

Unclean Dogs?

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Matthew chapter 15. Please follow along on the screen, the bulletin, or your own Bible. Starting in verse 21, we read, And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

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.

But he did not answer her a word. And his disciple came and begged him, saying, Send her away, for she is crying out after us. He answered, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But she came and knelt before him, saying, Lord, help me. And he answered, It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

And she said, Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered her, O woman, great is your faith.

[1 : 16] Be it done for you as you desire. And her daughter was healed instantly. Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee.

And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. 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.

I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way. And the disciples said to him, Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?

And Jesus said to them, How many loaves do you have? They said, Seven and a few small fish. And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, 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. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of broken pieces left over.

[2 : 48] Those who ate were four thousand men besides women and children. And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Megadon.

This is the word of God. All right. Well, a very good morning.

Good morning. I think... It's so great to... People who say good morning back. That's wonderful. I'm a wonderful church family as well.

But it's great to be here. What a privilege. What a privilege to be bringing God's word. To be bringing you Jesus. I hope you can hear me. Yeah, I'm Dutch. Hence the funny accent.

But I trust you'll get used to me. But... All right. For the coming 35 minutes. But... Why don't we pray for God to help us understand. Our Father, thank you for your word.

[3 : 53] Thank you that we can gather here. We can hear you speak. We can hear you speak about Jesus and how wonderful he is. His love. His grace. We pray that you would speak to each of our hearts.

Now in this moment. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, it's great to see so many things happening here. I was kind of surprised that I didn't even hear any Christmas announcement yet.

I don't know if you've been around Hong Kong. The Christmas trees are up, right? As soon as Halloween is over, then... You know, here is the Christmas trees. I was in Disneyland earlier this week.

And yeah. Christmas tree. Because Christmas is coming. And that's a great time for Advent. For our own hearts. It's also a great time for inviting people. So I don't know if you're going to have carol services here.

And you know, making it special. We've got a candlelight service at our church. Just a great time to invite people. To come and hear about Jesus. Now I was just going to ask you.

[4 : 54] Who are you planning to invite? Maybe, you know, someone you've been having conversations with. Someone you've been praying about. Someone you've been building some friendship with.

And that person. How much are they like you? And how much are they different? Because my guess is, usually we invite people who are really like us.

Right? And some of that is just obvious. Because that's the relationships we have. Right? If you're a lawyer. You work in a lawyer's office. And you meet lots of lawyers. And so my guess is your colleagues are lawyers. You're going to ask lawyers to come to the service here.

Maybe you're a student. And you invite fellow students. And you're a stay-at-home mom. And you invite stay-at-home moms. Right? That's usually how it works. And yet, we can have to be so focused on that.

That we sometimes miss. Actually, there's a lot of other people here in Hong Kong. And actually, God may be doing something there that we don't notice. Because so often we just look for the people like us.

[5 : 57] The people around us. I mean, it's a great thing to reach to those who are in your office. Right? That's often what we do. God has put us there. He wants to use us there. And yet, today, I think this passage is there to open our eyes to everyone else.

To all the people. And all the people's need for Jesus. And Jesus' love for them. That's where I want to go today. Now, it's a wonderful passage. Of course, great miracles.

I won't focus on those. We've seen Jesus' power. It's also a passage with a lot of depth. And so, I'm going to try and unwrap it slowly, bit by bit. So that we can see what God is saying.

And why this is such a powerful message. But of course, on the surface, it's very clear what's happening. Right? We see that Jesus really loves Gentiles. Jesus loves Gentiles. Now, when I say Gentiles, most of you will know, back then, you had the Jews.

They were God's people. And then the Gentiles was everyone else. The rest of the world. Had Jews and Gentiles. And of course, Jesus, he is a Jew. The Jew is Messiah.

[7 : 00] How about the rest of the world? Well, here is Jesus. And so, where is Jesus going today? He, well, verse 21. Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Again, that's outside Israel. So, you're going to a Gentile area. Maybe just to have a break from the Pharisees. Right? If you were here last week, they keep nagging him about everything. And he just goes out there.

But if he wanted a break, he doesn't get it. Verse 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. Hey, you can imagine. Here's this loving mother. And if you're a mother, you care about your children.

And her daughter was severely oppressed. And she'd heard about Jesus. So, she knew she had to just go to him. And she went there and she cried out. And, you know, Lord, son of David.

[8 : 03] You know, you are the one. Have mercy on me. But the thing is, she's a Gentile. Right? This is, it says he's a Canaanite woman. Canaanites, they didn't really exist anymore.

It was just her ancestry. Maybe you wonder about that. I mentioned the Canaanite woman. And then someone said, isn't she Syrophenician? Because that's what it says in Mark. It's just one is ancestry. One is where she was born.

Like, someone is from Singapore and they're Chinese. They're both true. But, you know, this Canaanite woman. And, you know, she is a Gentile. And Jews don't mix with Gentiles.

Right? So, what is Jesus going to do? She has real faith, though. Right? She really trusts Jesus. And she asks for mercy. Well, what would you do if you were Jesus?

The surprising thing is, Jesus seems so resistant. Right? He didn't answer her a word. He just ignored her. Right? And, you know, they go around and they walk around.

[9 : 03] And then she keeps crying out after them. And the disciples are just embarrassed. You know, please send her away. You know, heal her daughter. And, you know. Well, no, no. Jesus says, look.

I was sent only. Verse 24. To the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Right? You know, I'm the Messiah. I'm the king of the Jews. Right? I'm sent for Israel. Am I not?

But this woman, she doesn't give up. Verse 25. She came and knelt before him. Saying, Lord, help me. I mean, the word knelt. It's the word for worship. Right? So she came and worshipped him.

And, Lord, help me. You may wonder, why is Jesus so rude here? Right? This is not the Jesus you know. Why is he doing this? Now, Jesus definitely knows what he's doing.

I mean, if he didn't like Gentiles, why would he go to a Gentile area? Clearly, you know, that's not the thing. I think he is making us think. You know, his readers, Matthew's readers, probably Jewish Christians.

[10:06] How resistant are you? You know, hey, I'm the king of the Jews. But here is a Gentile who really believes in me. Right? She really trusts me. What should I do? It's making us think.

Because, you know, they're Gentiles. And we should have mixed. Right? They're dogs. That's what Jews used to call them. Dogs. Now, I don't know what you think of dogs. Here in Hong Kong, people really love dogs.

Right? You see a woman with a pram. Oh, nice baby. Oh, that's not a pet. Okay. Right? But, you know, we think of pets.

They didn't think dogs were nice. And I think 2019, the social unrest, most of us know a dog is an insult. And so Jesus says, well, look, it's not right to get the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

You wouldn't do that. I mean, I don't know. Now, you remember you're a teenager. You think of your mom cooking your favorite meal. And the kitchen smells so good. She brings the plate and she puts it on the ground for the dog.

[11:09] Right? This is wrong. The food is for the children and not for the dogs. And that's what he says to her. Look, you don't. This is not for you. And yet she doesn't give up.

And she's not offended. Yeah. I'm a dog. That's what she basically says. Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall down from their master's table.

I know I'm a Gentile. I know I'm not worthy. I know I don't deserve it. You're the king of the Jews. I don't need a bread. I just need crumbs. Just heal my daughter, please.

And then, yeah, Jesus shows his true colors. What does he? Yeah, he stops messing, right?

Woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you. As you desire.

And her daughter was healed instantly, right? Such faith. And yeah, of course. He should, right? He should heal this woman, this daughter. Because, you know, he's Jesus. And he loves her.

[12:06] And that's not just a one-off. You might think, okay, this is, you know, here's a Gentile woman. That's the exception that proves the rule. But actually, this whole passage is about Gentiles. I don't know if you can see that, right?

Because then he goes to a mountain. And then this huge crowd comes to him with the lame and the blind and the crippled and the mute. And he heals them all. And what do they do at the end?

Last bit of verse 31. And they glorified the God of Israel. Why does he say that? The God of Israel. You know, so often Matthew just says, you know, they glorified God.

Why of Israel? Well, because it wasn't obvious that that was the God they were doing. They were Gentiles. I mean, Mark tells us that explicitly in the same story that, you know, they were in a Gentile area, the east side of the Sea of Galilee.

But they praised the God of Israel because it wasn't their normal God. These people, you know, were Gentiles. And now they are praising the true God of Israel. And then he feeds them.

[13:09] And you get this repeat of the 5,000 with the 4,000. Right? These are Gentiles. Jesus has this amazing ministry with healing and feeding in a Gentile area.

And they come to him and they praise him. They praise the true God. They get healed. They get fed. Amazing ministry. So, yeah, very clearly Jesus loves Gentiles.

Right? He does. He's a Jewish Messiah, but he came for everyone. And I don't know who you are today. I haven't met most of you. Right? Maybe there's Jews here, but I guess most of us are Gentiles.

You know, clearly Jesus loves you. And whoever you are, from the executive to the helper, from the Philippines or Chinese or, you know, Jesus loves you.

And he wants you to come to him. Can you imagine, right? You want Jesus and you come and he says, no, sorry, I'm not for you. No, he doesn't. Right? He loves you. But that's only one layer.

[14:07] Because the question is why? You know, Jesus, okay, Jews and Gentiles. But there's a deeper truth underneath that, that this passage is telling us. Because when you hear Jews and Gentiles, what are you thinking of?

My guess is you're thinking of geography. Right? Here is one country and then there's the other countries. And then this is the chosen country and these are the non-chosen countries. Right? That's how we usually think.

And it seems a bit arbitrary. But of course, why were Gentiles a problem? Oh, because they were defiled. They were unclean. Defiled in that they were unacceptable to God.

They were not fit to be in his presence. Right? If your clothes are full of mud and you want to go to the country club and they don't let you in. Right? They were dirty. Why? Because they didn't know the true God.

They worshipped idols. They didn't know his law. They, you know, they did all kinds of immoral things. So, of course, they were not fit for God. They were unclean. And so you had to stay away from them.

[15:08] They might contaminate you. They were unclean. Right? But then the question that this passage is asking, well, who is really unclean? Who is really defiled?

Because with this woman, actually what Matthew wants to emphasize, he's a Gentile, but she's defiled. I mean, Gentiles, yeah, they're already defiled, but he calls her a Canaanite. I mean, of course he was born in Syrophenicia, but why a Canaanite?

Did you hear the word Canaanite? And then what's some of the things that come into your mind? Right? Anyone? No?

I mean, that's the people who were driven out of the promised land, right? Under Joshua. You know, you hear Canaanites and you think of Baal worship and you think of fertility cults and you think of temple prostitution and you think of child sacrifice and that kind of things.

Right? That's what you think of when you hear Canaanite. You just leave such a bad taste in your mouth. A Canaanite. From Sidon. I don't know who's the most famous Sidonian in the Bible.

[16:17] A woman. I wouldn't say famous, infamous. Jezebel. Okay, if you know your Bibles, Jezebel. She's from Sidonia, right? Canaanite from... So, this woman, in some ways, Matthew is saying, in some ways she's like the queen of unclean, right?

She is unclean to the max from her background. Right? That's why they were called dogs, right? Why do you call Gentiles dogs? Because dogs were unclean.

They weren't... They lived on the streets, right? They were dirty. You wouldn't want them in your house. They're unclean. And so, Jesus shouldn't help her because she's unclean, right?

She's defiled. But that's why this passage comes after last week's passage. Who is really unclean? Because I think most of you were here last week.

What did Jesus say? Well, he had a big dispute with the Pharisees, the religious leaders. And the religious leaders, they... You know, Jesus, you're not washing your hands properly. You're not keeping the traditions.

[17:20] And, you know, so you're getting defiled, right? What makes us acceptable to God? Well, it's our traditions. It's all the things we do. And Jesus, he blasted that away. He said, no, it's about your heart.

It's about who you are deep inside. I had an excellent talk from Ellen. It's who you are deep inside. That is what makes you defiled, right? Verse 17. Here from the screen.

This is what he said. Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and that defiles a person.

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.

But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. What makes someone unclean? It's their heart. And it's not any of those externals, right? You can be the most beautiful, shiny person on the outside.

[18:19] What do you like on the inside, Jesus said. And then these wonderful Pharisees, very religious, inside, full of wickedness and greed and all those things. Right?

Your heart defiles you. But if it's your heart what defiles you, then you see this woman, why would she be unclean? Right?

Because it's suddenly no longer about the outside. Washing hands doesn't defile anyone. Right? Jesus had just said, no, no, it's not about the externals. It's about the heart. And that's the thing here.

Your ethnicity doesn't matter. Your background doesn't matter, right? It's your heart. And not the externals. And so in a way, what Jesus has just done. It is an explosive statement. Because this is the biggest division in humanity. And Jesus has just erased it. It's no longer about where you're from. It's no longer about your religion. It's just about your heart.

[19 : 14] It's just about your deep inside. And that's when, yeah, this woman and the Pharisee. It doesn't matter, right?

They're from different places. It's just about the heart. Right? He's erased it. Jews and Gentiles. They're equally unclean. They're equally dogs.

And, of course, equally loved. Right? Jesus, yeah. If he can love Jews, he can love Gentiles.

Because there's no difference anymore. They are just equally unclean.

And, yeah, with some of these miracles, they just show how incredibly equal Jews and Gentiles now are. I mean, that wonderful healing ministry with the lame and the blind and the crippled and the mute.

You know, that's language from Isaiah about, you know, when the Messiah would come and restore Israel. But these are Gentiles. And the Jews, hey, that's my prophecy.

[20 : 12] What are you doing with my prophecy? Well, Gentiles are equal. The feeding of the 4,000. You probably wonder, why is it so similar to the feeding of the 5,000? Well, it seems to be exactly the same story, just less impressive.

Right? If you can... Can you imagine a superhero movie? And part one and part two, the villain is always more powerful. Right? Otherwise, it's not interesting. Why do we get the same story, but less people?

They are Gentiles. Right? That's why we get this story. Jesus comes for Jews and for Gentiles. And they're just as equal. And this beautiful picture of God feeding his people in the wilderness on the way to the promised land.

The national history of Israel with Gentiles. Completely equal. That is what Jesus wants to say. You know, there's no difference. It's erased.

Jews and Gentiles are now equal. Because we're all equally unclean. It's equally about our hearts.

Well, actually, I don't know. There is a difference, right?

[21 : 13] Well, what is the difference? It's your response. It doesn't matter where you're from. It doesn't matter how you respond. Because this passage is so positive. Right? Here is a woman who believes in Jesus and loves him and comes for mercy.

Just after these Pharisees who are hiding behind their religion. And they don't want Jesus. I mean, come on. Who should Jesus go to? Well, to this woman who actually believes in him.

He has these great crowds of Gentiles. And they're praising God. Jesus goes to his hometown. And they don't believe in him. Right? Now, Gentiles here, they are responding to Jesus.

And the Jews are not. Yeah, it matters. It just matters what is your response, right? Yes, we're all equal. The only thing is, do you respond to Jesus? And so, this passage, yeah, it wants us to see the world in a new way.

It wants us to see people in a new way. See ourselves in a new way. A bit like last week. So, what should we see? Well, first of all, let's start with seeing ourselves.

[22 : 20] Because here we have a woman who knows she's unclean and unworthy and coming to Jesus. Just after Jesus has told us how unclean we are, how defiled we are. It means she's a model for us.

If you're a defiled person with your defiled heart and you come to Jesus, how should you come to him? Well, like this woman. Coming with, you know, I don't deserve anything.

Jesus, you should have nothing to do with me. I'm defiled. I just want mercy. I just want, you know, I just want some crumbs. Please.

I'm not worthy. Not like the Pharisees with their religion. No. Coming in humility. Knowing that, you know, we are nothing.

Knowing that we are so defiled deep down and there's nothing we can do about it. That's how you come to Jesus with, like this woman does. Of course, things change when you become a Christian, right?

[23 : 19] He changes your heart. And he cleanses you. And he gives you the amazing access to God that we enjoy, right? That you can come to the Father anytime. But it's still through Jesus.

It's not because now I'm suddenly a good person and I'm suddenly clean, right? I still need to keep trusting Jesus. And so I want to keep doing that. I want to keep myself humble.

I don't know how you do that. I like to sometimes just make a list, right? Basically, in my mind, I write on all the good things I've done this week. All the best things. It's not a very long list.

And then I list, you know, the things I said wrong and my actions and my heart, right? My attitudes and my thoughts.

And then I just try and imagine myself standing before the throne, right? I want to get into heaven. I want to be with God. And look what I've done this week. Please let me in based on this. Right?

[24 : 17] That keeps me close to Jesus. That makes me see I can't do this. Right? I'm so defiled. I keep needing Jesus every time. I want Jesus.

And of course, he knows my sins. But I need to remember them. And that's how I come to Jesus. Because being defiled really matters. I need to remember this.

I shouldn't walk away from Jesus. I mean, this whole Jew and Gentile thing, it is based on something, right? God did want to teach the people that idolatry matters and immorality matters. And those who live apart from God, live their own way, that they will not inherit the kingdom of God. It really matters if you're defiled. That's why, you know, we need Jesus. Right?

So if you're here and you're not a Christian, you haven't come to Jesus, that is your situation. I don't know what kind of person you are on the outside.

[25 : 12] But Jesus says on the inside, all of us, we have a big problem, our hearts. We are wicked deep down. And you face being excluded. You face being judged.

If it wasn't for Jesus. Right? I hope this passage makes you see Jesus in a new way. If you see ourselves as the defiled person you are.

Again, do you see Jesus' love here? How he loves Gentiles. How he loves the defiled. I mean, he was the one human being who was perfect. The one human being who was, who could really, he has a heart that's totally clean.

Totally holy. Totally loves his father. And yet he loved you. And, you know, your defilement, it's a big problem. But not one that he can't overcome.

Because he died for you on the cross. Right? He took that on himself. He took all the things that you've done, all the things about your heart. And he laid it on himself. And when he was there on the cross, yeah, he was defiled.

[26 : 14] He was that unclean dog. You know, the father just couldn't look at it. Right? We sang it. The father turns his face away. He couldn't look at his son because he was so defiled with all our sin.

And he poured out his wrath. Poured out his judgment. And, yeah, Jesus paid for it. And that's why you are now welcome. That's why he loves you and he welcomes you.

Come to the father through Jesus the son. If you haven't done that, please come and talk to me. I'd love you to come to Jesus and experience his cleansing, his acceptance.

But then also, I think with this passage, we need to see others differently. I mean, do we see others the same as Jesus does? Do we look at the externals?

Or do we, well, we can't see the heart. But basically, do we not look at externals? I think I see this passage and I'm a Gentile. So I see that Jesus loves Gentiles. And I think, okay, Jesus loves people like me.

[27 : 20] Well, that's not what this passage says, right? This is written to Jewish Christians. And it says, well, Jesus also loves people unlike me. That is what this passage is saying, right? And so, how do I see Gentiles?

How do I see those who are different from me? Certainly, if I know my heart and it's not about the externals, then I should be humble towards other people, right? I'm humble to God, but I'm also, you know, maybe I look very shiny on the outside.

And you don't look so shiny. But, you know, I know what's going on inside, right? I shouldn't feel proud. I shouldn't feel in any way superior. Because, you know, we all have this heart deep inside. And that's certainly true. But it's not just sinfulness, right? It's a background. It's so easy to be proud of our background, right? That for some reason, you know, because of my job or who I am, I'm kind of more acceptable or better.

You know, maybe because I'm Chinese or I'm American or I'm Korean or I'm Dutch or, right? It's not like that. Maybe as a Filipino, maybe you sometimes feel that. You feel inferior here.

[28 : 26] Well, Jesus doesn't look at all the externals. He doesn't look where you're from. He doesn't look at what you've done. He just looks inside. And then you are really no different from other people, right?

On the helper's appreciation day, that's really great to hear. Jesus appreciates you because he sees you're not inferior. We're all equal, right? But even then, you know, how biased are we? You know, do we see indeed everyone as Jesus does? Do we see that the externals don't matter? Again, I can be so focused on just people like me.

I don't know who you feel like, okay, these are the people God wants me to reach. For me, it's kind of school parents. All right? My kids go to a school. It's a Christian school.

But 40% of the parents are not Christians. And certainly when we still met with parents before the pandemic, yeah. That's my area, right? So I would go to, and I would really, okay, praying.

[29 : 28] Who can I reach? But it meant like, basically, I just felt, you know, God wants to save middle-class international school parents. Basically, right? That's how I, you know.

And one of those families comes to church. Oh, great. You know, they're going to be an asset. And other people, right? You can see it, right? That's not this passage.

One time that came home so strongly for me. When I was, so I regularly go to St. Andrew's Church. It's the mother church of Chatin.

So I go to Tim's and Tsui. And if you're there, right? I think if you're a guy and you walk on the street, people will talk to you, right? Because, hey, hello, my friend. Do you want a suit? A tailor-made suit.

I don't know what you're like. So I have a meeting, right? I just ignore the guy. And I just, I go, Hong Kong. I'm busy. Well, one time I had lunch with someone from another church.

[30 : 26] And we were walking together to St. Andrew's. And again, hello, my friend. And the guy next to me, hey, Ali, how are you doing? I started talking to him. And, hey, how's your family?

You talked about your daughter last time. And did you read the tract I gave you last week? No, this guy had built a relationship. This guy noticed this person who was so different from him.

And yet he loved him. And he reached out to him. Because, you know, he's a South Asian Muslim. But Jesus loves him. There is no difference. And I felt just so ashamed, right?

I looked so embarrassed. That I had just walked past this guy. This guy who actually wants to talk to me. Unlike many other people. I hope you feel it. That's what Jesus wants.

He wants us to notice everyone. I mean, don't just have a picture of a Christian that is someone like me. Someone like this. Anyone can respond.

[31 : 26] Anyone can be cleansed by Jesus. That is what this passage is saying. And it's a wonderful thing because all of us needed to be cleansed. But there's so many more people out there.

People very different from you. Very different from me. Jesus loves them. So, yeah. Again, Christmas. Who are you going to invite? Please invite your colleagues.

Please invite your friends. But spend some time thinking. Is there anyone who I've ignored? And then just ask. Why have I been ignoring this person? Is it because I just assume?

You know, that of course they're not interested. Of course, I didn't even notice them. Because of who they are. Because of their background. Now, just think about it. Maybe you've just been too busy. I know what Hong Kong is like.

We just don't think about these things. But when you do, why not invite this person? Why ignore them? Right?

[32 : 22] And then when you fall about that, you just come to Jesus. Lay your heart before him. Let him speak to you. Let him show you again his love. His love in forgiving you.

For how you've treated others. And then let that love, yeah, flow out of you. To everyone else. Why don't we pray together? Amen. Lord Jesus, we thank you.

Thank you that you came down. Thank you that you died. Because you loved us so much. You saw us in our defilement. You saw us with our hearts. You saw us in our sin.

But you loved us and at such great cost made us. Made us yours. Father, we pray that it would change us. Help us see Jesus. Help us to be changed by his love.

To see people as you see them. No difference. No distinction. It's all sinners who need Jesus. And would it change us? In Jesus' name.

[33 : 28] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.