

MATTHEW 15:21 – 39
FEEDING THE “DOGS”

C.L. Franklin, the pastor and father of Aretha Franklin once preached a sermon in which he said, “If you call a man a dog, he will be offended. But if you call him a “big dog” he will take it as a compliment.

Today we will be talking about dogs, but in a different sense of the word. Every culture has its own sayings – colloquialisms, which use words and terms in a different sense than the usual dictionary definition. And the Jewish culture is no different.

Last week we saw how the purity laws that were originally meant for the priests had been handed down to the lay people, making it a requirement for them to wash their hands before every meal. Of course, washing our hands prior to eating is a good practice, but it shouldn’t have any bearing on our salvation or our walk with God. It was meant to be symbolic on order to set the priest apart for their service to God. There were many other laws concerning this for the priesthood.

Polemic – An aggressive attack or refutation of the principles or opinions of another.

Israel was a nation, which came from Abraham who was chosen from among the nations in order that God could build his own nation – a people wholly devoted to Him. They were to be a nation of priests who showed the surrounding nations what it was like to know the one, true God – YHWH, and live in the a land which was ruled by Him. They were to be a peculiar people, set apart for the service of God – a sort of polemic (define) against the false gods and the peoples that served them – those who had been disinherited at the tower of Babel. In the end, the entire planet is to be reclaimed; and eventually it will be. Israel was to be the instrument by which this happened. But something went wrong.

The fact that Israel was set apart from the other nations became a source of pride that crept in like a cancer. To make matters worse, Israel had adopted many of the practices of their pagan neighbors while simultaneously holding themselves to be superior to their neighbors.

- Holy land
- The irony of the “Good Samaritan.”
- The barriers of the purity laws.

Pericope – A section of text which is set apart for a particular theme within the overall text.

Last week we saw that Jesus was challenged by Pharisees from Jerusalem because He didn't recognize the oral traditions concerning these laws as binding. Jesus was well aware of the effect this misinterpretation had on the surrounding nations. He has seen His own people begin to turn on Him and how the crowds have been misconstruing His words, wanting more of a political king than a Messiah. And that is why this second part of the periscope is important. We don't need to just read over what Jesus does at this point. To do so would be to miss something that affects us. Jesus now departs from the area in which the majority of His ministry has been focused. He now leaves the Galilee.

Last week we read that Jesus and the disciples had landed at Genessaret, where He healed another multitude.

(Map)

21 Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

23 But He answered her not a word.

And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."

24 But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

26 But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

27 And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

(Map)

- Tyre and Sidon
- Jesus was in the region, but hadn't entered the cities or her house.

- This was not a mission to the Gentiles as was Jonah's when he went to Nineveh.
- This is more of a retreat meant to get away from the opposition of the Pharisees. There is no indication that Jesus sought an audience with anyone in the region.
- The woman is a Canaanite, (a Syrophonecian according to Mark) a descendant of the people whom Joshua and Caleb had evicted from the land. They were a constant thorn in the side of Israel.
- That a Canaanite woman would be the recipient of the compassion of Jesus was a powerful sign to the Jews.

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- "Son of David." This is Messianic title showing that this woman, though a Gentile, had some knowledge of Judaism. The fact that she followed Him and even expected an answer to such an important request shows some measure of faith. A mother's desperation for her child can be persistent.
- But Jesus ignores her. Rude?
- The disciples urge Him to appease her so she will go away. (They could have driven her away themselves.)
- Jesus then states to the disciples that His mission is not to the Gentiles.
- Inclusion of the Gentiles comes throughout the OT and later we see it in the NT.
- Jesus now appears to restrict Himself in the same way He did the disciples in:

Mt. 10:5-6

5 These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

- So how permanent is this restriction? Is it the final word on the subject of reaching out to the Gentiles?

- M. 8 5-13 and 8:28-34 Jesus has already dealt compassionately with Gentiles and remarked that He hadn't seen such faith in all Israel.
- Jesus' restriction could refer to the purpose of this particular retreat, but as we will in the purpose of this periscope, there appears to be a hint of what is to come.
- Dog – an unclean animal as dogs weren't domesticated among the Jews.
- The woman then uses the term as that of a house-dog.
- She acknowledges that the children are privileged, but even the house-dogs are privy to the scraps that fall from the table. Jesus does indeed have to go to His own people first, but His mission does not stop there.
- **Her reply, whether she knows it or not, encapsulates the Biblical theology of the election of Israel, not for their own benefit alone, but to be a means of blessing all nations, a light to the Gentiles. (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 49:6)**

So what has happened here? The woman is correct in her argument. Jesus has "drawn" her faith out of her. Persistence with God pays off here. Her question is no different than those asked by the centurion and maniac of Gadera. The only difference is the location and the fact that she had to be persistent. Once again, we see Jesus perform a miracle which is practical, related to the context and where persistent faith was shown.

James 5:16-18

16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

(MPB)

29 Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. 30 Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. 31 So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

Feeding the Four Thousand

32 Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."

33 Then His disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?"

34 Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?"

And they said, "Seven, and a few little fish."

35 So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. 36 And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. 37 So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left.

38 Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala.

(Map)

- Jesus skirted the Sea of Galilee.
- Verse 31 "Gave glory to the God of Israel" is used in a Gentile context. This was never said of the Galilean crowds.
- Jesus is now in the Decapolis, a Gentile region, east of the Sea of Galilee.
- And this is why Matthew has placed this periscope here. He presents Jesus' ministry outside the people of Israel. This segment parallels the one in chapter 11.
- Do you see what has just happened? Jesus left the Canaanite woman who plead for crumbs from the Master's table and then fed a Gentile crowd. He literally gave bread to the dogs.
- Our prayers and persistence change things.
- Without this move towards the Gentiles, we wouldn't be here.

Jesus gave us an object lesson.

- Don't set up artificial man-made barriers to those outside the faith.
- Welcome them, knowing that a true faith and walk with Jesus will change what needs to be changed.
- Persistence in prayer changes things. (See the message from Men's Prayer breakfast.)
- Let's not be like the Israelites that saw themselves as better than others, knowing that we are all sinners saved by grace.
- Our being forgive and set apart is to be the catalyst that propels us to minister to those outside the faith, not a barrier that excludes them, making us out to be self-righteous.