now, doesn't it? Jesus said in John 3, just as Moses, this is John 3, 14 to 15, just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

When Jesus went to the cross and died for our sins, he took the sins of everyone, Jew and Gentile, and he united them through having faith in him, granting the gift of eternal life to both parties in the same way.

[24:07] Ephesians 2, 17 to 19 says this, He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near.

For through him, we both have access to the Father by one spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people, and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Isn't that a magnificent work, to be uniting people in that way, out of his grace? The book of Hebrews says this about Jesus. This is Hebrews 7, 26.

Such a high priest truly meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people.

He sacrificed for their sins once for all, when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests, men in all their weakness. But the oath which came after the law appointed the son, who has been made perfect forever.

[25:37] Jesus meets all of our needs. He meets all of the requirements, so we can simply come to him in faith, whoever we are, whatever we've done. And that brings us on to our final verses.

And so you run out of time, we're not going to spend so much time thinking about these verses. I think they speak for themselves in a big way. Jesus returns to the Sea of Galilee, to Jewish territory, and he continues to heal people, continues to do his work, and perform miracles which resulted in the praise of God the Father.

When we look at the picture as a whole, isn't it amazing that Jesus, in his time out, when he left to go to the shore, he was looking for time out. He didn't say no.

This is my rest, this is my holiday. When this lady in absolute faith came to him, he didn't turn her away. I think we've learned quite a lot from this text, and I certainly did.

I hope God has taught you also. What conclusions can we draw from this to take with us into the week? I have two main things I'd like to think about.

[27:10] Firstly, I think we can look at the qualities that God has given this woman. So she was a caring person who was 100% active in seeking help for those people that she loved, for her daughter.

Absolutely 100% active. She was a person who, even when met with silence, would not stop calling out to the Lord. She was a person not ashamed to humble herself, who worshipped Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah.

She was a person who wouldn't let anything stand between her and Jesus. What amazing qualities. By God's grace.

I would say, forget Captain Marvel or Ray What's-Her-Face from Star Wars. The media would tell us that a strong woman is fierce and aggressive and so independent that they don't need any authority.

I would firmly disagree with that, and I would say that God has given us here a great example of a strong woman. And men, this goes for us as well, doesn't it?

[28:22] These qualities apply equally to us. When Jesus says, everyone who believes in me, he means everyone, woman, man, Jew, Gentile.

And I think that's really something we can take with us into the week. That determined faith in Jesus Christ. Because we know he is perfect and he will provide.

Let's pray as we go into the week that God will give us increasing measures of faith. Do we seek after that? Do we are 100% active like the woman was? My second point is this.

For those who might be struggling, there are going to come times in life where we plead with God and we are met with silence.

That happens, doesn't it? I'd like to say to you, and it's something I thought very heavily about when I was coming to this text, about the nature of this silence.

[29:28] It's worth remembering that silence is not the same as ignorance. God hears you the same as Jesus as God, as Son of God heard the woman.

Jesus drew out the faith of the woman with silence. It was purposeful silence and it was rewarded. That doesn't mean we're always going to get the answer to prayer that we want. That's up to God. He knows much better than us what we need. But thanks to Jesus, thanks to this magnificent work on the cross, there is no physical condition that can keep us away from his kingdom if we have faith in him.

Jesus, who took our sins to the cross and rose again, by faith, Jew or Gentile, he will welcome you into his everlasting kingdom. I'd like to close just by reading this, his verses from Ephesians.

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world.

[30:44] But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. That's something for us to remember. Amen. Amen. Amen.