KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material

Matthew 15:21-39

Week of 3rd of March

The faith of a gentile

Leader Preparation

The passage this week encourages the participants to think about some interesting issues:

- Why did Jesus initially reject the Canaanite woman's request for help? Didn't he care?
- What was God's purpose and plan for the Jews?
- What was God's purpose and plan for the gentiles?
- How should we approach Jesus?

Refer to pages 13-15 of the leader notes for some helpful guidance.

A practical note: there are quite a few helpful bible references in this study. Print out the verses on strips of paper and pass them out in your group at the beginning to make it easier for people to read them out.

Jesus,

There are some people in my group who know you so well. Help them to give us a picture of a faithful walk with you.

There are some who are argumentative. May their hearts be changed by you in their discussion and exploration.

There are some who long to know you more closely. Draw them into your presence through our time together.

There are some who just hang around on the edges. Give them a longing to experience the fullness of life you promise.

As I prepare to guide my group this week, would you open my eyes to see the needs of each person, and give me the wisdom to respond with your grace.

Amen

Group Time:

Some people really love leftovers – they will intentionally not finish the evening food so that they can take them to work with them the next day. Other people hate them – they will give extra food away rather than eat another helping of yesterday's food. Another group of people is skilled in rebranding – yesterday's roast chicken becomes tomorrow's chicken stew, or a gourmet salad.

- How do you feel about leftovers?
- Would you happily eat someone else's leftovers?
- Our attitudes regarding food are often related to the family we grew up in. How did your family shape the way you behave about leftovers?

Exploring the Passage

READ Matthew 15:21-39

Verse by Verse

v21
Once again we see Jesus choosing to withdraw. What is different about Tyre and Sidon from the previous areas he was in as far as you know? What might have made him choose to go there?

v22
What do you notice about the way this woman approaches Jesus?

- how does she address him? See this title used previously in Matthew 12:23
- what is her attitude in making her request?
- what do you think drew her to him?

v23

- How did the disciples respond to her pleas for help? Was this in line with Jesus' instructions to them? (Matthew 10:6)
- Was it in line with the actions and attitude he had modeled to them? (Matthew 14:16)

v24
What is your instinctive reaction to these words of Jesus? Have a look at these verses to see how they might confirm the purpose of Jesus' physical time on earth:

- Act 3:25-26
- Romans 15:8
- Deuteronomy 14:2

v25

- How does the physical position of the woman in relation to Jesus change from verse 22-23 to verse 25?
- How do the names she uses for Jesus reflect her attitude?
- Is this your attitude when you approach God with a request?

v26-27

- Again, how do you most naturally respond to these verses?

As much as we might find the term "dog" offensive, it does not seem that the woman responded angrily to it. She used the metaphor herself in pleading her case to Jesus. From the woman's posture and pleading in the previous verse, we might have expected her to shrink away from Jesus after his refusal.

- How did she respond instead?
- What do you think made her stand her ground so boldly (and counter-culturally!)?

v28

As much as Jesus stated that his mission on earth was focused on "the lost sheep of Israel", he grants the request of this woman based on her faith. Read these passages to see the message of God's ultimate plan for all people:

- John 3:14-15
- Galatians 3:5-7
- Deuteronomy 1:35-36
- Matthew 12:48-50
- Matthew 22:8-9

Ultimately, who are those who are included in the family of God?

v29-31

- What was Jesus' purpose in performing miracles?

v32-39

Here we have another story of Jesus' miraculous provision for a crowd. There is disagreement about whether this story still takes place outside Jewish territory. If it is still in a gentile area, how would you view this picture of a "feast" contrasted with the previous story about "crumbs"?

- do you feel you deserve crumbs or a feast from God?
- which do you feel you receive?

Meditation

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"
Hebrews 4:15-16

As Jesus has been revealed to you, how do you expect he will respond to your requests when you approach him?

Is there anything proud or entitled in the way you expect Jesus to grant your requests? Discuss as a group whether there are attitudes people may have that do not demonstrate dependance on God.

Do we shy away from approaching God with our needs? Can we ask him to give us the faith we need to be bold in our requests.

What elements of mercy and grace would you love to ask God for now?

(Remember that this is not a "recipe" for how to get the answers we want to prayer – it is rather a reminder that the way we pray tends to demonstrate our relationship and attitude to God)

As a group, commit to praying for each other during the week. Try to focus on praying that God would give us clarity to pray boldly for the things he would like to do in our lives. Try assigning prayer partners for the week – people who pray for and check in with each other on this issue.