

Matthew Chapter 15 v 21 28

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[0 : 00] After the last time I was here two years ago, I had on my computer a picture of your beautiful town.

It was panoramic picture. I was on one of those high spots. And every day I open my computer and I see Whitby there with Captain Cook with this arch.

And so your church, because of this wonderful picture that God allowed me to make on my cell phone made your church very special to me.

I don't know you all. I know very few people here. But I have sense that we must have something in common if you invited me a second time to come.

So because of that, I was thinking, what can I preach here? Last time I just shared with you a little bit about our ministry in Ukraine.

[1 : 22] And now we will together look into the scripture. And I thought that maybe you, like me, you like these special stories that are at the beginning not so obvious.

Like you read them and you understand that there is some, must be some important truth that is not obvious on the first time when you read it.

Sometimes you read, sometimes I read it second, third, ten times. More than that, I still cannot get it. I remember my father taught me that if you cannot understand something in the Bible, it's very difficult for you.

Then just let it stay there and come again later. And sometimes God will open it to you. So I want today to share with you one of those intriguing stories.

We all heard it. It's written twice in the Bible. First time it's written when we read Gospel of Matthew in chapter 15.

[2 : 30] And second time it is in the Gospel of Mark in chapter 7. And when you read the stories in both places, they kind of help to see those details and see the whole perspective, the whole panoramic view on this story.

I also learned last week that this Sunday some people in England celebrate as Mothering Day or Mother's Day.

And we all had mothers, I'm sure. And I'm pretty sure that we all have very special feelings about our mothers. I have still my mother alive back in Kiev.

She is ill. And before I came here, she was for a long time already on the bed. She said, well, I don't know, maybe we will not see each other again.

And I said, of course we will, my mom, my mother. We will see each other for sure. If not here, then in the heaven. But it was kind of special because she never said this word before.

[3 : 35] For her, England is almost like for us maybe to fly to the moon very, very far away. So she, I know, as mothers worry about me. And so we read this story about this mother who was, we read, Canaanite.

And Canaanite, in fact, it's interesting. It's not like British or Scottish or Ukrainian or American. It's more like one of those words that we don't use because it would be politically incorrect even to say. We know some of them. We know when some people from one nation call people of another nation of those words, it means that we don't appreciate that nation.

It's not good nation. People of that nation, of that particular place, they are not good people. And it could be truth. It could be that in history there were some problems.

But we know in our time, we know that to say this word about people of another nation is not only politically incorrect. It's also theologically incorrect.

[4 : 43] It's also wrong from perspective of the Bible. We do know that. We know about that especially because we learned something from the event of the last big war that England as much

as, or in many ways similar to Ukraine, also suffered so much.

So because of all of that, it is really strange and intriguing why Jesus behaved in this foreign country where he came to Tyre and Sidon, Vicente, like that.

Why he usually so compassionate, so loving, so eager to help is silent. Why he said that when this mother came and says to him something about her daughter.

Actually, here we were at little daughter, but little in that time has something to do with what we now call be little, or not just little, but it could be grown up, but still it would be special.

It's rather dear one, my special daughter. So Matthew gives us this picture.

[6 : 18] Jesus left his home country, Galilee, and went to this pagan country where the enemies, old enemies, many centuries ago there already were enemies, Canaanites.

They were pushed by Israel up to the north, but they still were always source of threat. We can think about Queen Jezebel, who was big threat for the people of Israel many, many years ago.

And her influence still was connected with these people from Canaanites. And we can go, continue on and on.

So Jesus comes to this place, and here is this Greek or Syrophenician woman, enemy, Canaanite woman, comes.

And Jesus is kind of deaf. He is rude. He doesn't answer. Disciples begin to talk to him.

[7 : 31] Well, whatever reason you're silent, maybe you can do something because she is annoying for us. She is crying too much.

And they may remember recently there was something similar. They went to another country, which was the country filled with unclean people.

For Jewish people, for Jewish people even now, but at that time even much more, to be in close connection with pagan people, with those who are not properly believers, it was wrong because they were unclean.

So good teachers of the Bible would not go to those areas, would not go to Tyre and Sidon, but they also even less would go to the place that in the Bible is called, in the same Gospels in Mark and Matthew, called the other side.

Remember when Jesus told disciples, let's go to the other side. And they took a boat and they went to the other side of Galilean Lake, Galilean Sea.

[8 : 54] And disciples were at that time, that was the first time when Jesus said, let's go to this territory of unclean people. They were really shocked.

What? What? What do we will do there? And surely enough, when they came to the other side, there were two demon-possessed, according to Matthew, men.

And Jesus healed them. He cast out those demons. Nobody asked him anything. So disciples now say, we don't know why he cannot help this woman.

Would you do something about it? And Jesus tells them something strange. There is one puzzle on another. Because he is saying, no, I am sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.

Like, I don't have enough time, or power, or desire. What's going on? You help those two men.

[10 : 05] Now there is another word that we hear. Misogynist, if I'm correct. Person who doesn't like women. Is Jesus not only racist, rude, harsh, maybe he doesn't like women?

And so all these puzzles come to us when we read this particular story, and we are kind of struggling. I am struggling with this story. What's going on? But there is another question that we still need to see in this story.

We know how it ends. It ends well, isn't it? It doesn't. Jesus helped answer the request of these women. And he also said that she has great faith.

And it's still strange. What is great about her faith? You know, sometimes when we read story by itself, it is almost like impossible to find answers from story itself unless we go to the broader picture, unless we go to the context and see what's going on in this bigger picture.

And so if we read this chapter 15 of Matthew from the beginning, we see that this story follows another very important story which also has to do with some sort of issue of cleanness and uncleanness.

[11 : 37] It was still in safe ground where good people can meet each other. And so there were some good people from Jerusalem who came.

Not simply good people. They were scholars of the Bible. They were theologians. They knew all commentaries of the Bible up to date at that time.

All these explanations how to understand and how to practice what we read in the Bible. And so being learned, being, they are scribes and Pharisees.

They came to Jesus and they said, teacher, we noticed something. And we think that you need to pay attention to what we noticed.

Your disciples, they did something really unbiblical. They ate, but they didn't wash their hands before they ate.

[12 : 45] And Jesus was just outraged. He was really harsh with Pharisees and scribes who came to him with that theological position.

He said, you missed something very important in the Bible. You follow all these traditions and rules, but something really deep, really something what you need to pay attention, you missed.

And we know, we know that in the Old Testament, there are so many rules about how to be clean.

How to be clean when you go to the presence of the Lord. When you go to the temple, you have to approach approach to this big bath and wash not only your hands but all your body.

And you need to be really prepared for that. You cannot touch anything unclean. And all of that was visual aid for people who studied the scripture in those ancient times when the temple was there.

Visual aid to think about how holy our God is so that when we approach him, we need to be prepared. We cannot just take it for granted.

[14 : 08] But these champions of Bible knowledge, they understood Bible differently.

They thought that by becoming, by cleansing themselves, by doing all these rules, fulfilling all these rules, they can become clean.

So they don't need God. They don't need Jesus. They can save themselves. And so Jesus said that you look on what other people do with their hands, but you don't look into the heart.

And it is heart which is important. You cannot approach God with unclean heart. And when he begins to talk about heart, heart, we don't see that they had any desire to continue conversation.

They kind of withdraw. They didn't want to be exposed. But Jesus explained his disciples what is really important.

[15 : 25] that it is not up to us to make ourselves clean. It is up to God. And we need to know who he is and what grace and power he has.

So this was the first part of the chapter. And so immediately after this story, we read the story how Jesus comes to unclean territory.

And by the way, at that time, scholars of the Bible, scribes and Pharisees, they also made some conclusions.

They knew that the Bible says that there is in the temple, there is a territory that is forbidden for pagan people to come in.

And so they put two things together and they said, okay, it means that pagan people are unclean.

And so if we touch them, if we have fellowship with them, if we eat with them, if we talk with them, then we ourselves will be unclean.

[16 : 35] So no connections with people who are not us. and Jesus does precisely what they thought was wrong.

He goes to the unclean territory. So we understand that this whole story is about issue of being clean and unclean.

And when we look on this woman and compare here with this man, woman who was Canaanite, who was unclean according to the men from Jerusalem, from the temple, from the seminary in Jerusalem who studied the Bible, scribes, we see there is an important difference between them.

And this difference is especially clear in this translation of the Bible that I have with me. It's what it's English standard version.

So I think it must be good. And we read it again a few verses from 23rd.

[18 : 00] But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him saying, send her away for she is crying out after us.

He answered, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But she came and knelt before him saying, Lord, help me. And he answered, it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

And she said, yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table.

There are two things that happened when she answered Jesus. When she heard that Jesus called her a dog.

Did you hear? He called her dog? Well, he, he, of course, he draws a picture. He draws a picture that would be familiar to people at that time.

[19 : 00] There is a table and the family around the table and the father is presiding in the table and he eats and he gives food that he eats to his children.

And children eat. And so he is saying it is, it would be wrong to take the food that belongs to the children and give it to dogs.

And she understands Jesus called me dog, dog. And you know how she answers? She says, yes, Lord.

She agrees. She understands. Not like those men from Jerusalem. And this is something really, really important just before us.

This humble heart who understands that Jesus is not a racist. He is not misogynist. He is good theologian.

[20 : 06] And she being Greek pagan, she intuitively fills this theology. She understands that Jesus says, you are unclean.

You are not, you don't have place around the table. And she knows, yes. Like everyone, like no one of us can sit around the table.

And so when she said, yes, Lord, that was her admission, that was her repentance. But it was not full story, because it was not the end.

she didn't go away just thinking, well, I'm not worthy. I know that I'm wrong.

I'm not clean. I cannot sit at the table. But she said, but, yet, this is short word in the original, in the gospel, in Greek, which is precisely that.

[21 : 22] Yes, Lord, but, yet, even dogs, they can be fed. There is food for everyone.

You know what is ironic? It's really ironic, because just before this story, in chapter 15, or in Mark, in chapter 7, there is another story where Jesus feeds 5,000 people with, you know, how many bread, loaves of bread?

Five. So, one loaf of bread, one little bread for 1,000 people. How many crumbs would be enough to feed one person?

And, there is another story after this story where Jesus repeats the same miracle again. it's almost like the gospel keeps telling us Jesus has enough bread for everyone.

We know that he himself is bread of life. And so, this woman, this Canaanite woman, she said, yes, Lord, but I know that there is enough grace for me too.

[22 : 32] This is true repentance. This is not just for us to say that, yeah, I know I'm wrong, I know that I'm not worthy, and there is another kind of another side of pride.

One side of pride is pride of those Pharisees from Jerusalem when they think that they have done everything, but there is another one when we say, no, I'm so bad, I don't have any way to be better, and it's another pride.

It's disbelief that Christ has enough grace for everyone, love, and this mother, she knew that Christ has enough love, enough power, enough grace to give it to unworthy woman like herself, and this is why Jesus said, immediately, instantly, no pause, Jesus answered her, oh woman, great is your faith, be it done for you as you desire, and her daughter was healed instantly.

there are other stories in the Bible, it's not the only one, that teaches us the same lesson. It's amazing how much God's power is released when we truly repent before God, when we know that we are not worthy, but we also hold with boldness for his grace.

one of those stories is in the Old Testament, in the book of Isaiah, chapter 6, when God is calling future prophet Isaiah for the ministry, and he said, no, I am men with unclean mouth, and I live among unclean people, and as soon as he says this word, it's like lightning, angel comes to him, and gives him what he needs to heal him, to give him strength, to clean his mouth.

[24 : 43] There is another stories like that in the New Testament, story which we can read in Luke chapter 15. It's about that man who left his father, and who lived wrongly in a distant country, and when he realized that he has nothing left, he thinks about his father, and he thinks about his father's table, and he remembers that even servants, even slaves, have enough food around the table, and he suffers with nothing.

And so he goes back, and he meets his father, and first words that he says, he says, I know that I'm not worthy, I know that I cannot sit around the table, and instantly as he does it, his father runs towards him, hugs him, kisses him, invites him, sits him, gives him space, special place around the

table, gives him good clothes.

God's power and God's grace is ready for us always to be released, when only we know the secret that this woman, Canaanite woman, knew.

Double truth. On the one hand, she knew that she is not worthy, and the other hand, she knew that God has mercy and grace for us all.

I think many examples in my own life, and I'm sure that everyone here would add your own story. I know how sometimes it is difficult in family life, when I know that I'm right and my spouse is wrong, and I'm not talking particularly about my own family, but yes, I am.

[26 : 58] And until I understand that I'm not worthy of my spouse, of my wife, there is no life, there is no possibility for us to live together as a family and to be good example for our children and to love each other.

It looks like family is only then family when both spouses and also children, they know that they are not worthy.

Not that we don't have our worth as humans in the image of God, but we cannot claim our right on the other person respect, love.

But as soon as we realized it, the love of another person is pouring to us. The same example is among friends, among countries.

As soon as someone says my country is first, and I was not intending to give you a political sermon, but we know how then it is difficult for that country to live with other countries.

[28 : 08] people are not in the country. This is an amazing principle that God gave us with his gospel.

And this is really the gospel. The gospel goes much deeper than just politics or family or social life. The gospel goes to that center, to that depthness, that we only little can appreciate, but we're so happy that God opened to us even that little that we can appreciate.

I'm talking about our Savior, Jesus Christ, because we know that it is precisely to give us right to sit around the table with his father.

he came to the earth to become a dog. Like scripture says, that he became nothing.

He emptied himself. We didn't see in him anything that would be worthy for us to appreciate him.

This is what Jesus has done for us.

[29 : 27] This is the gospel. And when he did it, that was instant power that empowered us all for the rest of eternity.

I'm thinking about our ministry back in Kiev. And I'm not saying it was with any attempt to put us on special place.

But I think that in many ways, ministry of our churches, ministry of our missions, ministry of realism, was successful only when we were realizing that we are not worthy.

We cannot do much. But we knew that God has grace, that he provides his grace for everyone. God has done.

I think it happened even in the scale of the whole country. And again, it's not political sermon, but it was very much political thing.

[30 : 34] In fact, I think that the Bible is very much political book, if we understand it correctly. In fact, in the university, one of our master's programs is called Sociopolitical Ethic and Theology.

In fact, how can we not think about Bible being a political book if we know that Christ is our king, and he is king of kings, and that he is our representative?

The whole politics is about having someone who represents others, and we are blessed people, because our king represents us.

And that was a very difficult time in Ukraine, very difficult time four years ago, four years and a few months, when people gathered together in downtown of Kiev, the square which is known as Maidan, it's Ukrainian word for square, that holds more than a million people.

And so in some weekends, there were a million people and more. Some people say probably much more than one million people. But in any given day, there were hundreds of thousands, or at least dozens of thousands, people day and night.

[31 : 59] Why they were there during those several months, four years ago, in winter cold months? people were there because they realized they cannot live anymore with the government that can be so violent, that doesn't appreciate any other mind, any other perspectives.

these people went there because corrupted president who was twice in jail by the time. He ordered police to make bloodshed with students who gathered before that in Maidan and they had their own protest.

But something really interesting happened at the time. Because first thing, what people who gathered there did, they called pastors and priests and they asked to pray for them.

So there were several groups of believers and I was with one of the groups there and that was big tents right in the middle with a cross and we were there always praying and ready to talk with people.

And then because people first gathered they thought that it would be just for one few days but definitely was longer. So in months these people asked us pastors and priests to pray twice a day in the morning and in the evening.

[33 : 33] And so we had this opportunity to pray publicly pray and preach sometime. And it became even more intense when first people were killed by police.

So there was every Sunday when all people would make some decisions and someone would go forward a politician someone and would say what do you think about this or about that?

So there was someone who said I want to make a proposal. We have this difficult time. Let us pray every hour. And everyone voted yes. So hundreds of thousand people wanted to have every hour starting with a prayer.

There was a prayer and national anthem at the beginning of every hour. Then after three months there was a very hard three days. My wife and I was there during the first of those three days when more than hundreds of people were killed.

And when those hard times came these people said now we need non-stop prayer. So there was a prayer that was going through the amplifier and there was one of the TV stations that always was producing through internet sometimes through TV what was going on.

[34 : 57] And there was and for the last three days there was non-stop prayer. So people were suffering people were killed but the prayer was going on.

And I think I believe that what happened there when people publicly in Maidan in Ukraine kneeled during those hard days even though all these people didn't know they don't know what we do know but they were like that Canaanite woman.

They knew something. They knew that they are not worthy and they knew that God has grace. And so these miracles that we have now when university invited us to teach there I think it is because of that humbleness because gospel is working.

I'm not saying that Ukraine now is a special country and it will be forever. Of course we know until God will come back we will go ups and downs. But this is a very special lesson that I think is a contemporary lesson of the same sort that we read on this mother's evening.

And so with this understanding of God's grace I call you all now give thanks to the Lord to tell him with one heart that we are not worthy but we so much appreciate that he came to us so that we can sit around his table.

[36 : 46] Let's pray. God our heavenly father we thank you that you are the same God as we read in the Bible who did so many miracles who did so many wonderful things.

Sometimes we don't understand. understand. We don't understand and we're trying to understand you what you are doing among us. But we thank you that you give us this special blessing to understand the most important thing your grace and your power.

we give your praise and glory of God Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Let's sing together as we bring our time of worship this evening to a close. Number 605 a very fitting hymn after what we've just been thinking of a debtor to mercy alone.

we recognize that we are not worthy and we are so indebted to the mercy and the grace of our God. It's all of him, all of his grace, all of his goodness.

[38 : 13] And 605, let's stand as we sing.