

Sheep v. Dogs: remembering our place in God's plan. Matthew 15: 21-39.

The history of Christianity is undeniably tied to the history of western civilization, from the Roman Empire to Western Europe and ultimately to the United States. Yet all of the West's legal, moral, and ethical roots are planted in the soil of the codes and law of one small Eastern ethnic minority, Israel. Nearly destroyed by Rome, and mostly forgotten for nearly two thousand years, the Jews of the Roman dispersion have labored under oppression and persecution to retain their unique identity. In pride, organized Christianity has removed Israel far from thought, except as example, and has exalted itself above those through whom God chose to reveal Himself.

Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman, v.21-28.

- He travels to region of Tyre and Sidon after his last encounter with the Pharisees.
 - With his disciples: probably not for rest. _____
 - But for a specific reason. _____
- A Canaanite woman, who clearly recognized him, begs for his mercy on her "possessed" child.
 - The disciples attempt to get Jesus to avoid her. _____
 - Was this his purpose there, as no other events were mentioned about this journey? _____
- Their dialogue, v.24-28.
 - *I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel.* _____
 - *But Lord, help me!* _____
 - *It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the "little dogs."* _____
 - *But even the little dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.* _____
 - *O woman, your faith is great; let it be done for you as you wish.*
- The child is subsequently healed.
 - The 2nd instance of healing in the case of a Gentile. _____
 - But the first outside of a Jewish setting. _____
 - An entirely unique circumstance. _____

After this Jesus returns to Galilee, v.29-39.

- Again healing and caring for the lost sheep of Israel, and performing another compassionate act of feeding a multitude.
 - Reflecting his "first" mission. _____
 - With compassion. _____

The contextual uniqueness of this passage.

- Out of sync, out of contextual character.
 - Jesus had been ministering only among the Jews, yet he made a deliberate trip out of the region. _____
 - He was uncharacteristically abrupt with the woman, yet he showed compassion. _____

The lesson in humility.

- After her initial rejection, the Canaanite woman grew more humble. _____
- Paul's warning to Roman Christians about their religious arrogance.
 - Romans 11:11, *as a result of their (Jewish) transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles.* _____
 - Romans 11:18, *do not be arrogant toward the branches, but remember that the root supports you.* _____

The lingering, the overlooked, the avoided: questions that make us uncomfortable.

- Do we feel compassion or ambivalence? _____
- Who does this woman represent? _____
- Are we like her, or are we replacements for the Jews? _____
- Does the dialogue speak to us?
 - Lost sheep or little dogs? _____
- Does our pride interfere with our interpretation? _____
- Do we bristle at a call to humility? _____

What does scripture say about humility? Is it something God does, or something we do? In Matthew 18:3, Jesus invites us to humble ourselves as a child, and by that act we shall be great in the kingdom of heaven. God doesn't humble us, we are called upon to humble ourselves. The natural human repose is unabashed pride, but we are called upon to reject self-exaltation, and act supernaturally. Jesus said that he was humble. How can we then be like him?