

The Book of Matthew

Lord of Jews and Gentiles

Lesson #7 for May 14, 2016

Scriptures: Matthew 14:1-23; 15:1-28; Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 29:13.

1. In this lesson we will discuss the events connected with: 1) The feeding of the 5000 Jewish men not counting women and children, 2) The healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter, and then, 3) The feeding of the 4000 Gentile men plus women and children.
2. Read Matthew 15:24. It is clear from the reading of the Gospels that Jesus spent most of His time working with the Jewish people themselves. All through Scripture, there are many hints that it was God's intention that the Israelites become a witness to the whole world regarding the truth about God and His government.
3. Read Isaiah 42:5-7. Clearly, even in the Old Testament, there are many passages suggesting that God wanted to reach out to all nations and not just to the Hebrews.
4. The feeding of the 5000 men "besides women and children" (Matthew 14:21) is one of the better-known stories in the Bible. It also turned out to be a major turning point in the ministry of Jesus.
5. Read Matthew 14:1-21. As we noted in a previous lesson, when John the Baptist was arrested and placed in prison in Herod's palace at Machaerus, Jesus left His ministry in Judea and moved to Galilee. When John the Baptist was beheaded and it had been reported by John's disciples to Jesus and His disciples, Jesus took His disciples away to be alone in a quiet place where they could be together for a short time. The Sea of Galilee is not that large. One can easily see all the way across it; so, the people watched the boat of Jesus and followed along on the shore. Soon, the crowds discovered where they had gone and joined them. Jesus ministered to the crowd for the whole day; and then, as evening approached, He suggested to the disciples that they should feed the people. Five loaves and two fishes from a small boy's lunch provided the starter for a meal which fed about 20,000 people with the food that they were accustomed to eating. (See *Desire of Ages* 366.1-367.2; *Counsels on Diet and Foods* 87.2-3.)

The tradition arose within Judaism that the Messiah would come on a Passover and that along with His coming, manna would begin to fall again.... So when Jesus fed the 5000 just before Passover, it should not surprise anyone that the crowd might begin to speculate whether He was the Messiah and whether He was about to do an even greater miracle—feed everyone all the time by restoring the manna.—John Paulien, *John: The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1995), pages 139,140.

6. Try to imagine the excitement among the people of Galilee who were present on that occasion. This was exactly the kind of Messiah they were looking for—Someone who would provide their daily physical needs without their having to work for those needs. They were ready to crown Jesus as king immediately. When Jesus refused to allow that to happen, they were very disappointed.

In their enthusiasm the people are ready at once to crown Him king. They see that He makes no effort to attract attention or secure honor to Himself. In this He is essentially different from the priests and rulers, and they fear that He will never urge His claim to David's throne. Consulting together, they agree to take Him by force, and proclaim Him the king of Israel. The disciples

unite with the multitude in declaring the throne of David the rightful inheritance of their Master. It is the modesty of Christ, they say, that causes Him to refuse such honor. Let the people exalt their Deliverer. Let the arrogant priests and rulers be forced to honor Him who comes clothed with the authority of God.

They eagerly arrange to carry out their purpose; but Jesus sees what is on foot, and understands, as they cannot, what would be the result of such a movement. Even now the priests and rulers are hunting His life. They accuse Him of drawing the people away from them. **Violence and insurrection would follow an effort to place Him on the throne, and the work of the spiritual kingdom would be hindered. Without delay the movement must be checked. Calling His disciples, Jesus bids them take the boat and return at once to Capernaum, leaving Him to dismiss the people.**

Never before had a command from Christ seemed so impossible of fulfillment. The disciples had long hoped for a popular movement to place Jesus on the throne; they could not endure the thought that all this enthusiasm should come to nothing. The multitudes that were assembling to keep the Passover were anxious to see the new prophet. To His followers this seemed the golden opportunity to establish their beloved Master on the throne of Israel. In the glow of this new ambition it was hard for them to go away by themselves, and leave Jesus alone upon that desolate shore. **They protested against the arrangement; but Jesus now spoke with an authority He had never before assumed toward them. They knew that further opposition on their part would be useless, and in silence they turned toward the sea.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 378.1-3. [Bold type is added.]

7. Read Matthew 14:22-33. Try to imagine the thoughts of the disciples in that boat and what they had to say to each other. They were extremely disappointed when they were forced to leave Jesus and the crowds without making Him king. They departed in the boat, murmuring as they went. A great wind came up on the lake and opposed their progress. After dismissing the crowds, Jesus went up into the mountain to pray. Between 3 and 6 o'clock in the morning, Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water. At first the disciples were terrified, thinking that He was a ghost; and then, recognizing that it was Jesus, Peter asked to go to Him. Jesus bade him come, and we know the story of Peter's failure and how he almost drowned.
8. It is interesting to notice that while we do not have the actual words of Jesus which were, no doubt, in Aramaic, the Greek from Matthew says: "It is I; do not be afraid." (Matthew 14:27) That expression, "It is I," is a direct translation of the Greek phrase *ego eimi* which, in turn, is a translation of the Hebrew phrase *Yahweh* meaning "I AM," the name of God Himself. (See Exodus 3:14.)
9. This story and many others that we could mention clearly show us that our God is not a God of Deism who created the world and then left it to whatever consequences might come. Our God has repeatedly demonstrated His ability to control nature—from the days of the Noachian flood to these miracles of Jesus in which He repeatedly controlled the destructive forces of nature on the Sea of Galilee.
10. What would happen if we were to try to fight against the forces of nature? Can we as humans stop wildfires, earthquakes, hurricanes, or tornadoes? Our only hope is a complete dependence upon our Friend, Jesus.

11. When the Pharisees complained about what Jesus was saying and doing, Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 (*GNB*):

The Lord said, “These people claim to worship me, but their words are meaningless, and their hearts are somewhere else. Their religion is nothing but human rules and traditions, which they have simply memorized.”

12. Matthew 15:7-9 (*GNB*) [Matthew was quoting the Greek Septuagint as opposed to the Hebrew of Isaiah 29:13.] is quoting Jesus:

“You hypocrites! How right Isaiah was when he prophesied about you!

⁸ ‘These people, says God, honor me with their words,
but their heart is really far away from me.

⁹ It is no use for them to worship me,
because they teach human rules as though they were my laws!’ ”

13. What do you think God was trying to say to the ancient Hebrews in the Isaiah passage? What was Jesus trying to say to the Pharisees in His day? What might we need to learn for our day? What is the essence of true religion? Keeping the rules? Is it a matter of doing what we have been taught? Or, is God asking us to think about what we are doing and then to worship God with our heart and mind? How much of religion is what we have learned as a child?

14. Read Matthew 15:1-20. Do we ever make the mistake that the Pharisees were making? Do we make a bigger deal over what people eat than over what they think? Or, say? What is it that really makes a person unclean and unsavable? Is it what s/he eats or what s/he thinks that is affecting who s/he really is?

15. This story is about hypocrisy. Are we ever guilty of condemning others for doing things of which we ourselves are either openly or secretly guilty? It is so easy to see the faults in others, especially when we are aware of those faults in ourselves! Since we all hate hypocrisy in others, shouldn't we be very careful about condemning those who are very much like we are?

16. Read Matthew 15:21-28. After the beheading of John the Baptist and the feeding of the 5000, Jesus returned to Capernaum; the people wanted Him to continue feeding them. Jesus condemned them for not recognizing the truths He had been trying to teach. Unfortunately, many of the Jews rejected Jesus at that point because He did not seem to be fulfilling their ideal vision of a messiah. See John 6 where the whole story is spelled out in more detail. At that point, Jesus realized that His ministry in Galilee was effectively over. He took His disciples with Him, and they left Galilee and headed for the pagan territories of Tyre and Sidon.

17. It is hard for us to read and understand the story of Jesus's reaction or interaction with this Canaanite woman. But, consider the following details which are spelled out in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, May 11:

First, it is true that at this time the Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs, bringing the image of many dogs running the streets. But Jesus uses the more affectionate Greek term, “small dog” (or “puppy dog”) here, conjuring up domestic dogs kept in the home and fed from the table.

Second, this Canaanite woman calls Jesus the “Son of David.” This shows her familiarity with Jesus' Jewishness. Like a good teacher, Jesus dialogs with her and perhaps tests her. Craig Keener writes: “Perhaps he is requiring

her to understand his true mission and identity, lest she treat him as one of the many wandering magicians to whom Gentiles sometimes appealed for exorcisms. Yet he is surely summoning her to recognize Israel's priority in the divine plan, a recognition that for her will include an admission of her dependent status... One may compare Elisha's requirement that Naaman dip in the Jordan despite Naaman's preference for the Aramean rivers of Abana and Pharpar..., ultimately leading to Naaman's acknowledgment of Israel's God and land (2 Kings 5:17-18).”—*The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 417.

Finally, it's likely this woman was an upper-class Greek woman who was part of a class that had “routinely taken the bread belonging to the impoverished Jews residing in the vicinity of Tyre.... Now... Jesus reverses the power relations, for the ‘bread’ Jesus offers belongs to Israel first...; this ‘Greek’ must beg help from an itinerant Jew.”—*The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 417.

18. Ellen White commented:

Behold, a Canaanitish woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” Matthew 15:22, R. V. **The people of this district were of the old Canaanite race. They were idolaters, and were despised and hated by the Jews. To this class belonged the woman who now came to Jesus. She was a heathen, and was therefore excluded from the advantages which the Jews daily enjoyed. There [400] were many Jews living among the Phoenicians, and the tidings of Christ's work had penetrated to this region.** Some of the people had listened to His words and had witnessed His wonderful works. This woman had heard of the prophet, who, it was reported, healed all manner of diseases. As she heard of His power, hope sprang up in her heart. Inspired by a mother's love, she determined to present her daughter's case to Him. It was her resolute purpose to bring her affliction to Jesus. He must heal her child. She had sought help from the heathen gods, but had obtained no relief. And at times she was tempted to think, What can this Jewish teacher do for me? But the word had come, He heals all manner of diseases, whether those who come to Him for help are rich or poor. She determined not to lose her only hope.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 399.2. [Bold type is added.]

19. Remember that as a Canaanite this woman's ancestors were supposed to have been eliminated completely by the Jews when they entered Canaan 1400 years earlier. But, although she came from a very pagan background, here was the case of a woman who had developed faith in Jesus because of what she had heard about Him. Would you describe what this woman did for her daughter as intercessory prayer?
20. Read Matthew 15:29-39 and compare Matthew 14:13-21. Many people, including many biblical scholars, think that these two accounts are the same story. A more careful reading will point out several very important differences. The Matthew 15 account took place after Jesus had completed His Galilean ministry. It is a gathering of Gentiles in the area of Decapolis north and east of the sea of Galilee. This was the same area where Jesus had previously cast the legion of demons out of the two (or one) demon-possessed men (or man) and sent them into the 2000 pigs. (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

These two men had gone back to their homes and to the surrounding towns and villages and had told their story—they had been missionaries to their fellow Gentiles.

21. Sometime later, when Jesus returned to that territory, everyone wanted to see the Man that they had been told about. The witness of those two first Gentile missionaries had an enormous impact; after hearing their accounts, thousands upon thousands of Gentiles were eager to hear the words of Jesus. After speaking to the people for three full days, He fed them, 4000 men—probably including Jews and Gentiles—not counting women and children.
22. The earlier encounter recorded in Matthew 14:13-21 involved feeding a group of Jews after they had been with Jesus only one day. The number of loaves is different in the two accounts; the baskets which were used to gather up the fragments were distinctly different as well. In that six-month period among the Gentiles, Jesus was trying to impress upon His disciples the fact that the gospel must be taken not only to Jewish people but also to the whole world.
23. Read Amos 9:7 (*GNB*). It is very clear from passages like this one that God cares about all people and not just the Jewish people.
24. Read Romans 4:1-12. This passage is just one of several places where Paul made it clear that all who believe in Jesus are the spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham and are, thus, eligible for salvation. Read Galatians 3:28. Compare Romans 8:1.

Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value. He "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us." **Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live.** "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference." "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free." "The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the Maker of them all." "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Acts 17:26, 27; Galatians 3:28; Proverbs 22:2; Romans 10:11-13.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 403.3. [Bold type is added.]

25. Read Matthew 16:1-12. Before Jesus could convince His disciples and other followers to reach out to all the peoples of the world, He had to disabuse them of their dependence upon the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. Repeatedly, He also condemned the Pharisees and the Sadducees for their failure to understand the teachings of the Old Testament and especially to recognize Him as the Messiah.
26. Are there widely accepted teachings from Christian groups in our day and that are commonly believed by Seventh-day Adventists but which are, in fact, false teachings? Are there any "Pharisees" or "Sadducees" in our day leading us into misunderstanding the truths of Scripture?
27. Review Matthew 14:1-12. Think of the stories of each of the main players in that passage. There was John the Baptist, the fearless prophet who did not fail to call sin by its right name. There was the weak and vacillating Herod Antipas who had stolen his brother's wife, the evil Herodias, who was willing to sacrifice morality and common decency in order to get

her revenge against John. Finally, there was Salome who allowed herself to be a pawn in the power game that led to the beheading of John.

28. In considering the feedings of the 5000 and then the 4000, it is interesting to note that in both cases Jesus had compassion on the crowds. There are 13 other times in the Gospels all related to Jesus and His ministry (Matthew 9:36; 15:32; 18:27, 33; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 5:19; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; Luke 7:13; 10:33; 15:20) in which the Greek word for *compassion* is used. These passages provide an excellent view of a God of love, caring, and approachability. What a contrast to the polytheistic gods of the Greeks and the Romans who cared little or nothing about human problems or human needs.
29. The woman at the well in Sychar was a Samaritan. In the story of the Canaanite woman in the area of Tyre and Sidon which was associated with the feeding of the 4000 men in Decapolis as well as His six months of ministry in Perea on the other side of the Jordan, Jesus tried to enlarge His followers views to include working for Gentiles. A review of the events recorded in the book of Acts helps us to realize that despite all these efforts, God had to work several more years after the death of Jesus before He could finally convince the disciples to reach out to Gentiles. See Acts 11:19-26. The bigotry of the Pharisees and the Sadducees almost squelched the spread of the gospel.

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