

Faith Outside Israel

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[0:00] Good morning. I should be speaking.

Sorry. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to open the word of God to you this morning! If you would, I'd like you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 15, the parallel passage to what Matt has just read for us.

How many of you are familiar with the book or the movie, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*? Some of you might remember the conversation that Mr. and Mrs. Beaver had with the four young people where they were talking about Aslan.

And as the conversation went on, Lucy asked the question, isn't he safe? To which Mr. Beaver replied, safe?

Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about being safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you.

[1:20] Today we're going to look at a passage that sometimes troubles people as they look at a picture of Jesus that they don't necessarily always have in their mind. But I want to stress right now that where he sometimes is not always safe or comfortable, he is always good.

And he's the divine king. Let's bow our heads for a word of prayer. Our dear Father God, how we thank you so very much for a new morning.

We thank you for the privilege of being able to come and worship you as a body of believers without fear of reprisal or persecution. We praise you and thank you for that.

We confess, Lord, that sometimes we take that for granted. And we pray, O Lord, that as we open up your word right now, that you might, in fact, just open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things from your word as we seek to unpack it and learn what lessons you perhaps would want us to have this day.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. I'd like for us to take this passage today and begin to try to unpack it a little bit, looking first at where Jesus is.

[2:36] Oh, I'm sorry. I'm not used to this. I usually have one around my head. Just kind of do this if I pull away. I want us to take first notice of where Jesus is.

Take a look at verse 21. It says, And Jesus went away from there. Now, where's there? He was in the Galilean area, the territory there.

And we, in recent weeks, had looked at the feeding of the 5,000. And after he fed the 5,000, his disciples crossed over to the land of Gennesaret.

Right there. Where he began to heal lots and lots of people. The word must have got down to Jerusalem because we found out from last week when Matt was preaching that the scribes and the Pharisees came up from Jerusalem.

And they began to interrogate Jesus and challenged him regarding how his disciples were transgressing the traditions of the elders. How'd they do that?

[3:45] Well, they were not washing their hands in a ceremonial way. The way was prescribed by the elders. And so after Jesus called them a bunch of hypocrites, he proceeded to tell them that they were too focused on outward form and ritual.

But that what God was interested in was the heart. And as Matt pointed out to us last week, he was interested in the intentions and the outflow of the heart.

If you still have your past in front of there, I'd like you to look at verse 11 and then we'll look at 18. Jesus said, It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of his mouth

that defiles that person.

Verse 18 there. And I should, yeah, verse 18 it says, But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart. And this is what defiles a person.

In the parallel passage of Mark chapter 7, he adds there in 7:19, This he declared all foods clean.

[4:59] Now that's a profound statement. Because it sets the groundwork for what's going to take place in the rest of chapter 15. As he begins to move out of the ministry in Galilee on into the Gentile area.

Let's take a look there at verse 21 again. It says, And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Here he's withdrawing from Galilee, which is a predominantly Jewish population.

And you find that he is now going to the district of Tyre and Sidon, which is predominantly Gentile. It should be noted that this is the only time in Matthew that Jesus goes into a Gentile area.

And as you can see on the map there, it's actually north of where he was in Galilee. Tyre and Sidon is up in the Syrian area and Phoenicia area.

Now Jesus has gone there with his disciples, not so much for ministry. How do I know that?

[6:14] Well, if we go back to Mark chapter 7, verse 24, we find that Jesus said that he went there because he didn't want anyone to know where he was. He was taking, we might call a respite from the ministry that he had in Galilee.

And yet though he tried to, I'd say, hide himself of sort, when you're a celebrity, that's very hard to do. Because his fame had progressed all around that area.

So he was found out. So let's take a note of who is coming. Oh yeah, the capitalist down here is where Mike will be talking next week with the feeding of the 4,000, which is significantly different than the feeding of the 5.

Take note of who's coming to Jesus. This is in verse 22. He says, And behold, a Canaanite woman from the region came out and was crying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David.

My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon. Once again, we find Jesus in a scandalous interaction with a woman.

[7:29] What do I mean by that? Well, the first woman that he had that interaction with was the woman by the well in John chapter 4.

She was a Samaritan. And the Jews made great efforts to not go through Samaria. They'd go all the way around it. They'd go from north to south, from Jerusalem up to Galilee.

But Jesus, in John 4, said he had to go through there. And he meets her at the well. And his disciples are really scandalized by that in some ways. But she was a Samaritan.

What does that mean? That means that she was half Jewish and half Gentile. This second woman here is a full Gentile. But worse than that, she's a Canaanite, which was an ancient enemy of the Jewish people.

The Samaritan woman was not seeking Christ. All she did was go to the well to get some water. But she found the living water in Christ. This lady, on the other hand, knows that Jesus is a healer.

[8:38] She hears that he's a good man and cares about the poor. So she purposely comes looking for him. I want you to note it's worth seeing how she comes in a very humble way.

It says, first of all, she came crying out for mercy. Now, the word crying has the idea of intense emotion. And, in fact, the verb form is such that it's ongoing.

She's crying out. It wasn't just one cry. It was over and over and over again, like a wailing of sort.

She's crying out for mercy. You're not finding her insisting that Christ heal her or help her.

She's not appealing to justice. She's appealing to mercy. You also notice that she addresses him with great respect. She calls him Lord, which was not an unfamiliar designation to someone that was of importance.

In fact, some of you might have translations that translate the word kurios to he, or I should say sir. We have a different significance for it as Christians.

[9:50] But it was a term that was often used for people of high esteem. The thing that caught people's attention, though, was the second title. Lord, Son of David.

Now, this is a title that was used many times through the Gospels by different people, oftentimes asking for the same thing that she was.

Son of David, have mercy. According to the religious authorities, Son of David was a title for the Messiah, the Jewish Messiah.

And some even believe that that was, in fact, a divine individual. Well, how did this non-Jew who was living in a Gentile land hear of the Messianic title?

And, I guess, having heard it, what possessed her to, in fact, use it? Well, it's likely that news got around in her area where she was living as Jesus was ministering in Galilee that, again, from the map, you might remember, they were budding one another.

[11:00] And if we keep in mind the size of it, Israel is about the size of our state of New Jersey. So it's not a big area. She must have heard about how Jesus was going around healing different people.

And having heard the term, she realized maybe that's what they call him. And it may be that that's all it meant to her. It was a title that she had associated with him.

And yet, at the same time, we find in the scriptures not everyone used Son of David. We know of the, for instance, Jairus, who was a Jewish synagogue leader, who also came to Jesus and implored him to heal his daughter, that he never used that term.

So it was perhaps some significance to why she used it. Here you have the mother then presenting her need. My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon. I'm going to guess that you moms can identify with that.

I didn't mean it that way. I mean, if she was really distressed. And she was suffering greatly, you would be in anguish for her as well.

[12:17] Well, what happened? What did Jesus do? We read in verse 23 that he ignored her.

It says, but he answered her not a word. Put yourself in place of this woman. She's distraught over what she's been dealing with.

And she's come to the only one that she knows can help her. And he ignores her. And it gets worse because the disciples are tired of her crying out to him and crying out to him and crying out to him. And they basically beg him and say, will you send her away? She's following us. Reminds me of us sometimes.

I remember how the disciples had really got after the parents.

[13:17] Remember the ones that brought their kids to Jesus to bless them? And he says, get out of here. Don't you understand that he's an important person? He doesn't have time for kids.

And so they want to get rid of her. Go on, you're bothering me. They're looking at this woman who's a Gentile, a Canaanite, outside the covenant of God's special people.

She's a pagan. She's an idolater. The nerve of her coming to bother our holy Messiah. And at first glance, it appears that Jesus shares their sentiment.

But we read in the next verse, and he answered, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Ouch. And again, I would just ask you, put yourself in the sandals of that lady who put all of her hope and faith in this person.

And this is the response she's getting. So who's Jesus speaking to when he says that?

[14:34] Well, it would appear, at least to me anyways, that he's speaking to his disciples who are saying, get rid of her. And he's telling them that I was sent to the lost sheep of Israel.

He's acknowledging and affirming his mission to be Israel's Messiah to come and to save them from their sins. That was his primary mission.

In fact, you might remember even the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans. He talks about first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. And you see that pattern in the book of Acts.

He always went to the synagogue first, and if they rejected him, he then would go to the Gentiles.

That was God's plan because they were his special people. I noted earlier that when Jesus came to this area, he didn't come so much to minister.

He came, as it says in the book of Mark, to get in the house and have a respite with his men to not be found out that he was there. And so he wasn't coming to minister to her, at least on the surface.

[15:50] The thing I find amazing is that this woman is not put off by Christ or the disciples. But you read in verse 25, she came and knelt before him saying, Lord, help me.

She's not arguing with him. In fact, at this point right now, you find that she is acknowledging her position. She's outside the covenant of God's people.

So you don't find her using the title Son of David any longer. The only appeal she has is nothing of her own, but she appeals to this Jewish holy man's compassion.

Doesn't know what else to do. And Jesus answers her in verse 26, and he says, it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

Ouch. Did we hear right? Is this the same Jesus who, in the book of Matthew chapter 11, said, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[17:12] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart. Here you have this mother filled with anguish, and yet, and she falls at his feet, and yet, he has these words that seemingly sound pretty harsh.

He not only refuses her request, he seemingly, I'll underscore that word, insults her.

I've read various attempts that softened this. perhaps one of the most popular is that the Greek term that's translated dog here is in the diminutive form, which means it could be translated doggy, like a household pet.

And it would be a term of endearment, say. But do you know how many times in scripture the word dog is used for endearment or respect?

Zero. It never is. And when people are referred to as dogs, whether it was in that culture or ours, it's always derogatory. Also, we'd point out that when Jesus was speaking with these people, he wasn't speaking in Greek.

[18:46] He was speaking in Aramaic. And the term for dog that was used here does not have a diminutive form. It could not be translated doggy.

One commentator suggested that Jesus was showing her great honor by putting it to the test.

Again, for the moment, if you could put yourself in her sandals, how many would have thought that was a great honor in light of the distraught anguish she was in?

As such, I think it's best to let the statement stand without attempting to soften it, even if we don't fully understand what's going on here at the moment.

for it's then that we can more fully appreciate her next comment. In light of all the stuff that's piled on her, the anguish that she brought in and the reception that she's receiving, she says, yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Wow. What an amazing woman this person was.

[20:09] Her boldness, quick wit that we see. She was ignored, she was turned down and potentially even insulted. She's out of her element.

She's a woman among many men, yea, a Gentile woman among Jewish men that really didn't have very warm feelings towards her. She's a pagan before a holy man.

And yet she comes back with a remark that frankly stuns and amazes Jesus. And he responds like this.

Then Jesus answered her, O woman, great is your faith. Be it done to you as you desire. And her daughter was healed instantly.

As we're reading that, we say, finally, Jesus healed as we expected him to do. Interesting thing is he makes it clear that he heals not in response to her anguish, not in response to her sense of giving respect to him, her pleading with him, pleading for mercy.

[21:34] What he says was that it was based on her bold faith. It was her bold faith that caught the attention of Jesus. She held on to him and would not let him go.

You might remember the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel, which many believe was a pre-incarnate state of Jesus as he's returning back home.

And the angel had said to him, let me go. And he said, I will not let you go until you bless me. And he blessed them. My friends, God is honored and pleased and Christ is as well when we hold on to him.

Even when the way things look at the moment doesn't look like he's giving me an instant answer. And he's coming to me and I'm teaching him, I should say, and it doesn't seem as though he's going to give me what I'd like to have.

This woman here thought initially that she had followed the right formula. She humbled herself before her, she showed respect to him, and she went to him pleading for mercy and compassion and no result.

[22:58] And so she tried again and this time she was, in fact, pushed off, possibly even with an insulting refusal. But the thing that we find about her is she continued to hang on to him.

She continued to believe in him. She believed that Jesus had the power to heal her daughter. And she wasn't going anywhere until he healed her.

She persisted. And Jesus praises her faith, her great faith, for that. What kind of lessons can we learn from this passage?

It's a short passage, but there's a lot going on here. Well, clearly, faith is an obvious subject matter of the verses that are before us today. But first, I'd like to look at the notable lessons about Jesus, particularly with regards to his actions.

What was going on here? So we'll begin by considering Jesus' seeming coldness. and I underscore, seeming, because that's what would have appeared to many people around.

[24:14] you know, Disney movies oftentimes have cute little characters and storylines, and they always have happy endings, no matter what's going on in the middle.

Sometimes we're not aware of the fact that the story or movie is based upon a tale that was violent and even terrifying. but they oftentimes would kind of soften the characters and the plot to make it more acceptable and approachable.

I think sometimes in the Christian culture that's what we do with Jesus to make him more approachable, to make him more appealing. Take a look at images, if you see any images of Jesus Christ.

He's always a good looking person with a smile and a peaceful look, possibly has a little sheep in his arm and he's petting the sheep. It's just so inviting.

Even our songs sometimes that relay our love for him can sound not that much different than a secular romance song.

[25:39] I don't think Jesus, I should say, I don't think the woman who was there at that time or even many that surrounded them had the impression that Jesus was gentle and sweet and kind and all of that at that moment.

There was probably a sternness or at least a harshness that was there. And it's true that Jesus describes himself as gentle and lowly apart. But even that remark came after he severely condemned three cities where he was ministering up in northern Galilee.

That's in Matthew 11. Now admittedly, this is a difficult thing for us to kind of put our heads around. He calls us to to come to him.

All you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. And yet sometimes we feel a certain discomfort.

He's like us but then again he's not like us. He's a brother and friend and yet he's also our king and judge.

[27:04] but as kind and compassionate and merciful that Jesus is at time there lies within him a character and a purpose that we don't always understand.

It goes beyond our understanding and oftentimes comfort zone. I'll let your minds think for a bit of some of the situations that the disciples found themselves in.

They were sweating bullets at times. He loved them. He's good. But he didn't just kind of give them a free ride. And as a Christian we're not put in a supernatural bubble protected from everything in this world.

Safe? He isn't all the time. But he is good. To quote Mr.

Beaver again, of course he isn't safe, but he's good. He's the king. He is the king. He's the divine king of the universe. He's the son of God, almighty God, the omega, the alpha and omega, the

beginning and the end.

[28:20] Sometimes we bring him down to our level and then we don't understand why he's doing things and saying things that we don't understand. We gotta understand our understanding of who he is.

the master of the universe. And as a result of that, sometimes like his disciples, we shake our head and say, I don't get it God, I don't understand.

But we need to recognize that Jesus is not always safe or comfortable. We need to come away with that today. And if you're going to go on and minister in his name and things like that, you're going to find yourself in situations that you're going to be sweating bullets as well.

But he is always good. He is always good. And I think the best thing for us to do is to accept him for who he is as revealed to us by the word of God and not try to tame the lion of Judah to our liking.

Learn to find out who he is based on what the scriptures say as opposed to against the image that we put together on our own. There's a second lesson regarding Jesus and that is oftentimes he has a bigger picture of things than anyone around him.

[29:54] I believe this troubling narrative is probably easier to understand if we look at it from the perspective of the disciples. You might remember that Jesus turned their thinking upside down in the message that Matt gave us last week.

They had as Jews an understanding of what it means to be clean or unclean and he turned that on its head. In Matthew 15, 1 to 20, after he turns what's clean or unclean on its head, he then takes them up into Gentile territory where they're surrounded by all these pagans, these Gentiles, these unclean people.

At least according to Jewish standards. And I suspect that many other Jews, not just the disciples, would have been inclined to do just what they did and said, send her away.

She's unclean, unclean. And yet this story, I believe, is one that, and the one that follows, and that's what Mike will be speaking on next week, the feeding of the 4,000, are intended to picture the reality that Jesus' plan involved much more than Israel.

Messiah of Israel, yes, but much more, much greater. In fact, his salvation was to, in fact, spread to the ends of the earth, which was a shocking concept for his men.

[31:41] In fact, if you consider, even after Pentecost, they all stayed huddled in Jerusalem. You have to send a persecution there to disperse them. And even after the dispersion took place, you find when he wanted Peter to go to preach to the centurion and his family, he had to lower the sheet three times.

And he had to tell, and Peter says, I don't have anything to do with what's unclean. And God says, what I've declared clean, don't you call unclean. And this is a step along the way that he's working on them.

And in some ways, it finally got through to Peter. We're the beneficiaries of that. You see, through his words and his behavior, he was beginning to undermine and undercut the traditional thinking of the Jews with regards to the Gentiles.

Because, you see, again, according to the Jews, the Gentiles had no right for the bread. Because they were nothing but dogs.

And Jesus uses those words, I suspect, as much for his disciples to hear it in their ears, as for the woman at that time.

[33:07] Because, in the midst of this encounter, this Canaanite woman, he is teaching the disciples a very invaluable lesson. That even the Gentile territory is a field ripe for the harvest.

he looked at the passage as a whole, not any given statement, you find that ultimately he didn't ignore her, nor did he send her away, as the disciples pleaded with him to do.

He had a game plan going on that wasn't being seen on the surface. and he used the encounter as a teaching occasion where he was going to be highlighting the great and persistent faith of this Gentile woman who cried out, have mercy on me Lord, son of David.

Now it's interesting, this Gentile here actually recognized who Jesus was as the Messiah of Israel when his own people did not.

And he's saying disciples take notice. Now let's turn to the Canaanite woman who in many ways is very much like us.

[34:44] And as we look at her story hopefully there's much that we can learn from her particularly in the area of faith. First I want to look at the simplicity of her faith.

Now this Canaanite woman was not schooled in the Bible in Jewish history or theology or anything like that. She had heard that Jesus was the Messiah but she wasn't even all that sure what all that meant.

What she did know and what was important to her is that she heard that he was a healer. One who cast out demons. One who cared for the poor.

One who she could go to and have her daughter healed. That's all she knew. She didn't know a lot of theology. She heard the title of the son of David and she knew that it was probably tied up with the hopes of the Jewish people.

But for her he was one that was going to save her daughter. That's all she knew. That's where she was focused. And to that belief she attached her hope.

[36:08] And she would not let go. I have to confess that I let go all too often before I probably should. I pray and I pray and I pray I guess God's not going to answer it I guess it's a no answer.

She was persistent. She had a simple faith but it was one that God honored. You I happen to share that I sometimes give up before I should.

I'm one that has had a fair amount of training in the scriptures. I went to seminary and everything like that. And what I want to say to you right now is that knowledge doesn't necessarily make a person one of great faith.

Sometimes knowledge can get in the way of faith. It can create and support doubts as much as faith. again she was a simple woman a simple faith.

The other thing that we should note here is that the fact that we're dealing with faith means that there's going to be times we're not going to really understand what's going on. We're not going to certainly be able to prove it because we're dealing with faith.

[37:24] this is really God's design. It's designed to stretch us in our faith and it's also used by God when we can't understand something to test our commitment to him.

You ever find yourself in a position where you say God I don't understand but because you said so in your word I'm going to do it. That honors God big time.

Remember Jesus' conversation with Martha when her brother Lazarus had died? Here he shows up four days late her brother is in the tomb and after some discussion back and forth he gives this grand declaration and says I am the resurrection and the life whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die and the next thing he says is do you believe this you notice he doesn't say do you understand this he says do you believe this do you believe that I can do this or do you have to wait till I prove it do you believe it even though your brother is dead in the grave right now does your eyes of faith take you beyond what you can see right in front of you and you know it would be good for us to answer some of those questions as well when do we believe do we believe when we even though we live in a culture that says that anything goes that there is no real

God or anything like that do we believe anyways do we believe when our culture is inclined to tell us that truth is just relative we would do well to follow this woman with simple faith and says all I know is that Jesus is my healer and I'm not letting go can we get to that point where we say oh God give me the grace that I don't let go of you like Jacob of old I'm not going to let go of you until you bless me what a difference it would make for many of our prayers we'd also would do well to have her persistent faith this lady was undaunted she was rebuffed three times each getting successfully maybe more difficult and yet at the same time she did not give up

I wonder how many of us would have fared as well Jesus told a parable about another lady like that found in the book of Luke chapter 18 you might remember the story she was a widow who had been wronged by an adversary and she went to this judge over and over again an unrighteous judge an ungodly judge didn't fear God or anyone and he wouldn't even hear her stop bothering him but finally he gave her justice why he says because she's going to drive me nuts she just keeps coming and coming and coming remember what Jesus said after that he said and will not God give justice

to his elect who cried to him day and night will he delay long over them

[41:28] I tell you he will give justice to them speedily nevertheless when the son of man comes will he find faith on the earth will the son of man find faith that kind of faith in this gentile woman who did not belong to Israel because she would not give up in her faith in him now some might say that she was motivated by desperation as opposed to by faith and I can appreciate that and yet I've seen people who are desperate without faith and if that was her case she probably would have broken out in anger or rage after the way she was seemingly treated but she didn't her faith allowed her to be focused on Jesus and him ultimately healing her daughter and the son of man found that kind of faith in her and was well pleased it would be good for us to have that kind of persistence as well in our prayers to

God we should also acknowledge her boldness like Abraham of old she reasoned with the Lord over and over again to try to get him to do what you want remember the story God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham says oh no my nephew!

Lot is there and so he says Lord would it be right for you to destroy the city with righteous people as well as the unrighteous would that be just he says if there's 50 people there will you spare them and God says yeah if there's 50 people there I'll spare them and so then he says what about 45 or 40 or 30 or 20 he finally gets down to 10 and each time God says yeah I'll spare!

them ultimately for the 10 sadly there weren't 10 righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah and so that we know that it was destroyed but because of Abraham's intercession Lot was spared because of the faith of Abraham I want to stress that the Lord does not feel displeased when we persist we sometimes give up way too soon we perhaps need to ask

God to help us to have the grace to persist like that Jesus was amazed by her persistence he said oh woman of great faith great is your faith!

[45:05] he done to you as you have desired I don't know what your prayer life is like I can only speak for mine I can only speak for the fact that it oftentimes is lacking in this area I give up too quickly on things that I was burdened with and because I didn't get the answer in a time that I felt was needful I just say well I guess not God's will well if God has burdened your heart with something do you think he would burden your heart for something that he didn't plan on answering at some point God could stretch us and grow us if we were inclined to be more like this lady there are only two times in the scripture that you find that Jesus is wow blown away by someone's faith only two times and they are both Gentiles and this woman here and the Roman centurion these are people that don't belong to the covenant of Israel they weren't descendants of Abraham but you know what they demonstrate what the apostle Paul and I'm later clarifying very much in the book of Galatians chapter 3 where he says this and he's speaking of us here know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham and the scripture perceived that God would justify the Gentiles rightly preach the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying in you shall all the nations be blessed so that those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham something that these disciples have learned my friends it doesn't matter what your background your heritage anything else in your life to be counted as a child of God

I mean a child of Abraham all that's needful is for you to have faith Jesus Christ it doesn't have to be sophisticated like this woman had a very simple faith but it's a faith that believes that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God who came to earth to die for your sins and mine not that complicated and yet for whatever reason people go through life either ignoring it or just sniff on it and all I can say today is I don't know all of you here but I would ask that if you've never put your trust and faith in Jesus Christ the son of God the son of David who came to die for your sins and mine I didn't pray to do that that you don't have to make it all that complicated it's just only acknowledging

