

A Savior for All People

By Jeff Noblit

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Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

Well, take your Bibles and let's go to Matthew 15 this morning. I've been working on the minor prophets and we'll look at jumping into one of those after the holiday break and doing a verse-by-verse exposition of that section of the old part of the book, but for the remainder of this year, I want to touch on a few things just as the Lord brings my heart to them and this morning we come to Matthew 15, beginning in verse 21 and going through verse 28, a very powerful unique story of where the Lord has ventured out of the confines of Israel proper, if you will, and he's in Canaanite or Gentile territory. Now, you do understand that from time and eternity, well, at least time, God has had an elect favor toward the nation of Israel. You can't slice it any other way. He called Abraham from the Ur of the Chaldees and said, "From you, Abraham, I'm going to start a great nation of people." And it was to that people, the Jews, Israel, that God specially favored, he gave them a special advantage. He appeared to their people. He appeared in pillars of clouds and a pillar of flame. His Shekinah glory was illumined in their temple. He gave them the prophecies. He gave them the law. They had every possible advantage, every blessing. Why you might ask, why just Israel? Why the Jews? God's sovereign elect choice.

Then he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but all of a sudden we begin to understand, and you cannot even begin to grasp how difficult and what is stretch this was for Jews, even Jewish Christians, Jewish believers of this day to grasp that God's Messiah would come for all the people. Not just Israel, not just the Jews, first to them but to the Jews and the Gentiles; that God indeed has his elect from all peoples, tongues, tribes and nations. And we see something of the step over. It was sort of a timing thing. There was a time when Christ began to show his disciples, "My ministry will extend beyond Israel." There was a time when God showed Peter, "Peter, the Gospel is not just for the Jews, it goes beyond the Jews to the Gentiles also." When Paul found out that, "Hey, God is closing this thing to the Jews." They are for the most part rejecting Christ and the Gospel in unbelief and, Paul, dedicated his heart to the Gentiles. First to the Jews but also to the Gentiles.

Let's look at this crossing over, if you will, from Matthew 15, beginning in verse 21,

21 Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is

cruelly demon-possessed." 23 But He [that's Jesus] did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us."

Can you just see the scene there with this frantic shouting screaming woman? "Have mercy on me, Son of David! Have mercy on me!" And they're just trying to get away from her. As a matter of fact, Jesus left the environs of Jerusalem and went to this region at least partially so that he might get some rest, that he might get away from the grind of ministry. But it always found him.

Verse 24,

24 But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

And I believe that's primarily addressed to the disciples who are all, of course, Jews, Israelis, but for the woman too. But look at verse 25,

25 But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread [that's the Jews] and throw it to the dogs" [that's the Gentiles]. 27 But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

What an answer.

28 Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

So this is a Savior for all people. A Savior for all people, but also here there is a powerful treatise on what true faith really looks like.

Now, I want you to real quickly look at Luke 2:10 where the shepherds are keeping their sheep on the hillside and first a singular angel appears and he is so terrifying the Bible says, verse 9, "terribly frightened," but then verse 10, "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people.'" Jews and Gentiles.

Then on your screen this morning, Romans 11:17-24, Paul writing to these Gentiles and says this, "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear." Let me stop right there. The trunk, if you will, and the branches, that's Israel. That's who God chose to

particularly bless, to particularly favor, but then because of unbelief, Paul says, "some of those branches were broken off and you, the wild all of tree, the wild Gentiles, you're outside of that chosen blessing and favor. God has now chosen to graft you in. You weren't originally of the elect, chosen, blessed, advantaged people. That's Israel. But God has chosen now to bring his favor to all peoples and now you, a wild olive tree, can be grafted into the tame olive, but don't be conceited about it," he says. Stay humble and in Jesus' words, "Remember, you're a Gentile dog. Don't get conceited about it. God has just chosen in grace to graft you in and let you get in on it." What a picture.

He continues in Romans 11:22, "Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell," talking about Israel, "severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in." So he says individual Jews can be saved and grafted back in, "for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches," that's Israel, get really converted and say, "Believe on Jesus and be grafted back into God's favor, God's blessed people, his own olive tree?"

Then also, Acts 11:18. Peter has been debating with the religious authorities of Jerusalem and these are believers, these are Christians, but they're having a hard time with actually the Gospel of the Messiah extending outside of Israel and, "When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'"

The angel said to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the peoples." Wow, what a Christmas story that is.

Let's look at this text in detail now back in Matthew 15, and let's just unpack it, if you will, one phrase at a time. Here's this woman, this Canaanite woman who has a daughter who is terribly ill and she comes pleading to Jesus for her daughter's healing. And notice first of all, this woman shows great faith in that she does not challenge Jesus' particular mission. She does not challenge his particular mission. As a matter of fact, in verse 24, look at it there, "He answered and said, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" This woman, this Gentile, this Canaanite woman is crying out for some help and Jesus at first, the text says, he just ignores her, of course, I believe he's testing her faith. Then he says, "Wait a minute, I didn't come to the earth," and I'll put this in, "first to extend my mercies outside of the confines of the people of Israel. I didn't come but for the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Indeed, even he had told his apostles, I believe it's in Matthew 10, "Go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It should be understood that they had the law, they had the prophets, they had the advantages, they had all the types and shadows and different pictures and prophecies of the coming Messiah. They should have recognized the Gospel. They should have turned to him. They should be the easiest ones to reach. "Go first to them." Jesus in a Gentile region, a Canaanite Gentile woman is begging for help and he says, "I didn't come but for those who are of the household of Israel."

Then look at verse, if you will, 26, "He answered and said," he's speaking to her now, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Now, dogs were dirty. Dogs are sometimes despicable. Dogs do things that are just, well, they're gross. Now, you might like to cuddle and kiss your dog on the face but that dog does some nasty stuff. It's just the truth and so when the Jews of old looked at non-Jews as Gentile dogs, it was the most derogatory. "You are outcast from God. You are the most despicable. You are the lowest of the low." And Jesus takes up this phrase. Now, there are those who would argue that this is not the word for a mangy, spray, cur, street dog, this is the name for a little doggy that you keep in your house that's a pet. Well, does that make you feel a lot better? The point is the point: Jesus reiterates the truth of what the Jews had held that these are dirty Gentile dogs. Jesus said, "I can't give the children's food, Israel's food, to the dogs."

Then verse 27a, just the first part now, "But she said, 'Yes, Lord.'" Now, strap that on. She didn't in bitter protest start "Gentile lives matter." Now, don't misunderstand me, there is nothing more unchristian and despicable than there being a bias against someone because of their race or their skin color. That is radically anti-Christian. But in this day, I mean, perhaps if there had been liberal progressives around, they would have been marching against Jesus and protesting everywhere he showed up. But what does she do? She does not challenge his particular mission. He particularly came primarily for Israel. Do you know what she says? "I am a Canaanitish woman. I am a Gentile woman. You said the bread didn't come for me. You said the children's bread can't come to me and I'm not to get even the bread of the children. I'm a dog and here's my response, 'Yes, Lord. Yes. I have no argument.'" You see, in faith she understood the sovereignty and the limited purpose of the Father's will to come first for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It was the Father's good pleasure to send his Son first for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is fully his prerogative and it extends perfectly and beautifully from the righteous excellence and the supreme dignity of his perfect heart to do this.

She, in effect, says, "No, Lord, you did not come for me and I do not ask for that which you have come to give Israel." Humility. You'll find that when a person has true saving faith, their heart begins to be opened to the sovereignty of God, to do what he does in his own will, for his own purposes, and for his own glory, even those things outside our brain's capacity to comprehend. All of this modern-day notion of everybody is equal and everybody should have the same, I'm sorry, the Bible says even God makes the poor and he makes the rich. He has sovereign purposes for the things he does. Do you know what our response should be? Oh, don't misunderstand me, advance yourself, do the best you can for you and your family in the Lord, of course, but at the end of the day, you look at him and say, "I'm better than that guy but he's doing better than I am. And I'm better than that guy and I'm sick and he's healthy." Do you know what you say? You say, "Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord." Like she did. She didn't challenge his particular mission primarily to Israel.

Secondly, she did not challenge his condemnation of herself. She didn't challenge him at all. She just says very simply in verse 27 after he said, "I can't take the children's bread

and throw it to you Gentile dogs," she just says, "Yes, Lord. I accept that evaluation." And when you think about it, pull back from this modern age of the God of self-esteem and the so-called God of everybody is equal and God has to give everybody exactly the same opportunity. And by the way, God has never done that. He has never ever done that either when he favored Israel in the Old Testament or the way some peoples, tribes and nations have Gospel preaching, Bibles and missionaries and pamphlets and literature and then some peoples of the world have almost none of that. I'm sorry, God does not submit to the dictates of the idol of fairness. He is God. He does as he chooses, he does as he pleases and this woman has received this damning condemnation, "You're a Gentile dog," and her only response is, "Yes, Lord."

But why should she have any other kind of response? It is true, the Gentiles did not receive the law, they did not receive the prophets, they did not receive the writings, they did not have the manifestations of the angels and others to reveal God's truth to them. The Gentiles were unenlightened fools. They were bound in sin and darkness. They had no inherent quality that would in any way appease the righteous standards of a holy God. They, the Gentiles, sought not for God. They loved themselves. They loved the world. They loved sin and they loved not God. They were pagan idolaters. They frolicked in unbelief, worshiping animals and plants and demons, and with wanton delight they offended all that God is and all that God stands for. These Gentiles could transgress God's law and sleep well at night. Rightfully and fully, they are dogs, but even less than that, out of respect for dogs, we need to change our narrative here: dogs do not sin against the light of creation and the light of conscience but man does. God has given us the light of creation to let us know there is a God that must be bowed before and honored and sought, the light of conscience. The law, the Bible says, is written in every man's heart and instead of bowing before that law, men try to find pseudo-intellectual ways to get around honoring the conscience God has put in them. We see it all around us. Dogs don't do that. Dogs are dumb beasts but men are willful rebels and traitors before God. Dogs are dumb, they are dirty and they are damned because dogs like every other part of the creation has been affected by the curse. When Adam and Eve sinned, the Bible says a curse is on all of creation and all of it is to be destroyed by the judgment of God. One day it will be.

So if this woman has really come to see herself truly and rightfully before God, then it doesn't bother her to be called a Gentile dog and it shouldn't bother you. And by the way, we don't let the Jews off the hook here. They were by unmerited favor and undeserved choice, they were those people who received the laws and the prophets and the writings and the light of truth, but that doesn't mean in their hearts they were any better people. As Romans 3:9 reminds us, the Jews and the Greeks are all under sin. They are all dirty dogs before this God.

So by calling her a dog, he's pointing out to her her true nature and he's pointing out the true ultimate end that judgment has for her. As I told you before, I'm not trying to hurt your self-esteem this morning, my goal is to obliterate it, to dismantle it, to decimate it, to destroy your so-called self-esteem completely. You know, I've been called to preach the truth and that includes the hard task of turning your thinking right side up. Man-centered

thinking is, "Oh, everybody is good and everybody ought to have this and everybody ought to be equal and everybody is beautiful in their own way." No, you're a bunch of dogs. Your problem is you do not know the Triune and holiness of God. One glimpse of him and "dog" is too positive an affirmation for mankind who spit upon, refuse, brazenly reject, deny, lie about, scheme, put a spin on, every type of truth God tries to give mankind and he does it to his own advantage. We are so man-centered and we are not glory of God focused and God-centered.

You see, nothing would thrill me more than to once and for all rid you of the cursed and damning disease of looking to yourself for esteem. Esteem has the idea of value or worth or high regard but God's desire for us – now listen to me this morning – is to totally forget self and look not to self at all, to turn from any hope or any confidence or any value in yourself. You see, that's the basis of insecurity. When you look to some degree to yourself, yourself always is weak, yourself always fails and therefore your confidence before God is weak and failing. You look outside of yourself. Instead you must look only and you must look fully and you must look joyously to Christ. I mean, we need self-esteem like we need cancer. What we need, what we all need is Christ-esteem.

Now, the secular psychologist would tell us that self-esteem is good for us, it's good for emotional and mental health, and the careless preacher or even the out-and-out false preacher has adopted this very deadly viewpoint. First, they've tried to synchronize psychology with the Gospel message; mix in all of these felt needs and all of these things that man feels like he wants and needs. He wants to feel good about himself, now let's throw a little Gospel around that message and try to make it look like it's Christianity. But, listen, when you attempt to combine the two, Christ leaves the room. He will tolerate no rivals. And when Jesus removes his power from the church, then all you are left with is powerless, helpless psychology which is simply the impotence of mankind dressed up in its Sunday best and they call it Christianity. Powerless, Christ-less psychology is still powerless and Christ-less even when you put religious clothing on it. Even so-called conservative evangelicals get caught up in this lie. How many times have you heard something like, "Well, you must be so valuable and so desirable and so esteemed because God sent his Son for you." That's not the message. The message is: God sent his Son for dogs. That's the message. Today in the name of God, prominent pulpits have all but abandoned true religion and embraced the false religion of self-esteem and we could be at an all-time low, but we, like this Gentile woman, must learn to place all esteem, all value, all hope, and all faith, in Jesus Christ.

So what does she do? She did not challenge his particular mission, "Yes, Lord. I know you came primarily for Israel." She did not challenge his condemning designation of herself, "Yes, before the holy God, yes, I am, I am a wretched dog." Number 3: she shows her great faith because she would not seek help or healing in another. She didn't say, "Well, so much for that great teacher. So much for that promised Messiah. I'll find me a different one that has a higher value or a higher view of me." Look, friend, you do not need a Savior that's got a higher view of you, you need a Savior who is true and who is righteous and who is mighty to save.

She would not seek help in another. Notice what it says in verse 23, "But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, 'Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us.'" She's not going to go away. But why should she go away? I mean, there is no other name that has been given among men whereby you must be saved. There's nowhere else to go. There is one Mediator of a new and better covenant of grace. There is only one sacrifice given for all sin for all time, that's Christ's sacrifice. There is only one Captain of our salvation. There is only one who has the words of eternal life and she simply could not and would not be deterred.

Look at verse 22, "a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began," notice it says "began" because she's continuing "to cry out, saying, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.'" Then verse 25 again, she came and she's more aggressive now, "she began to bow down before Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!'" And then verse 27, she will not be deterred, "Yes, Lord, I am a dog, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." She simply could not be deterred. So this woman bows before the Lord now and she, in effect, correctly says, "No, Lord" – now listen – "No, Lord, I accept that you did not come for me but I have come for you." There are those times, there are those seasons, there are those moments when in the depths of the despicableness and the weakness and the frailty and the vileness of our own heart and our own character, that we come to the conclusion, "I don't know if he would come for me that I've got nowhere else to go. I must go to him." That's where she is. "Lord, I accept. I'm outside of the covenant people, Israel. You did not come for me but I have come for you." What faith. John 6:37 reminds us, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me," and here it is, "and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."

So she says, "Lord, I know the dogs don't get the children's bread but since you called me a little house pet and dog, isn't it true, Lord, that most little dogs get to pick up the crumbs that fall off the table?" Maybe she did understand that though God's favored blessings came to Israel, that occasionally God let some of the little crumbs fall off out of Israel into other people's lands. He sent Jonah to the Ninevites, Gentiles, and Jonah preached the truth. They got some crumbs. He let Ruth, the Moabitess, a Gentile, marry into the household of Boaz and be grafted in, if you will. She got some crumbs. Rahab the harlot helped the spies in their searching out the conquest of the Promised Land and she was favored, a Gentile harlot, even. She got some crumbs. Who knows, perhaps this lady knows her Bible.

You see, there are times – listen, are you listening to your pastor this morning? There are times when you've got to take the word of God and you've got to go to God with it and say, "This is what you said." And she, in effect, is doing that. "I am a dirty Gentile dog before you, the holy one of God. I deserve nothing. But isn't it true that you have been known to give the dogs some crumbs? I don't want the bread you've chosen for others. I'm not here to debate and argue if I'm of equal value just because I'm from a different racial background. I'm not there. I'm on a spiritual plane. I'm not talking about that nonsense. I know what I am and if you choose to favor others over me, that's fine, but I'm just saying do not the dogs at least get some crumbs?"

You see, this lady seemed to understand what far too many today fail to see: she grasped in faith a glorious diamond of truth. She discovered the secret, the secret some of you need to grasp more tightly to or discover wholly for yourself. What is that secret? It's this: forgetting completely herself, she looked to Christ. She didn't try to say, "I'm worth something." She said, "I'm a dog but you're worth something. You, Jesus, are worth something. I'm not worth anything but, Jesus, you are."

You see, so many of you even sitting here today think, "Well, my sins are too great. I don't have enough joy. My faith is too weak. I do not repent like I ought to. I don't pray enough." But every one of those things is looking inside you and not at him. When you look inside you, do you know what you find? A dog. But when you look at him, you find something. All of those things are looking within, it's self idolatry. Look, friend, look not to the hand that grasped Christ, just look at Christ. Look not at your hold on Christ. That is not what saves you, it is Christ that saves you. It is not your joy that saves you, it is not your prayers that saves you, it is not your repentance that saves you, it's not even your faith that saves you though that be the conduit, it is Christ that saves you. So don't look at hope, look at the source of hope. Don't look at joy, look at the source of joy. Don't look at faith, look at the author and the finisher of faith. It is what Jesus is, not what we are, that gives rest to our souls. Focus your eye on him, that his life, his death, his sufferings, his merit, his resurrection, his ever faithful intercession for you in heaven, that all of his glories ever be fresh on your mind. When you wake in the morning, look at him. When you lie down at night, look at him. And if you sin hard, yes, look at him.

"I'm the lowest of dogs, but I'm looking to you." This woman asked just for a crumb that falls off the children's table. Oh, but a crumb of his love has more liberating power than a whole world of sin has power to enslave. A crumb of his grace has more cleansing power than a galaxy of sin has power to stain. A crumb of his mercy has more pardoning power than a world of sin has power to condemn. And a crumb of his life has more quickening and life-giving power than all the powers of death, hell and the grave combined. She found that grace in her faith response and her daughter was healed.

What a faith this woman had. She didn't question his particular mission, "Yes, you came primarily for Israel. I don't protest that. You are a sovereign God, do what you want. I am a Gentile dog and that's probably a compliment. Yes, Lord, I accept what I am before you. And Lord, though I accept that you did not primarily come from me, I want you to know something, Lord, I have come for you and I'm not leaving without you." And that's the way you need to approach Jesus Christ. "I'm grabbing a hold of you and no matter how despicable sometimes I feel and think that I am, I'm still not as low as you know me to be and you came to die for me. I'm holding to you. I'm holding to you."

Now, one little final note here. The Bible says Jesus is in the region of Tyre and Sidon. Now, Ezekiel 26 through 28 tells us that Tyre and Sidon were the lowest of the low. The judgments and condemnations uttered against Tyre and Sidon were the worst of all. I mean, the Jews would have held the Gentiles for this reason are double bad, accursed, abandoned from God type peoples. This would have been the last place of all the Gentiles

where they would have expected their Master to open up his arms of grace and minister to any of them and help them.

You see, but these disciples are learning and this woman learned it's not the place but grace that makes you a child of God. I mean, you can be from a preacher's family and grow up to have a hardened, bitter, unbelieving heart. And then again, like this woman, you may be lost in the darkness of sin, you might live in the wrong house, on the wrong side of town, on the wrong side of the tracks. You might be like one of our young ladies told us some years ago who had been gloriously converted and she said, "Pastor, my earliest childhood memory, just a little child, is sitting in our den and seeing my mom and dad and who knows who else those other people were, all passed out from drug and alcohol abuse." That's her earliest childhood memory. You might be from the wrong house, the wrong family, on the wrong side of the tracks, and you might think naturally speaking, "I have nothing to offer," but don't despair. Do not despair because the darkness of your place is no match for the light of his grace. Grace can save even you if you'll turn to him.

"Behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people." You might dwell on the coast of Tyre and Sidon but through the matchless grace of Jesus Christ, you can sit down in the kingdom of heaven. That's the Gospel. And by the way, that's the Christmas message. "Come, you sinners, seek his grace, whose wrath you cannot bear. Flee to the shelter of the cross and find salvation there."

Let's just sit where we are and pray this morning for a moment.