

Introduction: In recent sermons, we have marveled at the power of God's Word to open the eyes of even Rahab in Jericho in Joshua 4. We have also been impressed to see how Christ focuses the Apostles' attention on one crucial task in John 21:15-17: "to feed Christ's sheep". This week, we turn for another example of the power of God's Word as we see how the Word of Christ's saving work reaches the ears of a Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus went to that region to rest, withdrawing from the unbelieving multitudes in Mt.15:21.

Monday: read Matthew 15:1-20. We understand the need for escape from Galilee when we hear described for us in Matthew 15:1-16 the conflict over outwards purity which Jesus has with the Pharisees. The problem for these foes of Christ was that they approached spiritual cleanliness before God from the wrong direction. As Tim Keller puts it, they thought they could be acceptably pure before God by what Keller calls, 'Outside-In Cleansing'. They thought that by their man-made rules and external washings that they could hide the actual sinful corruption of their hearts.

Jesus replies in Mt. 15:17-20 that evil thoughts and associated wickedness all arise out of the polluted fountain of our hearts. It is these eruptions from within that make a man unclean. Please note that word, "unclean". It is not a word which we use today to describe our sins and failures. But as a word describing our pollution, depravity and guilt, it gives us a glimpse into how seriously Jesus views the stain of sin within us. This is how deep His battle against our sin goes. With the help of the Father and the Spirit, therefore, Jesus must do a deep, cleansing work in our dark hearts to save us. We see this deep work exemplified in the calling and saving of the Canaanite woman in Mt. 15:21-22. She too was utterly unclean and cast aside. She was a Canaanite (Mt. 15:22), which was a race handed over to destruction because of their sin in the days of Joshua 2-6. How wonderful to see the Word of Christ bring the deep, cleansing work of faith into reality in her life. Sing about this deep, cleansing work in hymn # 253:

*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.
Lose all their guilty stains,
Lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.*

*Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.
Be saved, to sin no more,
Be saved, to sin no more;
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.*

*Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save,
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave.
Lies silent in the grave,
Lies silent in the grave; When this poor lisping, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave.*

*The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he,
Washed all my sins away.
Washed all my sins away,
Washed all my sins away;
And there have I, though vile as he,
Washed all my sins away.*

*E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.
And shall be till I die,
And shall be till I die;
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.*

Tuesday: read Matthew 15:21-22; John 16:8-11 & Matthew 4:23-24. When Jesus encounters this Canaanite woman, it is on His first trip out of Israel into this area of Gentile cities. But this does not mean that God has been absent from such a heathen place. No! What may be known about God – even for the Gentiles in their darkness – is clear – both from the created order, and from the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all mankind, (see John 16:8-11). This woman who comes to seek Jesus' help is the object of the work of God's Spirit. Otherwise she would not come to fall at the Master's feet in order to seek His help for her daughter.

In fact, the good news about Jesus' person and work spread far and wide, (Matthew 4:24), – even to Syria where this woman resided. Her heart must have melted when she heard of One named Jesus, who could help even the demon-possessed. Why such a 'broad coverage' for the gospel message from Jesus' lips? Because the coming of the Kingdom of God in His preaching was indeed a great event! For His own glory, God sends His Spirit to deal with the hearts of people like this Canaanite woman whenever He is about a great work on earth, such as announcing the arrival of His Kingdom in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Reflect and Pray: Listen to how John Owen describes the work of God's Spirit in the consciences of the unbelieving world, and in individuals like this woman who comes and falls at Jesus' feet:

“When Christ has any great and signal work to bring forth in the world, He does by His Spirit deal with the hearts and consciences of the most wicked and vile men; which, when the secrets of all hearts shall be discovered at the last day, will exceedingly exalt the glory of His wisdom, patience, goodness, holiness and righteousness. So did God deal with the world before the flood – Gen. 6:3...His Spirit strived with men in that day...That this Spirit was the Spirit of Christ, and that the work of dealing with these ungodly men was the work of Christ, and that it was a fruit of long-suffering, Peter declares – 1 Peter 3:18-20.” John Owen Vol. 9, page 147.

Weds/Thurs: read Matthew 15:21-26. The pressing question of today's notes flows from the dramatic missionary purpose in yesterday's notes, i.e., 'If it is true that Christ was sent even into foreign regions to be a "light to the Gentiles", why then does Jesus seem to put off one who precisely fits the definition of 'Gentile' in Matthew 15:24-26?' Why so many "No's" to this woman before Christ says "yes"?

In other words, why seek to test this Canaanite woman, whose plight was as dire as a horrifying demonic presence in her own family? For her daughter's sake, this woman placed all her hope in Jesus for an exorcism. Moreover, it could not have been easy for this woman to find Jesus at all, given the anti-Gentile prejudices of the disciples, and given that Jesus had come into her region of the world precisely to *get away for rest* from the needs of humanity (see Mark 7:24)! Now she had made this profound effort, and Jesus seems to dash her hopes in verses Mt. 15:24-26, with not one rejection, but two! "No!" He says to her: "You are not one of the elect of Israel", and again, "No! You are a dog, and the table of salvation is spread not for your kind, but for the children of Israel!"

Now of course, there are many insights which Scripture and biblical scholars give us to help us understand Jesus' words. To give these various insights proper attention, I have taken two days' worth of notes to meditate on Jesus' profoundly wise, though stern response to this Canaanite.

Wednesday: First of all, Jesus as the Great Physician could afford to be stern with this woman because He knew so well the profound and strong work of His own Holy Spirit in her! Like a skillful Physical Therapist, who knows that true range of motion will not be achieved for our limbs unless they are bent painfully beyond what we as patients want to tolerate, so Jesus is not afraid to

“bend and twist” the limbs of this woman’s faith in order to demonstrate for God’s glory *the strength of the Holy Spirit’s work in this woman! The faith by which this woman will be united to Christ is that strong!*

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank the Lord Jesus for His admiring confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit. “Like recognizes like”. Just as the Holy Spirit was sent to bring glory to Jesus Christ because of His work, so Christ desires to bring glory to the Holy Spirit for the Spirit’s profound work of effective calling in this Canaanite woman’s life!

Thursday: Continuing our examination of Jesus’ stern words to the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:24-26: Jesus’ words ought not to be misunderstood as rooted in any capricious grouchiness or lack of concern for this woman’s plight. *Let us blame the disciples* for such an attitude, not Jesus! The woman seems to have approached the disciples first in Matthew 15:23. They are the ones most bothered by her, and ask Jesus to, “send her away”. What they are saying, in effect is, “Give her what she wants, and then she won’t bother us! Give her the mere outward miracle, so that she ceases being our concern”! Alas, the disciples, like many churches today, aren’t interested in getting beyond the spectacle of the wondrous and the instant cure! Many superficial believers say to their part-time Savior: “Give us what we want, and send us away into the world where we can pursue our own concerns. We won’t bother you again, if you just give us what we want”!

Meditate and Pray: How wonderful that Jesus takes time with us, and digs deep, as He did with this woman! Even His silence in Matthew 15:23 is eloquent testimony that we *all need to think more deeply* about our sin and the misery that flows from it! Second, beyond testing her until she sees more deeply *the extent of her need*, Christ’s goal is to help us and this woman to discover the wondrous treasure of faith – not merely to heal her daughter of her outward misery.

Friday: read John 3:1-16, Matthew 15:27 & 1 Timothy 1:15-17. As members of Christ’s church, saved by grace and adopted into His precious church family, we must beware of the infectious disease caused by a false sense of our own goodness. This disease of self-righteousness blinds many in our day from ever seeing their need for a Savior. We see this in society in general. But even among God’s people, a failure to appreciate the convicting purpose of the Law of God blinds us to our common standing with the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15 - as a sinner in need of grace. In the same way, we fail to take comfort from Paul’s example as the worst of sinners, because we forget our own level of impurity before God. May God give us the daily grace of humility so that we refuse to rise higher than the foot of the Cross!

To help us lower the estimation we have ourselves, and to exalt Christ’s righteousness by which we are saved – consider this example from history as a source of mediation on our need for God’s grace given in Jesus: taken from Tim Keller’s book called, *Encounters with Jesus*, the chapter entitled, ‘The Wedding Party’:

... If you live long enough and you are honest enough with yourself, you will learn beyond any doubt that there are things in your heart that will bite you and even shock you. You’ll say, “I didn’t know I was capable of that.”

The problem, actually, is that we are all capable of that. Adolf Eichmann was one of the Nazi architects of the Holocaust who escaped after WWII to South America, where he was caught in 1960 and taken back to Israel for a trial. He was tried, found guilty, and executed. But there was a very interesting incident during the trial. They had to find witnesses who saw him commit the terrible crimes against humanity he was charged with. They needed to find people who saw him participate in atrocities at the death camps. One of the material witnesses was a

man named Yehiel De-Nur, and when he came in to testify, he saw Eichmann in the glass booth and immediately broke down, falling to the ground and sobbing. There was pandemonium. The judge was hammering to get order. It was very dramatic.

Sometime later, De-Nur was interviewed by Mike Wallace on *60 Minutes*. Wallace showed De-Nur the tape of him falling down and asked him why it happened. Was he overwhelmed by painful memories? Or with hatred? Is that why he collapsed? De-Nur said no – and then said something that probably shocked Wallace and should shock almost all secular Western people, (who say of themselves, “I’m a humanist, I don’t believe that human beings are inherently evil.”) He said that he was overcome by the realization that Eichmann was not some demon but was an ordinary human being. “I was afraid about myself... I saw that I am capable to do this ... exactly like he.”

You can choose to say that the Nazis are subhuman, that they were nothing like us, and that we are not capable of doing what they did. But there are serious problems with that view. The scariest thing about that whole chapter of human history is not the few individual evil architects of it but the complicity of vast numbers of people across a society that was producing so much of the world’s best scholarship, science and culture. That makes it impossible to write off the whole era as the work of a couple of isolated monsters. Besides that, to call the Nazis “subhuman” or “not like us” is in fact the very reasoning that led the Nazis into their unthinkable atrocities. They, too, thought that certain classes of people were subhuman and beneath them. Are you prepared to deny our common humanity with them? Do you want to make the same move that they did?

The vast majority of the Nazis and the millions of people who were led by them were not monsters with fangs. Hannah Arendt, watching Eichmann during the trial, reported to the *New Yorker* that he was by no means psychopathic, that he exhibited no hatred or anger. Instead he was an ordinary man who wanted to build a career. She called this “the banality of evil.” Evil lurks in the heart of all quite ordinary human beings.

So it would actually be more honest to say, “I’m somehow the same as those who have done terrible things. I am made of the same human stuff. There must be something down deep in me that is capable of great cruelty and selfishness, and I don’t want to see it.” Jesus of course knows that it is there. “Many ... believed in His name. But Jesus did not entrust Himself to them ... for He knew what was in each person” (John 2:23-25). And while, for most of us, the self-centeredness and sin of our hearts has not led to overtly criminal acts of violence and cruelty, it has still caused misery for the people around us, and it has kept us from serving the God who created us and to whom we owe everything. And Jesus came to cleanse us of this, to purify us from what is spiritually wrong with us.”

Meditate and Pray: Oh Lord Jesus, thank you for the lesson which my believing mother, Rosemary Durham, impressed on me, especially in my teen years: That the best prayer I can utter every day of my life is, “God have mercy on me a sinner”.

Please enable us to live this reality of humble faith, as expressed in the following hymn (251):

*Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty rock
Within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness,
A rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat,
And the burden of the day.*

*Upon that cross of Jesus
Mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One
Who suffered there for me;
And from my stricken heart with tears
Two wonders I confess;
The wonders of redeeming love
And my unworthiness.*