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Introduction

- Today is Easter, but our lesson isn't specifically focused on the Easter narrative. However, in some ways I think the reading covered in today's lesson is a very apt backdrop for our Easter celebrations.
- *What parts of this week's reading reminded you of Easter? In what ways do you think the reading for this lesson was an apt backdrop for Easter?*

Faith, Dogs, and Crumbs

- Let's jump into the lesson by reading the first pericope, Matthew 15:21–28:

(21) Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. (22) And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. (23) But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. (24) But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (25) Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. (26) But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. (27) And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. (28) Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.
- This pericope contains some similarities and parallels with the story of the centurion's request (Matthew 8:5–13).

(5) And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, (6) And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. (7) And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. (8) The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. (9) For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. (10) When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. (11)

And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. **(12)** But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **(13)** And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

- *How are the stories similar? Are these similarities important? How are these stories different? Are the differences important?*

Faith, Dogs, and Crumbs: Location, location, location

- In verse 21, we find out that Jesus moves to a new location: the regions of Tyre and Sidon. *Where was he before he departed to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon?* The last place mentioned was Gennesaret. I don't think this necessarily means that the confrontation with the pharisees at the beginning of chapter 15 happened at Gennesaret. I think it implies that the location of Tyre and Sidon are important to this pericope so we get a specific mention by Matthew that Jesus is now in the regions of Tyre and Sidon.
- *Tyre was an "important city on an island off the Phoenician coast,"[1] and Sidon was a "coastal city of Phoenicia." [2] Why might the location or setting at Tyre and Sidon be important? Why would Jesus be going to or visiting a gentile region?*
- First, these are not random gentile regions. Both Tyre and Sidon (or Zidon as it is referred to in your King James Old Testament) have bad Old Testament reputations (well they are not always bad but they end up pretty bad). For example, let's read Ezekiel 28:20–23 (note: Tyre is also addressed in this chapter of Ezekiel as well):

(20) Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, **(21)** Son of man, set thy face against Zidon, and prophesy against it, **(22)** And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Zidon; and I will be glorified in the midst of thee: and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. **(23)** For I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets; and the wounded shall be judged in the midst of her by the sword upon her on every side; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

- *Do you think this Old Testament backdrop to Tyre and Sidon is important?*
- From a literary point of view it really contrasts nicely with the faith of the woman. It makes her faith all the more remarkable as she lives in a region that in times past was condemned by the God of Israel and His prophets. It also underscores the power of the message of Jesus to change or light people in even the darkest regions.
- Second, it probably also represents a location where Jesus is largely unknown or at the very least a location where he has not performed miracles or taught before. *Do you think*

this is an important backdrop?

- Once again I think this emphasizes the remarkable nature of the woman's faith and the scope of the message of Jesus. This implied scope seems slightly ironic given the verbal exchanges in the pericope.
- Third, the region must have had a substantial Jewish population or it doesn't make much sense for Jesus to be there. Some commentators have suggested that Jesus never crosses the border into the gentile region; the evidence for the hypothesis relies on verse 22 where it says, "a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts." I just don't see how we can either reject or accept this hypothesis.

Faith, Dogs, and Crumbs: Canaanite and/or Greek?

- This story is also found in Mark 7:24–30. However, there is no parallel narrative in Luke.
- The Mark and Matthew versions of the pericope are very similar, but there are some differences. The first difference is the identification of the woman. Mark 7:26 reads,

(26) The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.
- *Is this an important difference? Which one is most likely to be correct? Can they both be correct and the authors are just emphasizes something different? If this is true, what is Matthew emphasizing when he identifies the woman as a Canaanite?*
- First, both identifications work just fine in terms of identifying her as a gentile which is probably the most important thing in terms of the narrative. Also, my understanding is that some of the rabbinic literature uses the Canaanite title as a kind of generic term for non-Jews.[3] Thus maybe Matthew is emphasizing the Old Testament connection by identifying the woman as a Canaanite.

Faith, Dogs, and Crumbs: She said what?

- Notice what the woman says in verse 22:

(22) And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.
- *Is the woman's language surprising given the backdrop of the location and heritage as Greek and/or Canaanite?*
- She recognizes him as the Jewish Messiah (or the Anointed One) by referring to him as the "Son of David."

Faith, Dogs, and Crumbs: Silence

- In verse (23), Jesus ignores the woman and then in verse (24) He explains that, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
- *Why would Jesus say this? Doesn't it seem a little harsh?*
- *Is Jesus turning her down by not answering her, is he testing her, or something else?*
- *Is the Old Testament backdrop of Tyre and Sidon important here?*
- It does seem a little harsh to me, and I don't really know how to resolve that. On the other hand, I do think Jesus wants to emphasize God's faithfulness to Israel. God has not forgotten Israel and is faithful to the covenant even if Israel is currently lost. Thus maybe we should remember or reflect on God's grace to Israel rather than on the fact that Jesus' actions may seem harsh to modern ears. Also, I think the Old Testament backdrop is important here. I think God's obligation to the covenant is being contrasted with His lack of covenantal obligations to Canaan, Tyre, and Sidon. God is true to the covenant even when Israel is not (they are described as lost), and even if it implies that others (possibly more worthy others) must wait a while.

Faith, Dogs, and Crumbs: The Woman's Response

- *What do you make of the woman's response in verse 27 that, "And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table?"*
- *Of course it reflects her faith and humility nicely, but do you think there is more to than that? Do you think here response is theologically apt? Why or why not?*

Faith, Dogs, and Crumbs: Feeding the 5,000 and 4,000

- In Matthew chapter 14 and later in Matthew 15 we read about the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000. Do you see any connections between those stories and this narrative?

Thou Art The Christ

- Read Matthew 16:13–20:

(13) When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? (14) And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. (15) He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? (16) And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. (17) And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. (18) And I say

also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **(19)** And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. **(20)** Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

- *Some scholars see this as the climax of the first part or first half of Matthew. Do you agree? What is climatic about these verses?*
- *Hasn't Jesus already been declared as the Messiah? What makes this declaration by Peter important? Is Peter speaking for himself or the group of disciples collectively?*
- Well, we have certainly seen people (including the disciples) declare that Jesus was the Messiah in earlier parts of Matthew.

◆ For example, demon or devils have admitted it (Matthew 8:28–29):

(28) And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. **(29)** And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

◆ On the other hand, the disciples have admitted it too (Matthew 14:28–33):

(28) And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. **(29)** And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. **(30)** But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. **(31)** And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? **(32)** And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. **(33)** Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

◆ *Why is this declaration important? How is it different than the declaration in chapter 14?*

- *The disciple report that, "[s]ome say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." Do these prophets have anything in common? Do they give us insight into how the people perceived Jesus? What is the fundamental difference between the peoples identification and the disciples identification?*

Thou Art The Christ: Upon This Rock

- We now turn our attention to verse 18. "The verse is among the most controversial in all Scripture." [4]
- I think most Mormons view verse 18 as fairly straight forward because Joseph Smith said the following: [5]

Jesus in His teachings says, "Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." What rock? Revelation.

- I suppose most of you are not going to let me disagree with Joseph Smith here. So let me just say, that Joseph Smith explanation muddies up the water here at least for me . It's not that I don't think that revelation is an important theme in pericope. However, I just don't think we can dismiss the wordplay between Peter and Rock here. In Greek and Aramaic (my understanding is that the wordplay is even my direct in Aramaic—which Jesus would have been speaking), there is wordplay between Peter (Greek: Petros and Aramaic: Kepa) and rock (Greek: petra and Aramaic: kepa). [6] Thus it seems to me the most natural reading of the passage is that Peter is the rock here (hence the wordplay).
- *Let's go with Joseph Smith's explanation. What do we do with the wordplay between Peter and rock? Is it best to argue that the wordplay is accidental?*
- *Can revelation be the "rock," and Peter be the rock? Are they mutually exclusive?*
- *Do later verses or pericopes in Matthew shed light on in what sense Peter and revelation could be the "rock" in verse 18?*

Thou Art The Christ: Don't Tell Anyone

- *Why does Jesus command the disciples not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah?*
- *Do the next few verses (21–23) give us insight into the reason for the command?*

(21) From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. (23) Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. (23) But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Endnotes

1. Browning, W. R. F., 1996, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Oxford University Press, "Tyre".

2. Browning, W. R. F., 1996, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Oxford University Press, "Sidon".
3. Hagner, Donald A., 1988, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14–28*, Nelson Reference and Electronic, 441.
4. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 865.
5. Smith, Joseph Fielding (editor), and Richard C. Galbraith (editor), 1993, *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Deseret Book, 309.
6. Hagner, Donald A., 1988, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14–28*, Nelson Reference and Electronic, 470.