

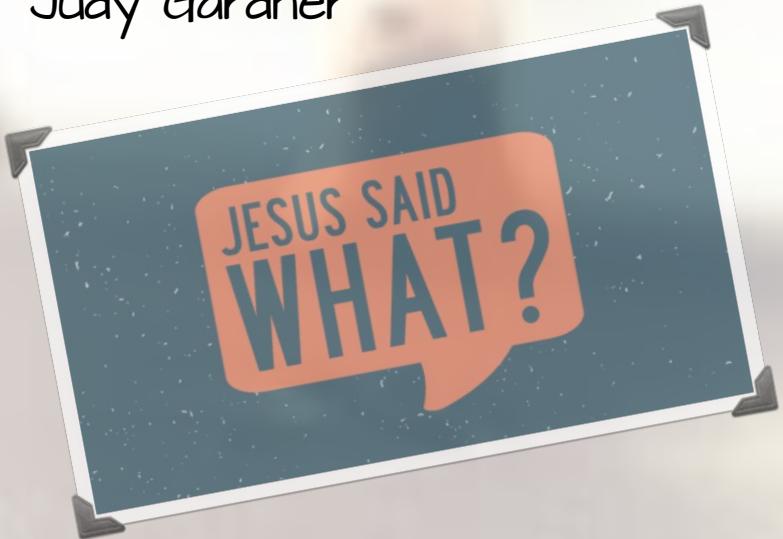
May 27-31, 2024 Edition

Following The Year_(s) Of [^]Jesus Part 126

Jesus Said What?????

May 25/26, 2024

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we'll be continuing our series of building a chronological timeline of the life of Jesus by talking about something strange Jesus says to a woman from the city of Tyre. But before we get to that I think it's important to remember the last installment of Jesus' story.

When we last saw Jesus He was having a heated debate with the Pharisees over the Jewish ritual purity laws. The Pharisees had this rule that before a Jewish person could eat they had to do a ceremonial "wash". They'd wash their hands, their cups, pots and any utensils but not for the same reason we do. They washed for a spiritual reason- they didn't want to become "unclean". How would one become unclean you ask? By touching someone (namely a gentile) or something (anything a gentile might have touched) and then eating before ceremonial washing the cooties off of their hands. It was a fairly simple matter for a Pharisee to make themselves clean again after their ritual washing was done but if they ate food with hands that were unclean then that uncleanliness was transferred into their bodies and that was a much bigger deal (to them anyways).

So when they see Jesus and His disciples eating without the ritual washing they're confused and irritated:

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?" Mark 7:1-5 (NIV)

If you remember (and even if you don't) Jesus told them that being unclean isn't an external thing- rather uncleanliness is caused by what comes out of a person's heart.:

Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." Mark 7:14-15 (NIV)

And it's right after that heated debate that we pick up our story for this week:

Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know which house he was staying in, but he couldn't keep it a secret. Mark 7:24 (NLT)

This is the only time we know of that Jesus left Israel as an adult. We know He went to Egypt was a baby but during His time of ministry this is the only time we're told that He went to another country. Tyre is about 35 miles away from Capernaum in modern day Lebanon. It would've been a gentile dominated place- very few Jews there (if any). It's very strange that right after a debate with the Pharisees over what makes a person unclean Jesus takes His disciples right into the heart of unclean-land. In Tyre every person they came across would have been unclean (according to the reasoning of the Pharisees) and anything they touched would have made them unclean. So why does Jesus do it? I think there's a couple of reasons. First I think He wanted to get away from the Pharisees even if only for a few days. There's no

way the Pharisees would have followed them to Tyre. But I think this is also Jesus' chance to teach His disciples a very important object lesson by putting them in the middle of so many gentiles. And what follows is Jesus' lesson to the disciples that involves a gentile woman who wants Jesus to heal her daughter. It's an incredibly strange story where Jesus says something that seems completely out of character for Him. We'll start looking at that interaction tomorrow but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on what you feel like makes a person "unclean".

Tuesday Reflection: This week we're looking at an incredibly strange interaction that Jesus has with a Canaanite woman in the Syrian city of Tyre. He took His disciples there (the only time we know of that He left the nation of Israel as an adult) to get away from the Pharisees because it was a mainly gentile city- very few Jews (if any). And while He was there this happened:

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him begging, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. Matthew 15:21-28 (NIV)

Does that confuse you as much as it does/did me? This just doesn't seem like something that Jesus would do/say. He first ignores her and then calls her a dog. What's up with that? Well, obviously there's stuff going on here that we will never understand with a surface reading of the scriptures. But when we look in context at what's going on I think it starts to make much more sense. That's what our mission is this week- to unpack this story in light of the context in which it occurs. By the time we get to the end of the week we'll all be Biblical scholars!

So the first thing we need to recognize is that this story happens right after Jesus' debate with the Pharisees over what makes a person "unclean"- we spent all of yesterday setting up the context but I need to mention it here again before we move on. Jesus is going to give His disciples an object lesson on ritual impurity AND He's going to give us a metaphor of what repentance looks like- both at the same time. Turns out Jesus is a master of multi-tasking.

When the woman finds out Jesus is in town she comes and begs Him to help her daughter. The word that Matthew uses for begging in this passage is a progressive verb. In other words she didn't just beg once and then shut up. She wouldn't stop begging. It was continual. It wasn't going to end which is why Jesus' disciples ask Him to send her away- they are getting very annoyed. Matthew wants us to understand that this begging isn't going to end- it will continue. It's tough to see that in our English translations but I think it helps us understand something about the gentile woman. There's another progressive verb in another place in the New Testament that I want to finish our reflection for today with. This progressive verb helps us understand something important about Jesus:

But if we are walking in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7 (NLT)

Do you see where John tells us that as long as we are walking in the light that the blood of Jesus "cleanses" us from all sin? That word "cleanses" is another progressive verb. It means that the cleansing never stops. I think what John wants us to understand is that when we are walking with Jesus our sin is cleansed immediately. I always think of the costume that Daniel wears to the halloween party in the original Karate Kid movie. The costume was an old fashioned shower. Daniel was inside of the shower curtain and you could see the shower head above him with what looked like water pouring out of it (it was some kind of material that was supposed to give the impression of water but didn't actually get Daniel wet while he was at the party).

I remember seeing that movie and immediately thinking- that's 1 John 1:7! That's the idea I think we are supposed to get from the progressive verb "cleanses". As soon as we sin the blood of Jesus immediately and continually purifies us. What an amazing picture John gives us of forgiveness. I don't know about you but I find that incredibly comforting. So what does it have to do with our story for the week and the progressive verb Matthew uses to describe the woman's begging? Well, maybe we're supposed to see that this woman was just as tenacious about getting help for her little girl as Jesus is about providing grace, mercy and forgiveness for His children. I'm actually doing a pretty shoddy job of shoe-horning the idea of a progressive verb into our reflection today because I am planning on coming back to the idea on Friday so for now maybe put a pin in that idea but maybe spend some time reflecting on what these two progressive verbs might mean for you in your relationship with Jesus.

Wednesday Reflection: I imagine it must have driven Jesus a bit crazy to watch as the Pharisees vilified and rejected the gentile people when that was never God's intention. If you go back to God's original covenant with Abraham you'll find that the plan was never to ostracize or exclude all other people:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:1-4 (NIV)

The plan was always that God would use the family of Abraham to birth His Messiah who would come to save the entire world- Jews and gentiles. But somewhere along the way the Jews started to believe that they were God's favorites and that He hated the gentiles. God kept trying to tell them that was incorrect but we humans often hear only what we want to hear. But all along the way God used even gentiles to bring about His plan to save all of humanity. It is maybe most clear in the genealogy of Jesus found in the book of Matthew. I know genealogies can be very boring but Jesus' family tree is actually pretty interesting if you know what to look for.

In most ancient genealogies women are not mentioned at all. Nobody cared who your moms or daughters were- they only cared about the dads and sons. So Jesus' genealogy is unique because it lists 5 women- this isn't the complete genealogy but it will give you the idea:

Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar)... Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab). Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth). Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah)... Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah. Matthew 1:1-16 (NLT)

In case you didn't know I skipped a bunch of "begats" there. I didn't want you to have to read the entire genealogy when all I wanted to focus in on today was the women. Five women are listed here- Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary. Bathsheba and Mary were Jewish but the other three were Canaanites who married nice Jewish boys and settled down to raise nice Jewish families. So what you say? Well these are the ancestors of Jesus. Jesus had gentile blood in his family tree. Canaanite blood to be precise. I think it's possible that this Canaanite woman who is begging Jesus to help her may have been distantly related to Him. It would make sense why Jesus would have a soft spot for gentiles- especially gentile women. But what may not be so clear is why then He would call this woman a dog. Is it just me or is this completely out of character for Jesus? Then why would He do such a thing? Tomorrow we'll start to unpack that but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on how Jesus' genealogy might have impacted how He felt about the gentiles and why that might make Him a tad sensitive when the Pharisees called them "unclean".

Thursday Reflection: This week we're looking at the strange story where Jesus seemingly called a Canaanite woman and her daughter a dog. But if we are focusing solely on the perceived insult we will miss the power of the rest of this story. Now I'm not saying it's not human to get caught up with why Jesus calls her a dog but if that's all we focus on we will miss a very powerful lesson I think Jesus was trying to teach the disciples- a lesson about what it is that truly makes a person spiritually "clean"- repentance.

The Pharisees believed it was gentile people that made a Jew unclean. Jesus tells them that no human is unclean. That what makes a person unclean is not what's on the outside but what comes from the inside- from the heart of a person. But the Pharisees wouldn't listen. They never did. They had decided they knew exactly how things worked and so they just never paid attention to any of Jesus' teachings (other than to try to get Him in trouble). They saw no reason that they should have to repent when they did everything exactly right. Jesus tells them that this Old Testament prophecy was about them:

When they see what I do, they will learn nothing. When they hear what I say, they will not understand. Otherwise, they would turn to me and be forgiven. Mark 4:12 (NLT)

This is why repentance is so important- without it we will never even consider turning to Jesus for help so we can be forgiven. If we're not careful we'll become like the Pharisees- hearing what Jesus says and seeing what He does but never being changed by Him. So what's the lesson that Jesus was trying to teach His disciples in this interaction with the woman in Tyre (remember the one He called a dog)? I think He's trying to teach them what makes a person truly "clean"- repentance.

And the first sign of true repentance is humility- a recognition that I am unable to save myself. That I can't earn forgiveness, mercy or grace- it's a gift given by Jesus to anyone who asks for it but without humility we would never see the point. Now I'm not saying the woman has anything to repent of with how she approaches Jesus but she still demonstrates to us the signs of repentance. So let's look at her encounter with Jesus:

A Canaanite woman who lived there came to him, begging, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely" But Jesus gave her no reply- not even a word. Then his disciples urged him to send her away. "Tell her to go away," they said. "She is bothering us with all her begging." Matthew 15:22 (NLT)

Does this seem to fit with Jesus' character? That He would ignore a woman who desperately needs His help? I don't think so. So why is He ignoring her? I think He's waiting for His disciples to jump in and become part of the solution. If you've been with us throughout this chronological story of Jesus' life then maybe you'll remember that it's only recently that Jesus has started expecting more out of His disciples. Giving them more and more responsibility and inviting them to help navigate problems and find solutions. I believe Jesus waits for his disciples to do something but instead of becoming problem solvers they just become whiners. So finally Jesus responds to the woman:

Since she was a Gentile... Jesus told her, "First I should feed the children- my own family, the Jews. It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs."

Mark 7:26-27 (NLT)

Now like I said earlier- if we're not careful we'll get so caught up in what Jesus calls the woman and her daughter that we'll miss the lesson Jesus is trying to teach us. But before we can do that we do need to discuss the whole dog thing. Did Jesus really call her and her daughter a dog? Yes. No. Kind of.

What He actually calls her is a puppy- not a grown dog. In Israel dogs are considered unclean. So it's kind of strange that Jesus would leave a debate with the Pharisees where He tells them no human is unclean and then come to Tyre and call the woman a dog (which would make her unclean according to the Pharisees). It's a strange story but I don't think the woman was offended because look how she reacts to Jesus' words:

She replied, "That's true, Lord... Mark 7:28 (NLT)

She doesn't seem bothered by Jesus' words at all. We'll get to why that might be tomorrow but like I said if all we focus on is the dog comment we'll miss something very important that the Canaanite woman is teaching us here and that is humility. You'll notice she doesn't jump up and down and tell Jesus she deserves His help. She agrees with His assessment that Jesus should help His own family (again we'll look at why tomorrow) and in so doing shows us the first sign of repentance- a spirit of humility where we admit that we can't earn our place or our own forgiveness or salvation. We need Jesus for these things and if we try to go it alone we won't get far. Tomorrow we'll finish up our time with this Canaanite woman but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on what repentance is and why it's so important.

Friday Reflection: So yesterday we looked at the first sign of repentance- a humility that understands and admits that we can't save ourselves or secure our own forgiveness by

our own human efforts. It's an attitude that understands that we are so hopelessly fallen that nothing short of the blood of God's own Son could save us. When we finally see that we are on the road to repentance. But we can't live fully within that reality or we'll end up mired in guilt and regret and shame and that is not something Jesus wants for us which is why the second sign of repentance is so important. If the first sign of repentance is recognizing how hopelessly fallen I am and that I need Jesus' help then the second sign of repentance is a joyful confidence recognizing that God's mercy and grace are more than enough for me.

This second sign gives us the confidence to move forward with the dual belief that I am so hopelessly fallen and flawed that nothing short of the blood of God's own Son could save me, but I'm so infinitely loved the both God and His Son Jesus were more than willing to pay that price. Our mission on this earth is to live a life that finds a place of balance within the tension of those two realities. How fallen I am AND how loved and valued I am by God. I think the Canaanite woman found that balance and it really impresses Jesus. After Jesus makes the strange comment to her about feeding His children first instead of taking the food from the kids and tossing it to the dogs she says something remarkable:

He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. Matthew 15:26-28 (NLT)

If you read yesterday's reflection you know that the word Jesus uses for "dogs" isn't the word for an adult mongrel- it's the word for puppies. The Jews considered dogs to be unclean but not the Canaanites- they loved dogs. They kept them as pets. Basically what Jesus tells her is that it's not right to take food out of the mouths of the children sitting at the Father's table and toss it to the puppies who are under the table. And when she agrees but points out that even the puppies under the table get to eat the crumbs and scraps that fall from the Father's table Jesus is really impressed. What she's really saying is that even though she knows she isn't worthy to sit at the table (she's wrong about that but we'll get to that in a minute) she believes that the grace and mercy of the Father is so great that even the crumbs falling from the table would be more than enough for her and her daughter.

And we find here an incredible irony of repentance- it's not until we admit that we're not worthy that we can become worthy. And as long as we insist that we are worthy we will never be worthy. That's the problem the Pharisees had. If they were having this discussion with Jesus they'd never get to the place where they recognized their own unworthiness. If a Pharisee walked in to a meal at the Father's table they'd demand their rightful spot and they'd probably look at the spot at the head of the table and tell Jesus to get out of their place. How very Sheldon Cooper of them (if you don't watch the Big Bang Theory you don't get that joke at all- sorry about that).

But this woman is humble and doesn't demand but humbly asks for Jesus' help. And Jesus is blown away. There are basically two things that amaze Jesus in the gospels- when someone who should have faith displays an incredible lack of faith (like the Pharisees) and when someone who has no reason or basis for faith demonstrates great faith (like this woman). Great faith always amazes Jesus. We saw it just about a year ago when a centurion came to

Jesus asking Him to heal his servant. Jesus tells the centurion that He'll come heal the servant but the centurion says "no". He tells Jesus that he understands how authority works. That if Jesus says the word then the servant will be healed even without having to go to the centurion's house and once again, Jesus is amazed:

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to those who were following him, he said, "I tell you the truth, I haven't seen faith like this in all Israel! And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world- from east and west- and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. But many Israelites- those for whom the Kingdom was prepared- will be thrown into outer darkness." Matthew 8:10-12 (NLT)

And in this statement Jesus informs anyone who is willing to listen that there will be tons of gentiles who come from all over the world and sit down at the Father's table for the great feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. But there will be many insiders- like the Pharisees- who won't be in attendance. Why not? Because they think they deserve and have earned their place at the table. They are unwilling to learn the lesson of humility and admit that they need Jesus' help, grace and mercy. They won't be at the party because they won't ask to be let in. Instead they'll stand outside in darkness wringing their hands and complaining to one another about how they are so much more deserving of a place at the table than those lousy gentiles who should be getting kicked out.

Do you want to be at that feast? Yeah, me too. Then we need to be working on the two signs of repentance- a humility that says "I know I don't deserve this but I also know that when it comes to the Father's grace and mercy there is more than enough for me". So let's spend today reflecting on that feast that is in our future and thank God for His amazing grace and mercy that are the only things making it possible for me (and you) to attend that feast.

Jesus is awesome.