

JESUS

There's no one like Him

Jesus is not a myth or legend. Jesus is not an ethereal religious figure. Jesus walked the earth at a specific time and place. There's never been another like Him. As we follow the life of Jesus of Nazareth through the Gospel of Matthew, we find our faith in Jesus rooted in the life of Jesus. Meet Jesus. Knowing this man will change your life.

JESUS • Matthew 15:21–28 • Tim McConnell • March 29, 2020

Jesus was famous for doing the unexpected. He said what He wasn't supposed to say. He did what He wasn't supposed to do. He talked to people He wasn't supposed to talk to, and He went places He wasn't supposed to go. He walked across social boundaries as if they were not even there. Have you watched any movies in isolation? We watched Ferris Bueller's Day Off. I'll warn you about the language. Find the cable-edited version. Ferris was a very popular high school student with all the high school groups. As it goes, "The sportos, the motorheads, geeks, bloods, waistoids, dweebies—they all adore him. They think he's a righteous dude." I can't believe that movie is 30 years old. Or that I'm quoting it. Oh well, you get the point. Jesus ran with all types. We are used to people being part of a group, separated out. Part of a team. Like Tom Brady and the Patriots. Always together. What? Jesus wasn't just part of one team. Jesus was for everyone. Jesus is for everyone.

As we walk along through the life of Jesus, looking with the historian's eye, looking at His life from the outside, what you would write down if you were a reporter just watching it unfold, well some people say Jesus was just a local, itinerant Jewish rabbi and He never would have imagined His teaching would go anywhere outside the bounds of Galilee and Judea. Is that so? Who is Jesus for? Who did He think He was for? Jesus is for everyone. One day He walked His disciples all the way out to the port cities, the region of Tyre and Sidon, and there He proved that His ministry was spilling the banks of the nation Israel, the region Judea, or even the genetic line of the children of Abraham. Jesus is for everyone.

If we are evaluating this life, the historical Jesus, was Jesus inclusive or exclusive? And this story here, was this an inclusive moment or an exclusive moment? It doesn't sound all that inclusive, does it? Jesus is at the same time the most inclusive and the most exclusive figure in history. I'll explain more toward the end. What was going on here? One of the big questions about Jesus is how did He see Himself? Wasn't Jesus just a local preacher who would have been shocked out of His shoes that His ideas had an impact beyond His local community? You don't have to be a spiritual person or a believer to answer that question. You just have to be willing to look at what He did and said. Jesus demonstrated that He believed His ministry was not just for His people. He believed His ministry was

for everyone.

So, what was happening in this passage, because on a first read, you might think this is about as mean as you have ever seen Jesus be to anyone. Right? But this is a critical moment in the life of Jesus. It isn't a parable, but it might as well be with how much there is to uncover and learn. The reporter on the scene could easily walk away with the wrong impression. Let's unpack it and add some context. One key to understanding this, and other events in the life of Jesus, is to pay attention to what happens in the end. What happens in the end? Jesus helps the woman. He heals the woman's daughter. Keep that in mind as we walk through what Jesus says and does. In the end, he heals.

"Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon" (Matthew 15:21). "Leaving that place." Okay, what place? Well, they were in Genesaret on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and now they are going northwest to some port cities on the shore. But Jesus was not just leaving the town behind. He and His crew were getting hammered by a group of Pharisees that came up from Jerusalem to give them a hard time. You can run up the page and see it. They were giving Jesus and the disciples a hard time about not washing their hands. Well, I mean, you should wash your hands, right? Twenty seconds. Sing Happy Birthday (or the Doxology). We'd probably kick Jesus out of First Pres for not washing his hands right now. But they were making it a salvation issue. As though your outside behavior determined the eternal course of your soul. As though your salvation depended on doing all the rules right and never making a mistake. Jesus was walking away from a frustrating, fruitless argument with people who just could not get grace. That's the place he left.

Where does he go? Tyre and Sidon. The coast. Port cities. Port cities were made up of all kinds of people. Traders and soldiers, traveling salesmen, entertainers, seers and spiritualists of all stripes. They were places where people passed through, had a good time, and moved on. Get it? So, in the minds of Jesus' followers, when they hear "Tyre and Sidon" they just think "Paganland. Heathenville." Sure enough, who do you meet in Paganland? A pagan. "A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter

is demon-possessed and suffering terribly'" (Matthew 15:22). Now, "Canaanite" is not a nice word. The other gospel writers call her Syro-Phoenician.

Born in Syria. Matthew drops the C-word. Remember, the Canaanites were the spiritually corrupt, child-sacrificing, pagan people that the Israelites were supposed to run out of the Holy Land way back when so they could set up a holy nation that knew and reflected the holy character of the one true God. If you've heard of Samaritans, well, the feud with Samaritans was a family feud. Canaanites were much worse. Outsiders. This woman sees and knows the difference. She calls Jesus "Son of David." "I know you're Jewish. I know I'm not. But can I ask your help?" Jesus responds with silence.

Maybe you can tell, we are entering a race relations moment. Watch how Jesus handles this. A barrier is there. A difference exists. Jesus does not pretend it isn't there. You know, sometimes that's the first mistake we make in race relations. I'm a white male. I checked again when I woke up this morning. White male. That means I see the world in certain ways, I have my white male perspective. That can't just be disregarded in my friendships with, say, a black female, or a Latino male, or a Cuban pastor, or a Mongolian leader. The differences are there and the different perspectives need to be acknowledged. Jesus does that. She calls him "Son of David." He remains silent.

"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'" (Matthew 15:23-24). Who did He answer? It looks like this answer is to the disciples. Let me just ask, does this sound like Jesus to you? The Jesus you know from other moments? Next the woman presses the issue, "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'" (Matthew 15:25-26). I mean, what is up with that? Did Jesus just call her a dog? He sure did. There are few moments in Scripture for me where Jesus sounds less like Jesus than this moment. "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." Here's what I think. I think Jesus was not speaking for Himself in that moment, or the last. He was making a point to illustrate the barrier that

was there relationally between His people and the woman's people. It looks like this, "I was only sent to help Israel," right disciples? Right, Jesus. "I can't take my children's bread and toss it at dogs like you," right Syrian woman? Jesus has just walked out of a conversation with people who sounded like this.

Here's the wall, says Jesus. Here's the boundary. Does everybody see it? Does everybody agree it's there? Now, Jesus waits. How will the woman respond? Will she turn and walk away? Will she spit on the ground, lift her chin and wave her arm and curse at this Jewish rabbi and His stinking fisherman friends? No. She sticks with it. It's not right to toss bread at dogs! "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table" (Matthew 15:27). A little humility. A little humor, maybe? She hangs in there until the wall comes down. "Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed at that moment" (Matthew 15:28). Jesus is back! Jesus is back, isn't He? He actually has kind of an exclamation, like He breaks out from behind the curtain. He says, "O Woman!" Other translations give you this. It's rare for Jesus to do this kind of thing, show this much emotion. He breaks out, "O Woman! You have great faith!" Ha-ha! "Your request is granted." Her daughter was healed right at that very moment.

See, Jesus was playing somebody else's part for the beginning. Those first two things he said, well, the silence, then the nasty statement to the disciples, then the nasty statement to the woman, Jesus was drawing out the poison. "You think this, don't you? And you think this, don't you? Well, let's see." Then, when the woman hangs in there, Jesus breaks out from behind the mask again. This can teach us a lot about race relations. Don't pretend the differences aren't there. The best breakthroughs happen when the differences are acknowledged, named, and then the bold move to step across the boundary gets made.

But here is the point. Jesus was thrilled not only to engage with a foreign woman, but to heal her daughter. And this sort of cross-racial engagement has happened. Jesus has spoken with Samaritans and has even performed miracles to help Gentiles. He healed a Centurion's son back in chapter 8, and if you want to count it, He changed the lives of the Magi who came to His birth. Jesus has engaged with

people outside of the lost sheep of Israel. But here, Jesus does it on their soil. Here, for the first time, Jesus heals a non-Jewish woman's daughter on non-Jewish soil. Was Jesus a small-time itinerant Rabbi who would have been shocked to learn that his teaching meant anything at all to a Syrian-born woman on the other side of the border? No. Jesus was for everyone. Jesus is for everyone. His ministry has no borders or boundaries, no racial limitations or social distancing guidelines. What about the two groups? What about the dividing wall? What about the barrier? "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Ephesians 2:14-16). With Jesus, everybody's in and nobody's out.

Unless, that is, you choose the barrier. Jesus is at the same time the most inclusive and the most exclusive figure in history. His ministry is for everyone. Everyone. He systematically and intentionally destroys the barriers we set up between us and others. He systematically deconstructs the walls of racism and sexism and all else. There is universal, inclusive unity for all humanity in the blood of Jesus. But you can still walk away from Him if you'd like. You can still self-select out. What Jesus did to remove the barrier and destroy the wall was He went to the cross. When He took our sin upon Himself and went to the cross to die, He died not just for Israelite sins, not just for Syrian sins, not just for white male Anglo-Saxon Protestant sins, He died for all our sins. Anyone can be named a child of God now, because the son of God has purchased your place. But if you say no to Jesus, if you disregard His cross, if you turn away from His work of grace, you remain separated. There is only one work of salvation. Jesus died once for sins. If you walk away from the cross and turn your back on Jesus, lift your chin and turn and spit and go your own way, then you remain separated. The most inclusive; the most exclusive. Jesus. Which Jesus do you want to see today?

STUDY GUIDE

JESUS • "Everybody's In, Nobody's Out" Matthew 15:21-28

UP: **UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word**

Friends, humanity is being rocked right now by needing to physically distance ourselves from one another. For the Christian, we do this out of love for neighbor. Fight hard to distinguish these two realities: physically distancing and relationally separating.

Now is the time to become the greatest artist you have ever been. Create ways to stay relationally and spiritually tethered to your core circle. We need each other. We are gifts to one another! Make phone calls; text photographs; set up video gatherings. Together, we are the hands and feet of Christ to one another and this city!

Begin your study in prayer. Read and reflect on Matthew 15:21-28.

- 1) What is your initial reaction to the words of Christ in this passage?
- 2) What do we know about the relational tensions between the Jews and the Canaanites at the time of this passage?
- 3) What character traits do we learn about the Canaanite woman? How can our own faith grow by observing the Canaanite woman?

OUT: **Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)**

4) In our text this week, Jesus is breaking through a social barrier. What is a Biblical understanding of a social barrier? What social barrier might God have you help break through in this city as we strive to be the light and life of Christ to our neighbors?

5) As you walk with the Spirit and opportunities arise, how can you present the inclusive reality of the gospel (Salvation is offered to all)? What about the exclusive reality of the gospel (Christ alone)?

IN: **Connect with Each Other**

COVID-19: Spend time connecting with your core circle on how you are doing. Pray together.

What's hard right now? What has surprised you most this week? What do you need most right now? What are the greatest needs in your community and family?