

Jesus' Response to the Gentile Multitude

Matthew 15:29-39

Halifax: 22 January 2006

Introduction:

This is now the third week in our series from Matthew about King Jesus' response to different sorts of persons...

- First, From Matthew 15:1-20, we saw His response to **empty tradition**.
 - Jesus spoke very strong words of reproof to the Scribes and Pharisees because of their traditions!
 - He calls them hypocrites, transgressors of God's commandments, plants that His heavenly Father has not planted, and the blind leading the blind.
 - It seems that they were so bound up in all their man-made traditions about keeping themselves from defilement that they couldn't even love people anymore.
 - They were so tied up that they couldn't even provide for their own parents when their parents were in need!
 - This is what happens when you go beyond what God has said in the way of your scruples...
 - It won't be long until you begin to ignore what He has commanded in the way of love.
 - Jesus insists that defilement does not come from eating foods, but from our own sinful hearts.
 - We need to be cleansed by Him,
 - We do not need to surround ourselves with man-made rules so that we can pretend that we are clean and others are defiled.

In the second sermon in this series, we saw Jesus' response to a Gentile—one that I called a Gentile Israelite.

- She came to Jesus in great earnestness and persistence when He was in the regions of Tyre and Sidon.
 - She was a woman of Canaan, a Syro-Phoenician by birth and not a Jew...
 - But she comes to Jesus pleading for her daughter who was severely demon possessed.
 - We saw how Jesus responded to her, at first seeming to ignore her, then putting her off—
 - but this He did only to test her faith and to prove that she, unlike the Pharisees with their vain traditions, was a true Israelite.

- A true Israelite is one who, like Jacob of old, prevails with God!
 - Jacob's name was changed to Israel because, like this Canaanite woman, he wrestled with the Lord and refused to let Him go until He blessed him.
 - She knew there was no other option for her.
 - If Jesus did not show her mercy, there was no mercy to be found.
 - In the end, Jesus shows that He is very pleased to show mercy to all true Israelites, no matter where they are from.

And so you see from these two accounts that:

- The Pharisees, who were Israelites according to the flesh...
 - Israelites by circumcision and by their formal covenantal connection...
 - proved to be unclean and no true Israelites...
- But this Syro-Phoenician woman who was formally unclean proved to be an Israelite indeed.
 - We learn here that God's blessing comes from laying hold of Jesus by faith,
 - not from mere baptism and the observance of vain traditions.

When you consider these two accounts together, you can see what the Lord is teaching His disciples...

- He is preparing them for the days to come when they will be ministering to the Gentiles.
 - The sequence of these accounts is almost identical to Peter's experience in Acts 10, which led to the baptism of Cornelius, the first Gentile to be baptised.
 - First, there was the lesson that all foods were now clean—
 - Then there was the clear and obvious confession of faith by a Gentile household calling for baptism.
- It is true, that Jesus had instructed His disciples **not** to go to the Gentiles while He was alive...
 - It was their duty to go to the Covenant people first.
 - He Himself retained this principle throughout His whole ministry,
 - and even Paul who was a minister to the Gentiles always went first to the synagogues to minister to the Covenant people.
 - Our first concern is always to be the reformation of the church—
 - to call the church wherever it has apostatised to repentance and not to pretend that everything is all right just because there is a profession!

- We must urge the millions of baptised people who are not trusting in Jesus to repent and believe!
 - We have not been faithful to the gospel if we accept a mere formal profession...
- But we must also be ready to reach out and find all those true Israelites who are yet outside the covenant...
 - those who often prove to be much more eager for the salvation of Christ than the false professors who fill the ranks of the churches...
 - Not that they are to remain outside the covenant...
 - Not at all—Jesus has commanded us to baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...
 - We are not to hold them off as outsiders,
 - but as soon as they show their faith, we are to welcome them gladly...
 - And even before that, we are to show them the warm love of Jesus Christ through acts of kindness and mercy.

And so it is that after dealing with the Pharisees and then with the Gentile woman,

- Jesus is now seen to welcome a whole multitude of Gentiles in Matthew 15:29-39!
- Here we see that Jesus has the same compassion for those outside the Covenant as He does for those within the Covenant.
 - As one poet said, “The heart of the Redeemer is most wonderfully kind...”

TRANS> And so we learn from our text today first of all that,

I. Our kind redeemer freely ministers to every soul that looks to Him, be he Jew or Gentile.

A. See how freely He heals the multitudes that flood to Him in our text.

1. This passage, as far as the healings themselves, is very similar to what we saw a few weeks ago in Matthew 14:34 at Gennesaret.
 - a. You will recall how as soon as Jesus was recognised in those parts, everyone rushed out to gather up their needy friends and relations and bring them to Jesus.
 - We saw in that passage that they only touched the hem of His garment and were immediately made whole.
 - I explained how Jesus’ was full of healing virtue as the sun is full of light...
 - Every beam to the very hem of His garment brought healing.

- b. We talked about all the happy people that day who were immediately relieved from their sufferings.
 - There were the mothers and fathers that had carried children with fevers who lay limp in their arms,
 - and now those children were seen to run and play...
 - There were the almost widowed women who brought their husbands and saw them immediately restored to full health...
 - There were the blind who saw the beautiful grass and sky and fertile fields—the faces of their loved ones—some for the first time...
 - There were the deaf who immediately heard the shouts of joy around them and the voices of their friends...
 - and the lame who had never walked and were able to do so instantaneously—without any therapy!
2. So it is in our text today that great multitudes are brought to Jesus for healing.
- a. We read in verse 30 that people came from all over and laid their sick and infirm at Jesus feet.
 - It seems that in this case they did not touch His garments at all...and He did not touch them...
 - They were simply presented before Him in their infirmities and He healed them.
 - b. The language is very interesting here, for when it says they “laid” them at Jesus feet, the word used there is to “cast them” or “throw them down” at his feet...
 - It is a striking word in the original.
 - It is used of Judas throwing down the thirty pieces of silver before the priests,
 - of hanging a millstone about a person’s neck and casting him into the sea,
 - of a demonised person being thrown to the ground...
 - and of casting the tackle off the ship in a storm.
 - Here, it is not that they were being rough with their loved ones,
 - but rather that there were so many coming that they were dropping them off and leaving them there...
 - They knew that they would not need to carry them away because they would be able to go on their own...
 - and they had to get out of the way for others to come.

- It is a very marvellous seen!
 - Some were dropping off one and going to get another!
- c. And as in similar accounts, it appears that every single one was completely healed.
- It didn't matter what the infirmity might have been!
 - the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others...
 - The word **mute** includes either inability to hear or speak—often both...
 - The word **maimed** includes even those who had amputated limbs...
 - Jesus could restore those also!
 - It did not matter if a person was born without sight or without hearing, or if they had lost these faculties through injury or disease...
 - Jesus was able to heal them all!

TRANS> It is all very similar to what we have seen before, only:

- B. This time it appears that Jesus extended these mercies to Gentiles who came seeking these mercies from Him.
1. There are several reasons for saying that these persons at least included Gentiles...
 - a. First of all, because we are told that when the crowds saw what Jesus was doing, “they glorified the God of Israel.”
 - This language suggests that it was not the God of the multitudes, but the God of Israel that they praised.
 - It was not their own gods, but the God of Israel.
 - The Gospel of Matthew was, of course, written in particular to the Jews—
 - and the use of this wording would be more clear to them than it is to us that Matthew was speaking of non-Israelite peoples here.
 - He did not have say anything more to make this clear than that they glorified the God of Israel.
 - b. But **we** who come to this passage today are given more to go on to show us that these are Gentiles than what the original readers of Matthew's gospel had access to...
 - We are given more because we need more...
 - We have access to a parallel account in the Gospel of Mark, and in that account, we are told just where Jesus was when He did these things—

- and it was clearly in Gentile country!
- Mark tells us that He was in Decapolis,
 - which, as the name implies, was made up of ten Greek city states—
 - the Greek word Deca means ten, and polis means city.
 - As one commentator says: “It was on the south-eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, directly south of the modern Golan Heights... In this area, archaeologists have discovered ruins of elegant amphitheatres, forums, and countless pagan statues and monuments honouring the various gods of the Greek pantheon—including Zeus, Aphrodite, Athene, Artemis, Hercules, Dionysus, and Demeter.
- Mark also supplies an account of what appears to be the first healing that was done in this region...
 - A deaf and mute man—
 - This man was brought to Jesus and healed...
 - Then Jesus instructed him and those with him not to spread it around,
 - but soon there were hoards of people coming to Jesus for healing from all around!
 - Jesus did not go them, as was his policy at this time (not to go the Greeks), but they had found Him and could not be kept away!
 - While the deaf man may have been a Jew as there were some in this area,
 - it is very unlikely that the hoards of people who came to Jesus in this predominately Gentile region were all Jews.

TRANS> So here are two reasons why we can conclude that Jesus was ministering to the Gentiles here...

- because of the language of Matthew...
 - because we learn from Mark that Jesus was in Gentile country...
- c. There are also a couple of other details that support the theory that these were Gentiles...
- 1) First, that it is expressly shown that they did not touch Jesus, but were laid before Him.

- In Jesus ministry to Gentiles, He never goes into their homes and rarely if ever touches them...
 - This was likely due to the Greeks knowledge of the Jewish squeamishness about touching them.
 - They always seem to show their faith that Jesus can heal them from a distance.
 - Remember the Centurion in Matthew 8 who said, “Do not come to my house, only speak the word, and my servant will be healed...”
 - And then we have this Syro-Phoenician woman who does not call Jesus to come, but simply to cast out the demon.
- The fact that these people do not touch Jesus is not a conclusive argument that they were Gentiles,
 - but it is supporting evidence.
 - This would have been a very significant point to Matthew’s first readers who knew that Gentiles would not have touched a Rabbi without much hesitation.

TRANS> A second supporting evidence is found in a detail concerning the gathering up of the fragments in verse 37.

- 2) In verse 37, the word translated “large baskets” is *spuridas*—but in the feeding of the 5000, the word used for basket was *kophinos*.
 - The seven baskets in the feeding of the 4000 were distinctively those used by Jewish merchants.
 - They were quite large, and were not rigid, but more like a mat.
 - In such a basket, Paul was let down from wall at Damascus.
 - The twelve baskets used in the feeding of the 5000, on the other hand, were the much smaller baskets used by the Jews to carry their lunches.
 - They were rigid and made of wicker or something similar.
 - And while admittedly, it is a bit of a stretch, it is interesting that in the Jewish feeding there are 12 baskets left over...
 - 12 being a distinctively Jewish number—
 - with the 12 tribes and the 12 disciples and the 144,000 of Revelation;
 - while seven is the number of completeness and refers to the fullness of the Gentiles.

TRANS> Again, I would not press this too far, but it does point in the direction that these people were Gentiles.

- I think with all things considered—including the context with the passage we looked at last week...
 - we can reasonably conclude that these were Gentiles.
 - And I would add that even if I am wrong about this, the truths and applications I will bring forth are nevertheless true to the analogy of scripture.
 - So then...

2. What difference does it make to us that Jesus is here ministering to the Gentiles?

a. If these are Gentiles, it shows us very plainly that Jesus will never reject anyone who comes to Him for salvation.

- It drives home what we saw about the Gentile woman last week.
 - It is not just the odd Gentile that Jesus receives, but every Gentile that comes to Him in faith.

1) In John 6:37, He says:

- “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”

2) Rejecting a soul that comes to Him is something that the Saviour simply will not do.

a) Oh yes, He turned people away who came to Him for the wrong reasons—

- those who came in their pride expecting Him to be glad that they were at last willing to associate themselves with Him...
- coming not to beg mercy to Him and find salvation, but coming as if they were doing Him a favour!
 - This is a very disgusting thing indeed,
 - but it goes on all the time!
 - To often in gospel presentations today, we are told that Jesus wants us or wants our hearts or such things...

b) There is a certain truth in this,

- Jesus and all heaven rejoices when a sinner comes to repentance!
- But coming to repentance is so very different than a proud sinner coming without repentance—as if he needs no repentance—to

offer his services or to offer himself as that friend Jesus is looking for.

- Jesus had no use for such persons, but utterly rejected them when they came...
- Remember the rich young ruler...

c) But the ones He never rejected were those who came to Him to be saved by Him!

- Those who came in their helplessness looking for His mercy!
- Not to present to him their virtues, but their infirmities and sins!

3) It did not matter what these persons were like!

a) Many of them would have been worshippers of idols who had defiled themselves with again and again with the worship that God abhors...

- There would have been sexually immoral persons involved in adultery and homosexuality and prostitution.
- There would have been men who physically abused their wives and children and who would not provide for their own families.
- There would have been liars and thieves and murderers.
- There would have been covetous persons who had cheated widows and turned away the poor who had sought their aid.

b) But now they had come to Jesus in their need and He does not turn them away.

- Never once does our Saviour say,
 - “I will not receive you because you have been too wicked.”
 - To Jonah’s dismay, He received the Ninevites when they repented...

b. What comfort this is for each of you who have come to Jesus!

- He will gladly receive you no matter what you may have done to defile yourself!
 - It doesn’t matter if you grew up in a Christian home or a Buddhist home,
 - It doesn’t matter if you have been a hypocritical Christian or a vile atheist...
 - All that matters is that you come to Him now with humble sincerity and He will not cast you away.

- c. What a strong impetus this is to us to minister to all kinds of people...
- 1) We all have a our likes and our dislikes,
 - some of us are shy, some of us are passionate about certain sins,
 - but we must learn from our Saviour's example to minister to all sorts of persons...

 - 2) You must be full of kindness like Him if you want to carry the name Christian.
 - You must never hold a brother or sister at arms length because of their past—
 - nor should you refuse to be kind and compassionate to those outside the covenant who are in need...
 - We are commanded even to bless those that curse us and to do good to those that speak evil of us.
 - You are not able to give sight to the blind and cause the lame to walk,
 - but you are to be always looking for ways to meet the needs of those around you and to show kindness to them.
 - You must not say, "well, if I was rich like that man over there, I would do a lot of good."
 - The truth is, if you are not doing good with the little you have now, you would do less if you had more.
 - It is great deception to say such a thing.
 - The Saviour has put you where you are with what you have in order that you might serve Him.
 - It is also wrong for you to say,
 - But the people He has put in my life are not like the people He has put in the lives of others...
 - They are very difficult to minister too, they have nothing for me to give them.
 - That is not true!
 - The problem is that you have not engaged yourself to minister to them...
 - If you really wanted to reach out to them, you would find a way to do it!
 - True love is very creative! It finds ways to show itself!

- If it does not show, it is because it is not there!
- Don't deny your sin, repent and look to Jesus for a fresh new beginning!

TRANS> The heart of your Redeemer is wonderfully kind!

- He rejects no one who comes to Him!
- Be encouraged to come to Him with your need!
- Be like Him in showing kindness to others!

But now I want you to see that our Saviour does not stop with giving every soul that comes to Him what that soul asks...

- He does more than that...

II. Our kind Saviour gives every soul that comes to Him even more than he can ask of even think!

A. These crowds came from all around to receive healing from Jesus.

1. They had very obvious needs—blindness, lameness, amputations; and all sorts of other infirmities...

a. These are the things that they came to Jesus for.

- Each one knew what was wrong with him with respect to these very obvious physical ailments...
- And not one of them that looked to Jesus was disappointed...

b. Now if I may digress for just moment:

1) I don't want anyone to get the impression that I am saying that Jesus will immediately heal you from all of your physical infirmities that you present to Him...

- I dealt with this when we looked at Gennesaret, so I cannot go into the details now...
- But let me just say briefly two things:
 - First, these physical healings are what Jesus does when He is physically present, and so they are what He will do when our bodies are raised from the dead at the last day.
 - Secondly, that from these physical healings we learn of our Lord's great mercy and compassion toward us in all our infirmities, both physical and spiritual.
 - Thirdly, that in the gospels, these physical healings are pictures of the way He works now to save us from our sins.

- 2) And so, I hope it is understood, that under the previous heading when I said that Jesus delivers everyone who comes to Him for whatever they ask,
- of course I mean that He delivers them whatever He has promised in His word to deliver them from.
 - When He was here physically, it was physical infirmities...
 - Now that He is in heaven, it is forgiveness of sin and the rebellious hearts we have...
 - and in heaven it will be all bodily infirmities plus remaining sin and corruption.

c. Okay, with that clarification,

- Let me say again that when these people came to Jesus, they had a clear awareness of what was wrong with them.
 - They presented their problem to Him and He healed them.
- 1) In the same way, if you have looked to the Lord Jesus for salvation, you looked to Him because you realised that you were a sinner who could not save yourself...
- Your focus may have been more on the guilt of your sin and how you were worthy of God's wrath and judgement and needed to be forgiven...
 - Or, initially you may have come to Him because you saw your depravity and you wanted Him to change you and give you a new heart of love and obedience.
 - If you were converted, at that time, you saw both of these at least to some extent...
- 2) But no matter how much you saw, there were many things that you did not yet see...
- And I will add further that there are still many things that you do not see or do not think about that Jesus came to save you from...
 - You do not see the whole of your need the way Jesus does.
 - You see certain things, that because of the work of God's Spirit are very obvious to you now, but there are yet many things you do not see.
 - You ask Jesus about the things that are obvious—
 - say if you have a problem with anger—
 - but you may not have even thought about your covetousness.

2. You get something of that with these people...
 - a. They had heard about Jesus and how He could heal them of these very obvious physical infirmities...
 - and you can be sure that the whole place was ablaze with enthusiasm and thanksgiving with all these healed people.
 - Most of them probably didn't even think about their need to eat in order to make the long journey home!
 - And if they did think about it, it probably didn't occur to them that Jesus who had opened their eyes or made a leg grow back could supply them with bread.
 - b. That's the way we are...
 - We don't realise many of the needs that we have...
 - and if we do realise, we often frustrate ourselves looking for solutions in all the wrong places when Jesus is the solution.
 - Sometimes, the last thing we think about is to call upon Him.

B. But in this we learn something very wonderful about the Lord Jesus.

1. He did not stop with your very obvious needs or those that you thought about...
 - a. We bring our cup with Him and we ask Him to fill it,
 - but our cup always overflows...
 - His grace and compassion are such that He always gives us more than we asked for.
 - As I have said, according to His promise to us in this particular age...
 - You come to Him forgiveness, and you know all about your sin, you suppose.
 - You have just lost it with your husband or you have just given way to some lust or something...
 - And you come and you say, "O Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, I have sinned against you."
 - And because He has absolutely promised to forgive us for our sins through the blood of the cross,
 - He forgives you...
 - But He not only forgives you for what you ask about, but also for all the other sins He sees that you don't see.
 - There is an overflow of grace.

- b. And so it was with these people...
 - They had come for healing and Jesus healed them,
 - But He also looked upon those who had carried their sick as well as those who were elated with their wholeness...
 - and He thought about what they would need for the journey home.
2. And you see how beautiful and encouraging it is...
- a. Our Lord Jesus reveals His compassionate heart to the disciples!
 - v. 32: Now Jesus called His disciples to *Himself* and said, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”
 - b. Isn't that marvellous!
 - 1) These Gentiles have come to Jesus and He will not send them away empty!
 - It goes against His very principles!
 - The soul that looks to Him will always be satisfied!
 - 2) Our dear Lord is not like those people that do something for you and then are satisfied...
 - No. He does not stop until everything is done!
 - He will keep working in us until the last enemy is conquered—and the last enemy is death!
 - He will keep doing for us until every last vestige of sin is gone.
 - He will make us without spot of blemish!
 - That's just the way He is!
 - He is no half-way Saviour.
 - He is a complete Saviour.
 - He who began a good work in you will complete it!
3. And look further that He not only does more than these Gentiles thought...
- He also does more than His servants, the apostles, thought.
 - a. Even though they had just seen the feeding of the five thousand the previous spring when the grass was green (now you can tell that it is late summer because the people sit on the ground instead of the grass)
 - it hardly seems to occur to them that Jesus might do this again!

- Some of the commentators I read did not believe that the disciples could have forgotten so great a miracle so soon...
 - but I agree with the majority who think they did forget.
 - And I will tell you why!
 - I think they forget because only a short while later Jesus accuses them of forgetting about the both of these feeding miracles...
 - We will see that in our passage next week in Matthew 16:9.
- b. Ministers are called to proclaim the greatness and the sufficiency of Christ,
- but they often fail to remember how great His grace is or to apply it to the needs of the hour.
 - They look around at the wilderness and at the slenderness of their own resources and they say,
 - “Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?”
- c. And then, just like in the feeding of the 5000, Jesus has them show Him their resources, and then He sends them to work to feed the whole crowd.
- 1) He is telling you to take what little you have and put into His service and He will multiply it.
 - As we saw last in the feeding of the 5000,
 - Take your slingshot like David did, and you will kill Goliath.
 - Take a tiny seed of the gospel and sow it in your children and watch it bring forth fruit.
 - Lift up your staff like Moses did, and watch the Red Sea open up to you.
 - Take the mite you have like the widow and see how far it goes.
 - 2) You see, Jesus is full of compassion...
 - He is pleased to take whatever His people have that is put into service for Him and multiply it beyond their wildest imagination.
 - Sometimes you hear about some little thing you did that you may have thought nothing of and how God used it mightily...
 - But often we don't even know...

- It will be marvellous to see in heaven the connection between a child's prayer for his church and God's eternal dealings with the church in answer to that prayer!
- Jesus is pleased to draw an abundance of blessing and grace out of the little His people have.

TRANS> You see, nobody asked for food and nobody expected food from Jesus, not even the disciples themselves.

- But our Lord Jesus was not willing to send anyone away who came to Him unfilled.
- He does exceedingly and abundantly above all that we can ask or think.
 - We have not yet begun grasp the wonders of His grace, the depth of His mercy, and the riches of His love.
 - His mercy is a deep well of which no one has ever yet found the bottom and of which no one ever well.
 - For all eternity, His people who trust in Him will draw from the wells of salvation,
 - and forever their satisfaction will grow.

And so what is the lesson for you?

The lesson is come, come to this Saviour...

- Come with your load of guilt and your corrupt and wicked heart...
 - Cast yourself at His feet and He will heal you.
 - It doesn't matter what you have done, or how far away you have been from Him.
 - He cannot turn anyone away that comes to Him.
 - It is not in Him to do so.
 - He has never done it and He never will.
 - So come, do not doubt, and cast yourself at His feet...
- And I tell you what you will find!
 - He will meet your need and do a thousand times more also!
 - You discover with freshness His gracious, compassionate heart just as these Gentiles did.
 - He will not stop at what you ask,
 - He will not stop at what you think...
 - Your cup will run over and you will go away perfectly satisfied.