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The Gospel According to Matthew

The King Expands His Kingdom

June 16, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 15:21-39

Scripture Reading:

You will remember from our recent study of the Lord's Promise to Abraham, that this Promise included Abraham becoming the father of many nations:

Gen 17:3-7 Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, (4) "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. (5) No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. (6) I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into

nations, and kings shall come from you. (7) And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

This is what Matthew is showing us now. Christ, the Seed of Abraham, the King come to call those whom His Father has chosen from all the nations of the earth. Jesus is now showing His disciples, and His enemies among the Jews, that the true Israel is going to consist of people who are true Israelites, born by the Spirit and circumcised in heart.

Mat 15:21-28 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. (22) And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." (23) But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away,

for she is crying out after us.” (24) He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (25) But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” (26) And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” (27) She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” (28) Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Tyre and Sidon and a Canaanite woman. The Lord's actions here are very intentional.

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Tyre and Sidon. This is up in Philistine territory. Enemies of Israel. As William Hendriksen notes:

“This time Jesus retires or withdraws himself to definitely Gentile territory. It is clear that he leaves the land of Israel. This time it is not a case of outsiders coming to him; he himself goes out to them.” [New Testament Commentary]

These are lessons for the Jews, very obviously. They should have known that the Messiah's kingdom would

include people from all nations, but over time they actually became racist, despising other nations and morphing the Promise into something that was only for the physical descendants of Abraham. Think about this. If God's Promise to Abraham was to him and his Seed, and if Abraham was going to be a father to many nations, then this necessarily requires that the Gentiles become children and heirs of Abraham! But the Jews simply disregarded this. And they hated Jesus for showing them the truth of the Promise, as He is doing here by going into Gentile lands.

Jesus Words to the Canaanite Woman

This account of Jesus' dealings with this poor lady initially leaves us thinking that He was quite harsh with her. If His point was to demonstrate to the Jews that His kingdom included people from all nations, then it seems contradictory of Him to speak to her in this way:

- But he did not answer her a word.
- He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”
- And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.”

How are we to explain this?

What Jesus was doing was showing not only this woman but His disciples as well, that His primary mission in coming into this world was to “come to His own.” That is, the gospel of the kingdom was to be offered first to the Jews. You see this repeatedly in the New Testament:

Joh 1:11 **He came to his own**, and his own people did not receive him.

Mat 10:5-6 These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, (6) **but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**

Luk 24:46-47 and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, (47) and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, **beginning from Jerusalem.**

Act 3:25-26 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ (26) God, having raised up his servant, **sent him to you first**, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

Act 13:45-46 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. (46) And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “**It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you.** Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

So God’s plan when Christ came into the world was that He would go first and only to the Jews. Why? Well, they were a privileged people. God made them His chosen nation and it was to their fathers that the promises and covenants were made. As Paul said:

Rom 9:4-5 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. (5) To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

And this is what Jesus was referring to in His response to the Canaanite woman. Her time, you might say, had not yet come. To present Himself as Savior to her and to the Gentiles would be running ahead of His Father’s plan. His statement really was true: *It is not proper to take the children’s bread*

and throw it to the house dogs. First the children are to eat to the full, then the dogs can have the leftovers. All of this was true and was in perfect agreement with the Father's plan.

But....He did it anyway!

“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”

I want to explain something very plainly to you at this point, but I find it difficult to verbalize.

God is a merciful God, full of grace and mercy. He is kind and compassionate. And these qualities often “trump” His plan or His decree. We must learn this well for ourselves or we will become like the Pharisees who held to the jot and tittle of the law no matter what.

Now I know this could be easily misunderstood. God's decrees are unchanging. It's true. And the Lord perfectly fulfilled every jot and tittle of His Law. Yet at the same time He never strained out a gnat and swallowed a camel in the process.

Here was this poor Canaanite lady whose daughter was demon oppressed, suffering greatly. And this lady had great faith – something the Jews did not have. Like Abraham, she believed

God and it was counted to her as righteousness. She was a true daughter of Abraham and the unbelieving Jews were not!

We see the same divine mercy operating in a seeming change of God's decree back in Jonah's day-

Jon 3:3-10 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. (4) Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (5) And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. (6) The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. (7) And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, (8) but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. (9) Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” (10) When God saw

what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Where there is faith and repentance, you can be sure that God's mercy will abound, even if that mercy does not seem to be in accord with the letter of His Word.

And WE must be certain that we handle His Word in the very same way!! Else we will become like the Pharisees – cold, heartless, by the letter rather than by the Spirit.

An Example

This last week I had occasion to correspond with a lady whose friend was dealing with her pastor on the issue of her wicked, evil abusive husband. She showed him a sermon I once gave that was entitled “God is For the Oppressed.” In that sermon and in numbers of other articles I have written, I said that the widows and orphans of our day are largely the victims of domestic abuse, usually by abusers who are parading as Christian men. I have made many parallels between literal widows and orphans and these women and children who are so cruelly treated in their homes. They are poor. They don't have enough to eat in many cases. They are ill and without healthcare. They don't have

adequate houses and there is no one to help them with things that a husband and father should be helping with.

But this lady's pastor objected. He insisted that women and children with an cruel, abusive husband and father are not to be classed as widows and orphans. And if you deal with Scripture in a stiff, wooden, literal manner, he is right. But God's Word is not to be handled in such a manner, and Jesus showed us this in many cases.

Mat 23:23-24 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected **the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.** These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. (24) You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

See it? Weightier matters. Yes, Jesus' Father had decreed that He was to go only to the Jews. And Jesus stuck to that plan...but when a situation arose in which the weight of justice and mercy which the Law also taught, justice and mercy were going to win the day.

So this pastor who handles Scripture in a manner that denies the protection to be given to widows and orphans just

because the poor and oppressed and abused women and children do not technically meet the definition of a widow or orphan – what do we say about such a man? We say he has disobeyed the weightier matters of God’s Word. He has strained out a gnat and ignored the camel.

People who twist and handle Scripture in this kind of way, who deny the mercy and justice God Himself decrees for the oppressed, do so because they have a private agenda. Why do you think that pastor balked at calling an abuse victim a widow and her children, orphans? Why would you do that? I can tell you-

He wants to continue to demand of them that they meet the letter of the law by continuing to submit to a husband who is no husband in a marriage that is no marriage and to a father who forfeited his fatherly rights long ago by his own cruelty. Make no mistake, there is ALWAYS a motive for a Pharisaical, merciless handling of Scripture.

Jesus’ Great Mercy Continues

I will not go into detail in regard to the final two sections of chapter 15, but just emphasize that as Jesus returns to the land of the Jews, His great mercy and compassion continues.

Mat 15:29-31 Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. (30) And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, (31) so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

And again:

Mat 15:32-39 Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” (33) And the disciples said to him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?” (34) And Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” (35) And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, (36) he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. (37) And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven

baskets full of the broken pieces left over. (38) Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. (39) And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

This then is our King. How very different He is from so many of the common caricatures of Him we so often have learned:

Exo 34:6-7 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, (7) keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”