

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 3, 2017

Matthew 15:21–28 (EHV) - ²¹Jesus left that place and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²There a Canaanite woman from that territory came and kept crying out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!” ²³But he did not answer her a word. His disciples came and pleaded, “Send her away, because she keeps crying out after us.” ²⁴He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵But she came and knelt in front of him, saying, “Lord, help me.” ²⁶He answered her, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷“Yes, Lord,” she said, “yet the dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire.” And her daughter was healed at that very hour.

Introduction

A couple Sundays ago, we heard a Bible lesson in which there was an abundance of leftover bread, even after several thousand people had eaten their fill. Just a chapter later in Matthew’s Gospel, we come to the opposite extreme. In this case, Jesus teaches us a lesson about crumbs.

Theme: Feast on the Crumbs of Salvation!

You’d normally have to eat a whole lot of crumbs to satisfy your hunger, wouldn’t you? The main course Jesus serves up consists of forgiveness, life, and salvation. But no matter where your place is at the table, the tiniest bite is just as nutritious and satisfying as a full serving. We ask for the Spirit’s blessing on our meditation this morning as we focus on his inspired message under the theme: **FEAST ON THE CRUMBS OF SALVATION!** In our text we see how **nothing prevented Jesus from preparing the feast**. We also see how **faith provides us a place at the feast**.

Part I: Nothing prevented Jesus from preparing the feast.

One of the benefits of preaching through the church year is consistency. If you’ve been paying attention, you’ve noticed that all of the Gospel lessons lately have come from Matthew’s account. And so, the story picks up almost from the point where the lesson left off last week. After Jesus had pulled Peter up out of the drink and they’d walked back to the boat together, they proceeded – now on calm water – to the west side of the Sea of Galilee. Almost immediately, word got around that Jesus was in town. As usual, scores of people brought their sick to him. As usual, Jesus obliged and many were healed. As usual, the Pharisees did their part to hinder Jesus work. And as usual, Jesus didn’t let any of these things sidetrack him from the real purpose of his earthly mission – that of preparing the feast of forgiveness by offering himself as the sacrifice for sin.

“Jesus left that place and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon.” That involved going northwest, towards the Mediterranean coastline. The two cities mentioned by Matthew were about as far as you could get from Jerusalem without leaving Palestine. His intention was to once again leave the crowds behind and prepare himself and his disciples for the brutal months to come. Even when a mission opportunity presented itself he remained focused on the ultimate goal.

“There a Canaanite woman from that territory came and kept crying out, ‘Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!’ But he did not answer her a word. His disciples came and pleaded, ‘Send her away, because she keeps crying out after us.’ He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” Jesus responded to people in many different ways, but this is perhaps the most

peculiar of all. When this gentile woman came to him for help, he simply ignored her. His reply to the request of his disciples was almost as uncharacteristic.

There are two big questions that lie before us. It may seem like there's a very fine line between them, but it's important that we understand the distinction. Here are the two questions... 1) For whom was Jesus sent? 2) To whom was Jesus sent? Let's take them one at a time.

First of all, for whom was Jesus sent? Let's allow God's own word to answer. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son..." "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world." "Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" "Just as one trespass led to a verdict of condemnation for all people, so also one righteous verdict led to life-giving justification for all people." "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."** Is there any doubt that Jesus was sent to win forgiveness of sins and righteousness and a not-guilty verdict for each and every person who has walked or is walking or will walk the face of this earth? God's Word is very clear in that regard.

As to the second question – to whom was Jesus sent? Our text gives us the answer: only to the lost sheep of Israel. After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the ripples on the pond started spreading out – **"Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, the ends of the earth."** Jesus himself limited his earthly preaching and teaching to God's chosen people of Israel – to those who were specifically waiting for the promised Messiah. That doesn't mean he cared for Gentiles any less than the Jewish people. But he'd leave it up to others to share the good news with them.

I'm not saying that it was unimportant to address this woman's spiritual needs, but Jesus did have more important things on his mind. He wasn't just on earth to *tell* people about forgiveness and salvation. He was there to *accomplish* it. In this account, we see a resolute Jesus, whose eyes were focused only on the completion of his work. And at this particular moment, even a demon-possessed little girl didn't take precedence. But then, Jesus knew exactly what he was going to do before it even occurred, didn't he?

Transition

Besides getting a view of Jesus' determination to prepare the feast of salvation for the world, we also learn something from this Gentile woman. Faith provides us a place at the feast.

Part II: Faith provides us a place at the feast.

Jesus wasn't the only one determined in his mission to save the world of sinners; the woman in our story was just as determined in her mission to seek an answer from Jesus. **"But she came and knelt in front of him, saying 'Lord, help me.'"**

Whenever the New Testament uses the word "Lord," we have to look at the context to see what's meant. Sometimes it's simply a title of respect, like we'd address someone as "sir" or "ma'am." Sometimes it refers to a master or ruler. In reference to Jesus, it usually means that he's the covenant-God of the Old Testament. Which sense of the word does the woman have in mind? Is she just being respectful? Since he's got these twelve men tagging along behind him, does he look like a master? Let her speak for herself: **"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!"** She recognized Jesus as the descendant of David who'd been foretold by prophecy. In other words, she believed in him as the promised Savior.

In all of this, we see the grace of God at work. She belonged to the people who were originally supposed to be destroyed by the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. God's command had been specific – don't let any of them live. In almost every instance when this command had been

ignored, the Israelites were corrupted by the idol worship of the Canaanite people. Here, though, is an example of the opposite. Somewhere down the line, this woman had learned to know the promise God had made to his people. She herself trusted in that promise and knew that the fulfillment of God's promise was now standing right in front of her.

The Jews commonly considered any non-Jew no better than a dog. Jesus words to the woman might seem harsh, but he uses a different word, meaning "house dog" or "family pet." **"He answered her, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to their little dogs.' 'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'"** She herself recognized that Jesus came first for the Jews (in the sense of chronology and priority in earthly ministry). But she knew the promises of the Old Testament that Jesus would be the Savior of the whole world. Isaiah wrote of that promise, **"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."**

The woman's faith gave her persistence. And Jesus commended her because faith provides a person a place at his feast of salvation, not genealogy. The New Testament, and especially Paul, makes it clear that all believers are children of Abraham, not just his biological descendants. **"For this reason, the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham's descendants—not only to the one who is a descendant by law, but also to the one who has the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all."** **"Understand, then, that those who believe are the children of Abraham. Foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, Scripture proclaimed the gospel in advance to Abraham, saying, 'In you, all nations will be blessed.'" "He redeemed us in order that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we would receive the promised Spirit through faith."**

And guess what!?! You and I are included among the little house dogs that sit under the table begging for crumbs and scraps. We're unable to find this food for ourselves, but long for the spiritual meal that God promised and delivered to his Old Testament people. In that same faith, we feast on the crumbs of salvation. And it's not the tiny pieces of fat and gristle that we trim off and give to our dogs. Each tiny bite melts in our mouth. Through that faith we take hold of Jesus' righteousness and appropriate it to ourselves. In that persistence of faith we seek our Savior's blessing and he answers that prayer of faith in ways that are beyond our understanding or expectations. And what a feast it is!

Conclusion

Usually, we don't much like crumbs. But the crumbs of salvation are so different from what we find in the bottom corner of a bag of chips or an almost empty cereal box. These crumbs are eternally satisfying. We can savor each one and look forward to the next. Let's continually devour the Word of our God and taste and see that the Lord is good. Amen.