



Humble Access

Matthew 15:21-28

Sermon – Tony Swinton – 13 Feb 2022

The title for this series in Matthew's gospel is 'Perspectives'. It's a good title because Matthew's gospel is about a radical shift in perspectives. Our passage today is Matthew 15:21-28. But before we look at it, I want to frame it with some big strokes of 'colour' that appear in the gospel or, if you like, some big changes in perspective that I find in Matthew's gospel. Why? Because they should help in understanding Matthew 15.

Let's pray: Lord Jesus as we come to your Word today, calm our hearts and minds, and I ask that your Holy Spirit restores us.

Matthew's gospel 1:1...

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, the son of Abraham.

Right at the start we find out this book is about the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham... his name is Jesus.

Now if you were a Jew living when Matthew wrote his gospel this one liner would have been a head turner. The Jews had been waiting for the Christ. Matthew is saying, he's here! he's on the ground! he's the one I am writing about!

Now the Jews of Jesus' day were waiting for the Christ to come and they understood the Christ would come for them, God's people. He would rule over God's people and his reign, unlike our Queen Elizabeth's, would last forever. The Christ would rule over God's people, give them victory over their enemies and blessing in life. He would usher in God's Kingdom for them.

Now if we jump to the very last verses of Matthew's gospel, we find Jesus saying this to his disciples,

'all authority on heaven on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the of the age'.

It seems something has happened between the first verse and the last verse. The first verse likely raised huge expectation, great hope and even greater relief among those bought up in Israel. **Our** Christ is here. But then at the very end of Matthew's gospel Jesus' disciples are told to go and tell everybody from all nations about him and make disciples of them!!!

The colour has changed; the whole Jewish mindset is being challenged between the first and the last verse of Matthew's gospel. The Jewish readers are being called to a reorientation of their perspective... from our Christ is here for us, to he is here for all nations; now go make disciples from amongst them.

Perhaps nowhere in Matthew's gospel is this momentous challenge to the Jewish mindset played out so clearly as in chapter 15. But before we go to Matthew 15, I want to add another bold stroke of colour to the big picture of Matthew's gospel.

Please read Matthew Ch 5 – Ch7. This is a section of Jesus' teaching; we call it the Sermon on the Mount. If you like the Sermon on the Mount is a succinct summary of the essence of the Old Testament teaching. In this block of teaching by Jesus he redefines who God's people are... God's people will be the ones striving to live out the teachings of Matthew Ch 5 – 7 because these are the values and behaviours of the Kingdom of God, of God's people.

So, who can enter this Kingdom of God... Jesus tells us who can at the end of his Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew Ch7:7-8 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to the person who knocks, the door will be opened.

It seems that **everyone** can come to God; anyone can come to Jesus... anyone who asks, anyone who seeks and anyone who knocks. The Jews of Jesus' day could benefit, **but then everyone would have to include the non-Jews of Jesus' day.**

You can come to God, even I can, our relatives, friends, colleagues, even those we do not like. We can all ask, seek and knock; if we do the door will be opened to us... **we can all be counted** amongst God's people. Your race will not exclude you, nor will the creed you have been bought up with; every condition of humankind can come to God and those from every profession or lack of profession can knock and the door will be opened to them.

Then Jesus continues...

7:13-14 ... Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

How do you get to God? Who will benefit from Jesus the Christ, son of David, son of Abraham entering human history? Only those who enter through the narrow small gate... those who take the narrow road. So now we see that not all will be included amongst God's people.

All can ask, all can seek, all can knock and the door will be opened... but which door? It's a narrow small gate, followed by a narrow road... it leads to life and Jesus says only a few find it.

Jesus is talking about himself here. He is the narrow gate and he walks the narrow road. When Jesus went to the cross and was crucified, he was opening the gate for us. The narrow road we must walk is the one he walked and we must follow.

Now it's with all this in mind we come to Matthew Ch 15. I want to suggest to you that in Matthew 15 we see what we have just read in Ch7 being 'acted out' in two real life object lessons.

Last week Aiden took us to Ch 15:1-20, the first of the object lessons, and we saw some Pharisees and teachers of the law in dialogue with Jesus. They were not coming to Jesus the small gate and they were not travelling the road Jesus travelled. Rather they seem to suggest to Jesus the Christ that he was on the wrong road.

It seems they had turned true religion, religion of the heart, the religion of Matthew 5 -7... into a religion of form. They missed the small gate and they were walking the wrong road. They had spent their lives learning about, teaching about and waiting for the Christ, son of David, son of Abraham... yet they failed to acknowledge him when he stood in front of them.

This week we come to Ch 15:21-28 and it's a total contrast. Here we see Jesus dialoguing with a Canaanite woman. I want to suggest to you that we see her entering through the small gate and via the narrow road that leads to life.

V21 we read Jesus leaves the Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem, the holy city, the city of God... and he takes his disciples to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Now if we go back in time about 1,500 years before Jesus to the days of Moses and Joshua, this was Canaanite territory. For about 400 years prior to Joshua these Canaanite people had been offending God. In the time of Moses and Joshua the Canaanites were known for their

worship of demonic idols, false gods. They were known for their taboo sexual acts and even their sacrifice of children to false gods (Deut 18 & Lev 18).

The result? God's judgement came down on them. They were to lose everything and the land they lived on was to be given to the people of Israel. Tyre and Sidon were to become part of the land '*flowing with milk and honey*' that God had promised the people of Israel.

So here in Matthew Ch15 we are reading about Jesus taking his disciples to the north western corner of the promised land, part of the land given to Israel by God but a land that was no longer under Israel's control... a land lost to 'God's people' because of their disobedience and faithlessness.

I'm left wondering if going there was very deliberate on Jesus' part as he taught his disciples about who God's people really were... as he taught his disciples about the small gate and the narrow road.

It was in this region of Tyre and Sidon that Jesus is approached by a Canaanite woman... First, note she is a woman - unfortunately considered a second-class citizen in that time and place. Not only that but she she's a 'Gentile dog', a way some of God's people thought of non-Jews in Jesus' day and, even worse, she is a Canaanite.

Remember, Canaanites were people who worshipped false gods and demonic idols in the past. And here we have a Canaanite woman whose daughter is demon possessed... a descendant of demon worshipers, possessed by a demon.

Now if there was ever to be a God forsaken place on earth, Jesus and his disciples were standing on it. This land was taken from the Canaanites because of their evil. Then eventually it was taken from God's people because of their lack of faith and disobedience to God.

Jesus' disciple would have known this history, and are possibly thinking, 'why on earth has our Christ bought us here?'

And it's here they are approached by a Canaanite woman. Now if there was a list of God forsaken people, the Canaanites and this woman would be on the list.

The disciples' mindset would be stretched at this point; they would likely be uncomfortable. They are indeed not comfortable, as you will see; the disciples ask Jesus to send the woman away.

V22 the woman cries out. *Lord, son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.*

'Son of David' she calls Jesus. What was it Matthew wanted his readers to understand? That Jesus is the *Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham*. This woman understand exactly who Jesus is... pay special attention to how she approached Jesus.

Do you see the juxtaposition Matthew creates for his readers here in Ch15. In Ch15:1-20 The Jewish religious leaders, 'God's people' came to Jesus to argue a moot point with the one God has sent, basically telling the Christ he was on the wrong road. Then in v 21-28 we are starting to read about this Canaanite woman coming to the one she knows is Lord, Son of David... She comes in humility, seeking mercy for her daughter.

Now at first Jesus doesn't answer the woman and his disciples urge him to send her away. But she keeps crying out...

Then Jesus says to her, *"I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel..."* She kneels before him... *"Lord help me."* Jesus replies, *"It's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."*

Blessings from God belong to the children of Israel, the descendants of Abraham; that would have been the Jewish mindset.

The woman is not put off by this seeming insult and she persists.

'Yes, Lord, she said, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.' Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, **you have great faith!** Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

So, in Matthew Ch15 there is no faith where there should be faith (like the Pharisees and teachers of the law, like the region of Tyre and Sidon) **and there is faith where you would not even bother to look for it... in fact great faith.**

See the change in perspective? Christ was to be sent to the people of God, but who are the people of God?... They are those like this Canaanite woman - people who come to Jesus in humility and faith. They are not like the teachers of the law and the Pharisees who came before Jesus with their faithless arrogance and found Jesus' judgement. Now some here may have found the dialogue between Jesus and the woman confronting; it was a tough conversation. If that's you let me ask you... How might the Canaanite woman have felt at the end of her conversation with Jesus and after going home finds her daughter cured? I suspect tears of joy and feeling like she was held in great esteem.

In the Anglican Prayer book there is a prayer called **the Prayer of Humble Access**, it seems it was first written about 1550 AD and it forms part of the *Anglican communion service*. It seems the writers of this prayer learnt how to approach Jesus from this Canaanite woman.

Listen to the prayer:

"We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold (many) and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy." *An Australian Prayer Book*, p. 125, §27.

Our prayer book tells me I am not worthy even to gather up these crumbs under Jesus' table! Our prayer book goes on to tell me what this Canaanite woman discovered...

...but Jesus is the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy.

Do you, will you, come to Jesus like the Canaanite woman, in humility and faith?

You may have to make more than a shift in perspective; you may have to make some radical prayerful changes to your mindset... to the way you view the world and yourself.

Prayer is a good start; reading God's word is also a good start. Come to Jesus with the Canaanite woman's humility; humbly trust in Jesus and, like her, you will find life... you will find that his nature is always to have mercy.

Then go and tell others, others from anywhere and everywhere, what Jesus has done for you...

Background reading:

2 Samuel 7:12

Genesis 12: 1-3

Joshua 19:24ff

Deuteronomy 18

Leviticus 18