

Matthew 21-03-14b

I thank Dan and Anna and Lori for our special music. The wonderful words of life is exactly what we are looking at this morning as we continue our study in Matthew chapter 15. And we have seen how important it is to have the humility to look past the superficial, what would pass for righteousness or propriety in the human realm, according to human standards, and the wisdom of men and instead be seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, understanding what kingdom pertains.

Do we have a kingdom that is coming? One that is our hope and our future? We do. Who is the king of that kingdom to which we look? It is God the Father. It is the kingdom of the Father.

You could say it is the kingdom of the Father and the Son. They are going to be seated together on the throne. The Lamb will be the light in the new Jerusalem.

But we come to the Father. Our relationship, I've said in the past, I sometimes wonder if we should call ourselves fatherians instead of Christians because Jesus over and over again makes the point that it is the Father to whom we pray. It is the Father to whom we come.

No man comes to the Father but by Him. And it is understandable but slightly amiss to stop short at the Lord Jesus Christ and not arrive at the destination of the Father. You read Hebrews 10 and there is a new and living way through the veil, the torn veil, which is the flesh, the sacrifice on the cross of the Lord Jesus that gives us access to the Father.

Let us come boldly to what? To find grace to help in time of need. Where do we come? Come to the throne. The throne of grace.

Who is seated on the throne of grace? It's the Father. So one of the points I would suggest we can take from the episode of the Syrophenician woman and the healing of her demon-possessed daughter is the importance of proper approach to God. This has been true.

And as I've also said many times, it's hard to stay ahead of the people in our group. Many times on the break, someone will make a comment or make a point that is coming up in the next session. It's just hard to keep ahead of this group.

But the nature of approach is important. Go all the way back to the earliest chapters of Genesis. Why did Cain kill Abel? One sacrifice by Abel was accepted.

The sacrifice by Cain was not accepted. They're both coming to God, but one approaches properly and one approaches improperly. Abel brings a sacrifice from the flock.

It is a blood sacrifice. It is a life-for-a-life sacrifice. The similar sacrifice was initially made for Adam and Eve when they realized that they are naked and God makes them clothing of skins.

He doesn't make them clothing of 100% breathable cotton. He doesn't give them Dacron polyester. They are clothing of skins.

The animal had to lose its life so that its protective covering could be given to Adam and Eve. Abel approaches God on the proper basis. Sacrifice, my very existence as a sinful man costs creation something.

To approach God, something has to die because of me, because of my sin. Cain had a different idea. I grow my crops.

I will bring a tossed salad and that will be my sacrifice. I, by my efforts, will create this offering to God. It's the work of my hands.

Raising sheep and goats and cattle is essentially protecting them so that nature can take its course. They will eat and feed themselves. They will drink and water themselves.

They will grow and fatten and produce wool or milk or meat. It's a built-in feature of those animals. Gardening requires a great deal of husbandry and care and preparation and to bring a grain offering which ends up being a legitimate offering later on but for a different purpose.

This sacrifice that Cain brings is improper. It is not approaching God on the basis of the shed blood. And that is the only basis.

We enter into the throne room and appeal for grace to help in time of need because of the torn flesh which is the veil into the Holy of Holies where God the Father dwells. The basis of approach. So we sometimes think, well, I don't understand why this particular circumstance, this particular challenge, this hardship, this difficulty, this health issue, this financial issue, this social issue, this great trauma is upon me.

I have prayed and prayed and prayed and God seems to be turning a deaf ear. Well, Jesus turned a deaf ear to the Syrophenician woman. Why? Now this is not the only reason why we don't receive an immediate answer but this is one to consider.

We should consider when we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. We should consider maybe I am asking for a legitimate thing that is well within the realm of the compassion of God and the grace of God and the power of God. But am I approaching God and making my request on the proper basis? Is God waiting for me to figure this out before he answers? If he answers too soon before I have parsed this equation, before I have solved for the unknown here, then I lose a chance to learn and grow.

I lose a chance to not only learn but to reflect the glory of God and the multifaceted aspects of his grace and of his power. They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They are the ones who mount up with wings as eagles, who run and are not weary, who walk and are not faint.

Why doesn't God just snatch me up by the hair of the head like he did Ezekiel or Philip the Evangelist and drop me where he wants me? Why do I need to be able to fly with the strength of an eagle? Why do I need to be able to run? Why do I have to walk? Why can't I just be picked up and dropped there? There are things that we learn perspective-wise, application-wise, that we can only learn by experience. This is the difference between gnosis, G-N-O-S-I-S, and epi-gnosis, E-P-I, epi, upon, upon knowledge. It's experience.

You study the book, then you take the test. Some of us, one of our church projects here, and the gals are as welcome as the guys, but we're learning amateur radio, ham radio, and we study for tests to get the technician license or the general license. I'm going this afternoon to take another test and upgrade my license.

And then there's others who are going to test, and some have tested. So we study, and they say, well, there is an offset when you use a repeater. You cannot transmit on a frequency to a repeater and then have it repeat on that very same frequency because it's just a train wreck.

It won't work. It has to receive on one frequency and transmit on another so that everything will work. Well, in frequency ranges, there are particular offsets.

So if you're in the 440 megahertz area, then there is an offset of 5 megahertz. If you're in the 144 megahertz area, then there's an offset of 600 kilohertz and so on. You see this information is all floating around in my brain.

Well, that's in the book. But I'll tell you when it really made sense to me is when I was configuring my own radio to talk to the repeater. And it has a special tone code that has to be in there, or the repeater will not repeat.

It won't say, oh, you're a legitimate signal. There's a special little - it's kind of like a password. It's a tone.

It's a subaudible tone at 88.5 PL tone. And that has to be programmed into the radio, and it keys your transmission so that the repeater will say, ah, this is a legitimate user. Let me boost the power and retransmit what I'm hearing 600 kilohertz away on my repeater frequency.

Well, of course, that sounds like gobbledygook if you haven't been looking at it. But let me just say when you're trying to make your radio work and you want to have a wide range and cover hundreds of square miles, you need a repeater at a high altitude up on a tower or a hill, and you use your small, weak radio to hit the repeater, and the repeater

retransmits a very strong signal blanketing the area. And somebody can be 40 miles to the south, and I can be 40 miles to the north, and we can span an 80-mile distance with just a few watts of power because we're able to hit the repeater.

And there's a great spiritual application there I won't go into. You have to be a radio person to really get it. But we're basically little 5-watt Baofeng radios, and it is the power of God that amplifies our strength and our power and enables us to do things we could never do on our own.

But my point is you turn academic knowledge. I was just having to brute force memorize the offset amount until I programmed my radio. Now it's just second nature.

It's easy because I've done it several times with three or four different radios. That's what God wants us to do. And when it comes to approach, think about this Sero-Phoenician woman.

It is actually a legitimate thing for her daughter to be healed. Jesus heals people by the scores. Doesn't ask them questions.

Doesn't test their faith. Doesn't wait for them to ask several times. Doesn't do it just so that they will quiet down and stop following him.

As soon as they come, he heals them on virtually any basis. But he's making a point in this case. It is all about proper approach, proper understanding of our particular relationship to the Lord.

This woman's relationship to him does not route through the promises to Israel or the kingdom message. Or his claims to the throne as the son of David. Her claim to mercy and help is God's grace and God's compassion.

It is divine compassion, divine power. And she comes as a suppliant. And as a suppliant, as someone who is dependent and requesting the power of God, pride can't be a part of the picture.

You can't get in a huff and say, how dare you compare me to a dog? How dare you discriminate against me because I'm Syro-Phoenician and not Jewish? What's the matter with you? You're bigoted. You're racist. You're callous.

You're indifferent. This is all about understanding. What does Jesus say to her? Oh woman, great is your faith.

You figured this out on the basis of faith. Has Jesus not been making this point over and over again? Flip back a page to chapter or two pages in my Bible to chapter 13. I speak to them in parables 13, 13, because seeing they do not see.

Hearing they do not hear. Nor do they understand. Superficiality.

A parable has a superficial storyline, but that's not its meaning. And if you stop at the superficiality, it's confusing. It makes no sense.

Verse 16, blessed are your eyes for they see, blessed are your ears for they hear. Jesus says one thing in the hearing of this woman. I am not sent but to the sheep lost from the house of Israel.

And she processes that information. She doesn't stop short on a false issue or a, or a shallow understanding. She says, ah, son of David, isn't the right approach.

So what does Jesus say in our chapter 15, verse 10, hear and understand, hear and understand. Every plant, which my heavenly father has not planted will be uprooted. Verse 13, let the Pharisees alone.

They're blind leaders of the blind. They're going to fall in the ditch. Peter says in verse 15 of chapter 15, 13, 13 is significant.

15, 15 is significant. Explain this parable to us. And here comes the rebuke.

Are you also still without understanding? You've heard what I said. Did you understand it? Have you penetrated the parable with your faith? Have you penetrated the word of God with your faith? You've got to stop and think. Get past traditions of men.

Get past the superficial. As we look around at the world, roiling and bubbling and brewing in the cauldron of passions and shallow ideas being expressed in all different areas of politics and culture and everything from financial issues to social issues, racial issues, economic issues, immigration issues, and what's right, what is proper. Faith has the answers if we stop and think.

Jesus looks at us and says, you've learned the word of God. You're observing the times, observing the circumstances, observing these episodes, these things that are reported and the faulty and one-sided nature of reporting on both sides. You listen to any one side and you're only getting a portion of the picture.

What does faith do? What does Hebrews 11 tell us? Faith supplies evidence when you can't see. Substance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen. The parable is what is seen.

But do you understand? Faith gives us understanding that penetrates below the surface and past the appearances. Faith is the evidence of what you don't see. Faith goes to God, asks, seeks, knocks, and judges by the standard of the word of God, not the traditions of men.

It's key, it's critical, never more so than at this time in our history. So anytime you think about this Syrophenician woman, just remember, Jesus was not a racist. He wasn't

bigoted.

He wasn't cruel and insensitive and just holding the treat a little higher and higher to see how far she would jump before he gave it to her. Not at all. Jesus says, look past appearances and figure out what the lesson of faith is.

The woman got it. But this Syrophoenician woman has got more faith than the people of Israel because she got Jesus' message about the house of Israel and the sheep and the children and the dogs. It doesn't matter that dogs are the comparison for the Gentiles.

That's stopping short at the shallow. What is the message? He is not trying to insult her. He is about to give her one of the great expressions of divine compassion and grace and power in driving demons out of her daughter with a thought.

He doesn't even say a word. He doesn't issue a command. These demons have to go at a distance.

Jesus' name is not invoked. There's no magic formula. Jesus just says, let it be to you as you desire.

He's talking to the woman and the demons have to pack up and go. It's the power of God available when we approach on the basis of faith, proper faith, faith that understands, faith that penetrates past the superficial. What is the real issue from God's point of view? Don't sacrifice the doctrines of God for the commandments of men, the traditions of men.

Well, in verse 29, now Jesus departed from there. This is the region of Tyre and Sidon. Remember now on your map, he is north and west of the north part of the Sea of Galilee up close, almost to the coast.

He is going back now. Southeast skirted the Sea of Galilee and went up on the mountain, the mountain, not a mountain, the mountain. This is Jesus' favorite mountain.

People have speculated which one it is in that area, but he went up on the mountain and sat down there. Now there are other times when Jesus goes to the sea and he'll get off a little ways in a boat so that he's got the natural amphitheater and he can teach. And this makes it easy for people to have access and to hear because he's got the reflective properties of the water.

We've talked about this many times. Why does Jesus go to a mountain and sit down there? The same reason Jesus went to the mountain when he called his 12 disciples, he could have talked to them in the house. He could have talked to them in Cana.

He could have talked to them in Capernaum, could have talked to them in Nazareth, could have talked to them as they walked along the road or as they sat in a boat, could

have called them as disciples. But Jesus goes up into a mountain and then the disciples come here. He goes up into a mountain and the multitudes come.

This has the effect of weeding out the casual and people who will do things for convenience. You're only going to climb a mountain. You know what your legs feel like, especially as you get older.

If you climb a grade, if you run up uphill, if you walk uphill, if you climb stairs, you have to have a good reason. Your natural inclination is not to raise your heart rate and do the work. And if you've got sick relatives that you need to carry or assist or pull, then the work is double.

Now is Jesus once again being insensitive and cruel and saying, well, only people who are really dedicated are going to come up here. It isn't a part of the nature, the revealed nature of the Lord Jesus to test people's perseverance in that way. But it is a part of his nature to make it difficult for those who aren't really interested, who are casual, who are shallow.

And when these people find out where Jesus is and they climb up to where he is, this is another illustration of why reformed theology and the Calvinist understanding doesn't work because they had to work to get there. They had to climb to get to Jesus. It's just a fact of scripture.

Jesus could have just spoken a word like he did for the Syrophoenician woman and the people at the base of the mountain or the people passing by, or all the people in the land could have been instantly healed. He could have just said, behold, I bring you healing from heaven and everybody in the land is healed. They don't even have to come.

These people had to figure out where Jesus was, pack up. And by the way, they bring food. They pack picnic baskets and come.

Great multitudes came to him having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others having with them. And these are healthy people bringing with them sick people and bringing them to Jesus for healing. They laid them down at Jesus feet.

This is actually Balaam. They threw them down at Jesus feet is what it literally says. And we do have to temper that a little bit.

I don't think they just, I saw one translation that says they brought the sick and lame and hurled them at his feet. But that's, that's one translation of that verb. And you've got to find the semantic range and figure out they're not taking their sick relatives and just throwing them down at Jesus feet.

But you get the idea that the press of the crowd was so much perhaps that as they worked their way through and brought these sick ones, that by the time they got there

and got into the clearing, that was probably around Jesus and his security team of disciples, that as they sort of stumbled into the clear, their, their loved ones, they're just have to get them to Jesus. And they put them at his feet in a very rapid and forceful fashion. But literally it says they threw them down at Jesus feet.

They hurled them at Jesus feet and he healed them. Now, if you look at the parallel in Mark, it tells you that this is in the region of Decapolis, this mountain is in the region of Decapolis and Decapolis is a largely Gentile area. So these people are being healed.

They are persistent enough to find Jesus. They're not casual in their approach. And notice nobody is crying out son of David.

You remember blind Bartimaeus and his friend, they cry out son of David have mercy. And Jesus does respond to them. If you want to contrast to the Syrophenician woman, great multitudes came.

He healed them. 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. They didn't glorify the son of David, did they? They glorify.

And when it says God of Israel, this is sort of a tacit reminder that these are Gentiles. They're glorifying the God of Israel. They don't not necessarily glorifying their God.

They, they recognize that the God of Israel has sent the Lord Jesus and he is the one doing this. That is the occasion. And we're not going to have time to cover it this morning.

We'll do it this coming Thursday. But in verse 32, now Jesus called his disciples and said, I have compassion on the multitude because they have now continued with me three days and have nothing to eat. He fed the 5,000 after just a long afternoon, right? These people have been there three days.

Not only did they come and bring their loved ones who were maimed and lame and blind and mute and many others, they stayed afterward. Do you see that? It's not a line where people come, get healed and leave and go home. They have come.

Their loved one has been healed and they have stayed. They've remained there. Could be to, to enjoy watching others healed.

But you have to believe that Jesus is also teaching and talking while he is healing. And people are interested in what he has to say. They are interested in what he is doing.

And by extension saying, and they have stayed day after day. They have stayed three days. And the, the whole explanation of the feeding of the 5,000 that well, when Jesus started distributing the five loaves, everybody kind of brought food out of their coats and

that's how it got multiplied.

Well, it doesn't work here because over three days people ate everything they had in their coats and their picnic baskets. And now they have no food. And Jesus says, I have compassion on the multitudes.

They've been here three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way. I know they don't have trail mix.

They don't have road snacks. So once again, it is the compassion of the Lord Jesus. This is not a part of his mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

This is compassion. These people have come, they've been compassionately healed. Now they're going to be compassionately fed.

So when we come to God and we throw ourselves on his mercy on the basis of what, what is the basis of our approach? We are the body of Christ. We are the church. He is our savior.

He is our Lord. The new Testament says nothing about Jesus as king to the church. It does not present the church as having a kingdom function in the present.

We have the hope of a kingdom, but the king of that kingdom is the father. And we'll have a little more to say about that this Thursday, because this compassionate healing of the crowd who is largely Gentile speaks to our situation and is a harbinger. It is a preview of things to come, but we have plenty to think about from this wonderful section of scripture.

And we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for its power to transform our thinking, to renew our hearts, to cleanse us.

The washing of water by the word in the hands of the Holy Spirit to sanctify us and to thoroughly equip us for every good work. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, that your Holy Spirit will illuminate our lives as we seek to use the eyes of faith to see what is not seen on the surface, that you will bless us in that effort as we ask and seek and knock so that our lives can reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now and in the ages to come.

We prayed in Jesus name. Amen.