

OPENING PRAYER

Proper 28¹

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written
for our learning:
Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn,
and inwardly digest them,
that we may embrace and ever hold fast
the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

MATTHEW 15²

The Tradition of the Elders

15 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat.” 3 He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said,[a] ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.’ 5 But you say that whoever tells father or mother, ‘Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God,’[b] then that person need not honor the father.[c] 6 So, for the sake of your tradition, you nullify the word[d] of God. 7 You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said:

8 ‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
9 in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.’ ”

Things That Defile

10 Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand: 11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” 12 Then the disciples approached and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” 13 He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14 Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind.[e] And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.” 15 But Peter said to him, “Explain this parable to us.” 16 Then he said, “Are you also still without understanding? 17 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer? 18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. 19 For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

The Canaanite Woman's Faith

21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” 23 But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” 24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost

¹ Episcopal Book of Common Prayer pp.236

² All Bible quotations and footnotes are from Biblegateway.com, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE)
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sheep of the house of Israel.” 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” 26 He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” 27 She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’[f] table.” 28 Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed from that moment.

Jesus Cures Many People

29 After Jesus had left that place, he passed along the Sea of Galilee, and he went up the mountain, where he sat down. 30 Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the maimed, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, 31 so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

Feeding the Four Thousand

32 Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for the crowd because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat, and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.” 33 The disciples said to him, “Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?” 34 Jesus asked them, “How many loaves have you?” They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” 35 Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, 36 he took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 37 And all of them ate and were filled, and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 38 Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 After sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.[g]

Footnotes

15.4 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) read *commanded, saying*

15.5 Or *is an offering*

15.5 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add *or the mother*

15.6 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) read *law or commandment*

15.14 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) lack *of the blind*

15.27 Gk *lords’*

15.39 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) read *Magdala or Magdalan*

GOSPEL COMPARISON³

Pericope ⁴	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
What Defiles a Person - Traditional and Real	15:1-20	7:1-23	11:37-41	
The Syrophoenician (Canaanite) Woman	15:21-28	7:24-30		
Jesus Heals a Deaf Mute and Many Others	15:29-31	7:31-37		
Feeding of the Four Thousand	15:32-39	8:1-10		

PERSPECTIVE

Chapter 15 deals with fundamentals: Jesus argues for an emphasis on the *interior* life of religion versus *external* signs of piety; that the problem of faithlessness to God lies with both the leadership and the people of Israel; and how Jesus' mission changed from exclusively for the Jews to include those outside Israel in response to their faith in Jesus.

The chapter does not clearly resolve if Jesus intended to overturn the purity and kosher laws; or how Jesus' mission may or may not have changed; or whether Matthew is continuing to view the Jesus movement as a Jewish sect or something more.

15:1-20 The Tradition of the Elders

In the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, Jesus proclaims a "profound revolution"⁵ in Jewish religious thinking of his generation. Matthew focusses the confrontation to a single issue, the purity laws, and Jesus contrasts the laws given by God through Moses, with the "Tradition of Elders" which the Pharisees promote. (It should be noted that on this issue Jesus agrees with the Sadducees). Jesus also makes it clear that the problem is with the Pharisees and scribes themselves. They have elevated their tradition over that of God's.

Jesus argues that human rule creation and enforcement can lead people to neglect God's laws. More fundamentally, Jesus argues that hand washing, or food consumption are not what is important. These are *external* signs of piety.

In Matthew, as in Mark and Luke, Jesus stresses the *interior* life of religion, on intention and attitude. Matthew, even more than other gospels, makes dwelling on the heart and purifying interior disposition a regular and emphatic theme of his Gospel. Matthew presents Jesus as laying extraordinary emphasis on the real inner religious significance of the commandments.⁶

The issue of whether Christians needed to be Jewish first to be Christian, and thus follow all of the purity and kosher laws caused great conflict in the early Jesus movement. Gospel writers and scholars are divided on whether Jesus intended to overturn the purity and kosher laws:

- The Gospels don't agree:
 - Mark explains kosher practices and presents that Jesus "makes all things clean" (Mark 7:19).
 - Matthew omits the kosher practices explanation and "makes all things clean" (Mark 7:19, possibly because does not see Jesus replacing the Law.⁷

³ Source: <http://www.gospelparallels.com/>

⁴ An extract from a text, especially a passage from the Bible, "a book of pericopes"

⁵ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel according to Matthew* pp 387-411

⁶ Davies, W.D., Allison, Dale C. Jr. *Matthew Volume II Chapters VIII-XVIII*, The International Critical Commentary pp 516-540

⁷ Brown, Raymond E., S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p 188

- Scholars don't agree:
 - R.T. France, Jesus eliminates the need for many kosher regulations and concentrates on an attitude that will take care of them all.⁸
 - Leon Morris, 15:11 Jesus is setting aside the Levitical food laws (Lev 11; 17:10-16).⁹
 - Dale C. Allison Jr., the law and the prophets were still valid. Jesus (and Matthew) sought to preserve and reform at the same time.¹⁰

Is the problem with the people of Israel or the Pharisees and scribes?

- God's "planting" echoes Isaiah 61:3 that the problems are not about the leadership but about the people as a whole. In this context the failure of the leadership is because of a wider failure of the people.
- The "blind guides" (15:14) implies that the leaders of Israel have themselves missed the way in their understanding, and if the blind are leading the blind they both will fall into the pit.
- The powerful polemic against the scribal tradition (15:3-9) confirms that Matthew and Mark are aware of the relations between Jesus and the scribes had reached a breaking point by this point in the narrative.¹¹
- 15:12-14 on the Pharisees being blind leaders is a clue to Matthew's historical context. Matthew is trying to direct Christians away from Pharisee-dominated synagogues after the fall of the Temple in 70 CE.¹²

15:21-28 The Canaanite Woman's Faith

The Canaanite Woman's Faith is the story that may show Jesus changing his mind on who his mission is to help. Jesus thought he was exclusively for the Jews, as a fulfillment of God's faithfulness to his covenant to the people of Israel. He reflects the biblical doctrine of election: Israel is God's chosen people, and to them the Messiah must go first. Due to the Woman's faith, persistence and intelligence, Jesus himself now recognizes that salvation comes to those outside Israel in response to their faith in Jesus.¹³

The story occurs near Tyre and Sidon, in today's Lebanon, which is Gentile territory to the north west of Israel and Galilee. In Mark, the woman is a Greek Syrophenician and in Matthew she is a Canaanite. The word Canaanite is a scriptural term for ancient Israel's pagan enemies. The woman has four strikes against her: she is a woman, a gentile, from Canaan and is appearing alone before Jesus.¹⁴

The Canaanite woman addresses him as Lord and Son of David and asks for his mercy and help with her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus' first response is silence. He is either turning her down or trying her faith. The woman presses Jesus for help.

Jesus responds cruelly, with what may be a proverb, that it is not good to give the children's (people of Israel) bread to the dogs (the gentiles). The woman's response shows she understands the parable Jesus is using about children, bread, and dogs. (In this regard she is somewhat unique in Matthew for understanding a parable of Jesus' without his having to explain it.) The children are the people of Israel, the bread is Jesus and the word, and the dogs are the gentiles (including the woman). She responds saying that even the house dogs eat the crumbs beneath the master's table – i.e. even the gentiles have a legitimate right to salvation after the Jews have been served.

⁸ France, R. T., *The Gospel of Matthew* pp. 573-603

⁹ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel according to Matthew* pp. 387-411

¹⁰ Davies, W.D., Allison, Dale C. Jr. *Matthew Volume II Chapters VIII-XVIII*, The International Critical Commentary pp. 516-540

¹¹ France, R. T., *The Gospel of Matthew* pp. 573-603

¹² Davies, W.D., Allison, Dale C. Jr. *Matthew Volume II Chapters VIII-XVIII*, The International Critical Commentary pp. 516-540

¹³ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew Contributor*, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 863-4

¹⁴ *Harper Collins Study Bible*, NRSV Version, pp. 1694-6

Jesus' response to the woman is unique (15:28):

- He changes his position on his mission. He will now include gentiles.
- The woman's faith is described as "great", the only time in Matthew great faith is mentioned.
- The woman and the centurion at Capernaum (8:5-13), both gentiles, are publicly praised for their faith by Jesus.
- Likewise both healings are done remotely – Jesus does not visit either's suffering child.¹⁵

The Canaanite Woman's Faith story is similar to the centurion in Capernaum (8:5-13). Both supplicants are gentiles; both are received reluctantly by Jesus; in both cases the faith of the gentile supplicant is more highly commended than that of any Jew; and in both cases the healing is done remotely.¹⁶

Has the woman changed Jesus mind?

- For the reader who views the story in the context of :
 - *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."* (28:18-20) This is the turning point in the gospel where the final mission to gentiles and Jews becomes clear.
 - If one sees the following healing and feeding miracles as being among gentiles. That is the "bread" of the Canaanite Woman's Faith's story is then shared with the crowd in the Feeding of the 4,000 story. The rest of the chapter (29-39) shows Jesus at work healing among Gentiles – they demonstrate Jesus changing his mission to heal and feed Gentiles.¹⁷
- For the participant in the story it is less clear:
 - He abandons the policy stated in 15:24 and 26. But in fact he has already done that on individual cases in the gospel of Matthew.

15:29-31 Jesus Cures Many People

This passage as a summary of several healings has clues that it is among Gentiles: it is repetitive of 14:34-36 but in a different place along the sea of Galilee; and the crowds gave "glory to the God of Israel" (15:31) praising the God of Israel not Jesus.

15:32-39 Feeding the Four Thousand

The feeding of the 4,000 is very much like the previous story of the feeding of the 5,000 (14:13-21). The meanings of the two stories are similar so it is a repetition of the key teachings from the miracles. Scholars do not agree on whether Matthew's text support the idea that the 5,000 are Jews and the 4,000 are Gentiles. Arguments for and against interpreting the passage as being of Gentiles:

4,000 are not Gentiles	4,000 are Gentiles
Matthew's text does not support that early Church belief that the 5,000 were Jews and the 4,000 were Gentiles.	Mark and Matthew may have thought the two events occurred historically; and they both have an interest in documenting Jesus' ministry to Jews and Gentiles during his life and ministry ¹⁸ .
However, the mountain setting recalls the OT prophecies from Mt. Zion. So the second feeding shows us that the eschatological expectations associated with Zion have come to fulfillment in Jesus. ¹⁹	Note: The Canaanite Woman after Jesus heals many people who "praised the God of Israel" (15:31) could lead one to infer that the feeding is of similar Gentiles outside of Jewish territory.

¹⁵ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel according to Matthew* pp. 387-411

¹⁶ France, R. T., *The Gospel of Matthew* pp. 573-603

¹⁷ France, R. T., *The Gospel of Matthew* pp. 573-603

¹⁸ France, R. T., *The Gospel of Matthew* pp. 573-603

¹⁹ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary*, pp. 863-4

The feeding stories parallel the Last Supper Eucharist language: take, bless, break, give.

Last Supper (26:26)	Feeding the 5,000 (15:19)	Feeding the 4,000 (15:36)
"While they were eating, Jesus <i>took</i> a loaf of bread, and after <i>blessing</i> it[d] he <i>broke</i> it, <i>gave</i> it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."	" <i>Taking</i> the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and <i>blessed</i> and <i>broke</i> the loaves and <i>gave</i> them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds."	"he <i>took</i> the seven loaves and the fish, and after <i>giving thanks</i> he <i>broke</i> them and <i>gave</i> them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds."

The language parallels could argue that the Eucharistic language is the lens the miracles are seen by the authors of the Gospels, and that the feast is now extended to the Gentiles.

Take Aways

Matthew documents the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities and may have focused his narrative on the Pharisees because they are who Matthew and the other evangelists writing gospels are competing with after the fall of the Temple in the 70-100 CE period.

Jesus in the Gospels stresses the *interior* life of religion, on intention and attitude over *external* signs of piety, which he emphasized in Matthew in the Beatitudes (5:1-10).

Jesus makes clear that the problem lies with both the leadership of Israel and the people. The leaders are the "are blind guides of the blind," (15:14) and that among God's chosen there are people who no longer follow God. "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted." (15:13)

Because of how Chapter 28 ends, and how you might read the subsequent stories in Chapter 15, Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman may have initiated the change in his mission from being exclusively for the Jews to now include those outside Israel in response to their faith in Jesus.

What is subject to debate is whether:

- Jesus intended to overturn the purity and kosher laws. Matthew is interpreted both ways.
- Does the Canaanite Woman change God's mind on Jesus' mission as has occurred before with Abraham and Moses with YHWH? In Matthew the reader knows that:
 - Jesus is a divinely conceived and named human;
 - His authority and power come from God; and
 - His mission is at the direction of God.
- Is Matthew continuing to view the Jesus movement as a Jewish sect or is that in the process of changing? What are the implications of expanding the mission to include non-Jews?

REFLECTION

- How do I judge my own spirituality? Am I obsessed with external signs of piety or my internal spiritual life?
- How do I think the church today helps or hurts my spiritual life? Is it because of leadership or the community of which I am a part?

CLOSING PRAYER

We thank you, heavenly Father,
for the witness of your apostle and evangelist,
Matthew, to the Gospel of Beatitude and Grace
which you have given us in your Son, our Savior;
and we pray that, after his example,
we may with ready wills and hearts obey
the calling of our Lord to follow him;
through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

The Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun

SLOW RELIGION: GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW



The Inspiration of St. Matthew, Caravaggio, 1602

Slow Religion, The Gospel According to Matthew is a lay person-led adult education weekly series for Christians and seekers. Slow Religion uses a literary and historical approach to the ancient texts to identify and apply insights from the Gospel to today's world.

Matthew's gospel is worth studying because the author attempts to uphold Jesus' Jewish past, with Jesus ministry, death, and resurrection, in the context of the 1st Century CE Jesus movement and early church, and in a hostile Hellenistic and Jewish world.

21st Century readers recognize Matthew as the source of many of the best-known stories and sayings of Jesus as well as a social philosophy that many non-Christians believe in. Famous for its Sermon on the Mount, The Beatitudes, and other teachings, Matthew is often called the most Jewish of the Gospels, while also contributing with the Gospel of John to antisemitism.

The class is created and led by Joe Jennings and advisors include: the Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Belvedere, CA; the Rev. Br. Richard Edward Helmer, Episcopal Church of our Saviour, Mill Valley, CA; the Rev. Heather Wenrick, the Episcopal Church of the Ascension, Seattle; and the Father Vincent Pizzuto, PhD., vicar at St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Inverness CA and Full Professor at the (Jesuit) University of San Francisco, New Testament and Christian Mysticism, in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

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