

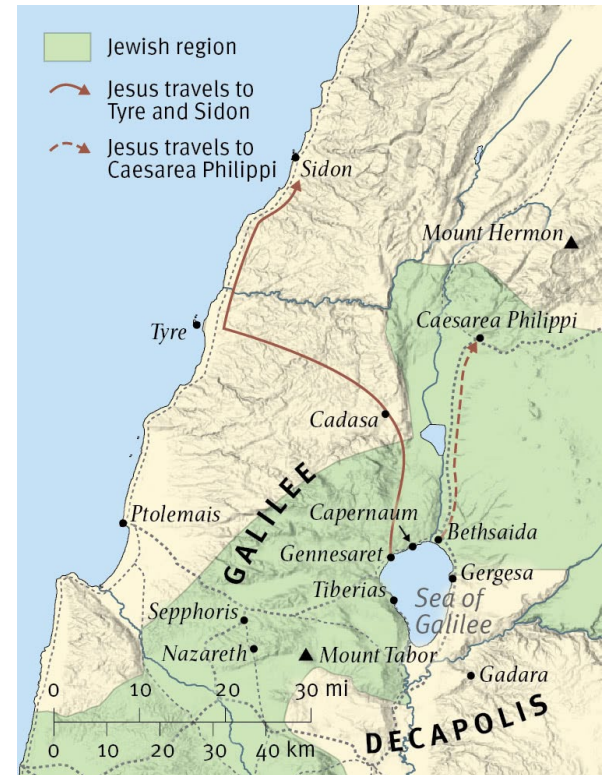
NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 15 (PART 2)

Matthew 15:21-28 - Jesus In Tyre & Sidon

The people of Tyre and Sidon were descendants of the ancient Canaanites, and their culture was shaped by: Pagan religions (including Baal worship) and Greek and Roman ideas. They had different language and customs from Israel.

According to the Hebrew Scriptures, Jews were not necessarily specifically forbidden from having interactions with Gentiles, but the vast disparity in their lifestyle and practices, interaction would have risked a Jewish person from defilement. Over time, Gentiles were avoided and disliked for the threat they posed to Jewish ritual purity.

For example, if Jews were to abstain from eating or touching an unclean animal and Gentiles ate that animal 3x day, there would have been potential for defilement. Gentiles worshipped idols, Jews rejected idolatry. God's people were called to be different, distinct and holy while Gentiles had a very different standard for morality. So for a Jewish Rabbi to intentionally enter this region and interact with Gentiles is shocking (v. 21)



v. 22 - “Canaanite Woman” - this term means non-Jewish person from this region.

In **Mark 7:26**, the woman who approaches Jesus is called a “Syrophoenician” (aka a Phoenician from Syria), further underscoring the non-Jewish identity of the area and its people.

Yet, look at what the woman says: “*Have mercy on me, Lord*”, “*Son of David*” & “*Lord help me!*”

Jesus has an interesting interaction with her which appears to be a test of some sort or assessment of her faith. At first he doesn't answer her. Then he says he was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Jews). During all of this the woman remains persistent (shouting) and eventually bows down before him.

Jesus' answer to her “*it is not good to take the children's bread and give it to dogs*” (v. 26)

Q - What do you think he means by this?

The people of Jesus' day would refer to unclean people, especially gentiles as "dogs" (2965 κύων *kuon*). However, the Greek word used here by Jesus is different from that word. The word used here is the word used for a dog you would have as a pet (<2952> κυνάριον *kunarion*).

As a recently converted dog owner/lover this makes some sense. Picture a family seated around the dining table eating. Mom serves dinner and the dog comes over and is showing great interest in what's happening. The children are served and expected to eat dinner - but instead of eating they take some of the food off of their plate and start handing it to the puppy. What is their motivation? Love and friendship (perhaps a desire to not eat whatever might be on the menu that night?). But, the food is supposed to be for the kids, not the dog.

The woman responds to this statement from Jesus with a good comeback - "yes Lord, but the dogs are allowed to eat the crumbs that fall off the table". In other words, she understands that mom didn't make a loaf of bread and set out a place setting for the dog, but the dog isn't rebuked for eating the pieces of food that fell from the baby's highchair.

Jesus rejoices at the faith and desire of this woman and declares her daughter healed. (v. 28)

Q - What does the woman's actions and answers reveal about her heart?

Matthew 15:29-31 - Healing Resumes

At first read, it seems like Jesus is doing more of the same things we have seen him do in Matthew's gospel. More healing and miracles from Jesus, thanks Matthew! But there's more here than meets the eye.

In Mark's gospel account immediately after the record of Jesus and the Canaanite woman, we read of him healing and doing miracles. But Mark adds the following verse:

Mark 7:31 - Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.



The Decapolis was a federation of ten Greco-Roman cities, predominantly Gentile, located east and southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Additionally, look at what the crowds say when seeing Jesus' healing: "*they glorified the God of Israel*"(v. 31) – giving another indication that this crowd was made up of Gentiles.

So we have a quick snapshot into the ministry of Jesus which is so similar to what we have read previously it almost makes you wonder why it is repeated again. But once we understand the

audience, we learn that the similarities are showing us how Jesus was caring for people, even non-Jewish people and treating them like he treated his own countrymen.

Matthew 19:32-39 - Feeding Of 4000+

Again, without knowing this was likely a crowd made up of a larger than usual Gentile audience, this record seems redundant (to the story in Matthew 14). But knowing that it is a different story with a different, somewhat controversial audience, it's remarkable!

Feeding details: Jewish audience - 5 loaves, 2 fish - 12 full baskets left over
Gentile audience - 7 loaves, "a few" small fish, 7 baskets left over.

Commentators suggest that the numbers of left over baskets in each record are significant. 12 baskets for the Jewish crowd, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. And 7 leftover baskets for the Gentile crowd representing a complete number of the nations

Q - What do we learn from this record?

Matthew 15 starts with Jesus pushing back against the Jewish traditions that were being elevated over not just the actual commands of God but compassion and care for the people of God! He confronts the Pharisees' obsession with external expressions of holiness while neglecting the matters of the heart and one's relationship with others. He said "it's not what enters the mouth that defiles someone, but what comes out of the mouth (which ultimately comes from the heart) that defiles."

And what does he do *immediately* after this teachable moment? He travels to the land of the unclean people - the Gentiles! And he talks to them, and touches them and heals them. Then he teaches them and feeds them - just like he did to the Jews.

For sure the majority of Jesus' ministry is to the biological descendants of Abraham. In the next chapter he doesn't launch a worldwide outreach to Gentiles and pagans. But for this moment he is revealing his father's heart and love, not just for one kind of person, but for all people. This was God's original intention in the beginning as well as the destiny of Abraham's descendants from the start (see Genesis 12:3, Isaiah 49:6, et).

But Matthew 15 is showing us that what makes someone holy is not how many times they wash their hands or who they avoid - but how Christ-like they are. And often being like Christ means getting your hands messy so you can make someone else whole. May we follow him wherever he leads.