

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for today comes from our Gospel reading in Matthew 15:21-28.

Dear Christian Friends,

Today's text talks about two different types of people. The insiders and the outsiders. The insiders, who think they know what's best and can make decisions for Jesus and the outsiders who think they have no place with Jesus.

First, a little bit of context. Jesus feeding the 5,000, and walking on water was just a few days before this account. He will feed 4,000 right after this account. Jesus had a pretty intense discussion with the Pharisees on what defiles a person, they complain because Jesus' disciples don't wash their hands before they eat and they feel that makes them unclean. Whereas Jesus says, it's not what goes into a person that makes them unclean, rather, it is what comes out of a person is what makes them unclean. Out of the heart come evil thoughts, desires and passions.

So Jesus and His disciples left that area and are now in the district of Tyre and Sidon, an area known for Gentiles, people outside of the Jewish faith. So it's not totally unexpected that a Canaanite woman would be in the area. It is unexpected that she would come to Jesus. Because she would have no idea who He is. Canaanites were known for worshipping a bunch of idols. She has nothing to do with the Jewish faith. She was a woman, women at this time were viewed as property, not as having a say in anything. This outsider comes to Jesus and says, **Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon** (vs. 22).

She recognizes that she doesn't deserve to have anything from Jesus. But her daughter is severely oppressed by a demon, somehow, somewhere she heard about Jesus, and she came to Him.

Now Jesus remains totally silent. We have no idea why He remained silent, we have no idea what He was thinking at the time. But His disciples are not at a loss for words. The ones who are on the inside, the ones who are closest to Jesus, they know what to say, **Send her away, for she is crying out after us** (vs. 23). Just do what she says so she will stop bothering us. Who cares how she heard about you, who cares where her faith might be, just get rid of her.

To that Jesus sharply responds, **I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel** (vs. 24). Answering the disciples, Jesus is not here to do what they want Him to do. He's not here to answer to their whim, to get rid of people at their desire and help the ones that they like. He came with a purpose, to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and we learn very quickly the ones that are part of the house of Israel.

The woman comes back, kneeling, **Lord, help me** (vs. 25). You can hear and almost feel her desperation. And Jesus says, **It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.** To which she says, **Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table** (vs. 26-27).

This is where we see the beauty of the woman's faith. Jesus, very strongly, challenge her, speaking that she doesn't deserve to have her daughter healed. She is not a child at the table, she is not a Jew, she is not an Israelite, she is a Gentile. She is a dog, who only gets crumbs from the table. And this may also be a test, does this woman really believe in Jesus? Does she really see Him as her Lord, the son of David, or are these just mere words for her?

And her reply, **Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.** The woman's response is, you're right. I do not deserve the bread that is for the children, but the crumbs are enough to supply and sustain my needs. And Jesus commends her, **great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire. And her daughter was healed instantly.**

So our question is, where do we fit, in this Bible account? Where would a visitor to Zion fit in this Bible account?

Are we like the disciples, the insiders? The disciple's mentality is this: We like things the way they are. We don't want to be bothered. We don't want to allow those that are different from us to come and disrupt what we have going. Sure, people are welcome to join us, and welcome to do what we're doing, but don't change anything that we're doing. You make sure you fall in line with us, don't disrupt anything, because we like things the way they are. It's very much a "me" mentality. Church now becomes about "me," it's all about us.

Or do you connect with the woman? You know that Jesus is here for all people, but when it comes to you as an individual, you have a hard time believing that Jesus sees you with the same love, the same forgiveness, as the prized and treasured possession He sees for others. You think that because of past sins, past failures, past disappointments or guilt that you of all people have doubts that God's promises apply to you.

The reality is, we can all know for certain if we're going to heaven or not. These are not difficult, and they are not rhetorical questions, I want you to answer: Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God? Do you believe Christ Jesus, is your Lord and Savior? Do you believe what Jesus says in John 3:16, **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life?** Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again, paying for all of your sins? My friends, YOU have all of God's promises in Christ Jesus. Not only are your sins forgiven, heaven is absolutely your home, and it's all because of Christ Jesus.

This is what Zion is all about. We are all about God, what He's done, what He's still doing, and what it means for all of us, His people. Our whole goal and mission and purpose is to be in God's Word, apply His Word, and live in His Word and promises. God's promises are not just for us, they are for every single person we see and meet.

We're not a church and school ministry, so that we can simply serve ourselves and our needs, we are a church and school ministry to apply and live God's Word. You and I are living examples of what it means to be a child of God. You are a living and breathing example of what it means to have all of God's promises. Your life is not about you. Your life is not about what you want, what you desire, what you like. Your life is centered in Christ Jesus. That means, your life is all about what Jesus has done and what He desires for you, to love and care for others, before yourself. That means you and I, we love, we care, we place the needs of others before ourselves.

Jesus gives us a whole new perspective today. Jesus and church is not, just all about you and me. This ministry is not all about what we want and what makes us happy. This ministry, Zion, our lives that we live, they are all about Jesus. Centered in Christ Jesus. It's all about what He has done. He gives us identity, He gives us worth. We really are His people, heaven really is our home, and it's all because of His death and resurrection. Therefore, we live our lives, reflecting Him. Meaning, we live our lives showing God's love and compassion for the people around us. Whether we see people many times a day or just once in a lifetime, we care for them the way God loves and cares for us.

So at church, what does that mean? We are all warm, and welcoming, and inviting to each other and to new faces. We are gracious and kind and forgiving to each other and to new faces. When we look at what we're doing as a ministry, we don't just look at what we like and what we want and desire. We look to the needs of others. We look to what may be serving and connecting and reaching with people that we may not be reaching right now. But seeing their hurt, seeing their struggles, seeing their pain, and seeing them through the eyes of Jesus. And sharing what has been abundantly shared with you. In Christ Jesus, you are a child of God. In Christ Jesus, your sins are fully forgiven. In Christ Jesus, you are going to be gathered with all of the saints in heaven, for all eternity.

In Jesus' name. Amen!