

Knowing God's Will through God's Word

August 16, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Matthew:

The Gospel according to Matthew is written by Matthew (Levi), a Jewish tax collector who became one of Jesus' disciples. This Gospel forms the connecting link between the Old and New Testament because of its emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy. The purpose of the writing of this Gospel was to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the eternal King and it was written especially to the Jews probably between AD 60-65. A key verse of this Gospel is: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (5:17). Some of the special features of this Gospel are: Matthew is filled with Messianic language ('Son of David' is used throughout) and Old Testament references (53 quotes and 76 other references); this Gospel was not written as a chronological account but that its purpose was to present the clear evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior.

– Adapted from The Life Application Bible, p. 1636.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Matthew 15:21-28 NRSV

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 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’ 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 instantly.

Commentary:

Taken as a realistic report, the story raises difficult and inappropriate questions. Why is Jesus so harsh and offensive to this person? Does she finally best him in an argument and get him to do something he did not want to do? How did a Gentile come to have faith in Jesus as “Son of David”? What would it mean for someone to have (Christian!) faith in this setting? Does Jesus here already rescind his declaration of 10:6, so that the mission to the Gentiles is already opened by this act?

Such questions only demonstrate that the genre of the story is misconstrued when taken as a “report,” from which the observer may make historical inferences. Rather, the woman emerges from the story and disappears again into it, to embody and communicate three Matthean points concerning the meaning of God’s saving history and the meaning of human faith.

1. God has a plan for salvation history in which salvation is offered first to Jews (during Jesus’ ministry, 10:5-6; 15:24) then broadened to include all nations after Easter (28:16-20). This story is a preliminary sign of what is to be. Like the kingdom of God, which is to come in its fullness only in the future, it already erupts into the present.
2. Worshipful struggle with God is not unbelief, but here pronounced to be great faith. The contrast between her “great faith” and Peter’s “little faith” only a few verses earlier can hardly be accidental (14:31). Had the woman said something like “If you are the Son of David, command my daughter to be healed,” she would be in the same category as Peter, even if she had dared to proceed homeward on the assumption that the exorcism had taken place. Matthew has much to teach us on the nature of faith. We tend to assume we know what faith is, our main problem being that we do not have enough of it. Matthew’s stories address our false assumptions about the meaning of faith itself.
3. It should not be lost that the example of such victorious faith is a Gentile woman, doubly an outsider. But the text should not thereby be embellished

and placed in the service of an ideology, as though the Canaanite is an aggressive single parent who here defies cultural taboos and acts to free Jesus from his sexism and racism by catching him in a bad mood or with his compassion down, besting him in an argument and herself becoming the vehicle of his liberation and deliverance of her daughter. Rather, the story serves to challenge the sexism and racism of readers, ancient and modern, who tend to consider those of different gender and ethnicity as “the other,” somehow more distant from God and the divine order and plan than our own group. Readers, ancient and modern, tend to identify with Jesus and his affirmation of God’s order and plan. The story invites readers to place themselves in the role of the other, to struggle not only with God but also with our own perceptions of the other, and pronounces such enduring struggle to be great faith.

– Adapted from The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol VIII, pp. 337-8.

This week we are looking at Knowing God’s Will through God’s Word. As we go through life we desire to know God’s will for ourselves either for having direction in life or for making decisions in certain situations or we desire to know God’s will for others or for circumstances around us. This may be quite true in the present time that all of us are going through. God guides us and reveals his will in various ways but the most sure and reliable way is through God’s word, the Bible, by reading and studying it.

However, it’s not always easy to understand what we read in the Bible and there are several parts and passages that we find hard to agree with or accept as being God’s word itself, let alone believe it to be his will. One such passage is what we are looking at in Matthew 15:21-28 where we do not find the Jesus that we are familiar with. Here we may find Jesus coming across to be uninterested to help the woman with her problem and even coming across to be bordering on being disrespectful to her. But on the other hand we may not understand what God is wanting to show us because of the way we often approach God and God’s word. Often we go to God in prayer and reading the Bible with our own pre-conceived ideas or ego, our desired expectations, and based on our past experiences. As a result, we are not able to understand what is God’s word for us and what is God’s will being revealed through it.

There is much that we can learn with regard to approaching God and his word from this Gentile woman and the way she came to Jesus with her request for healing for her daughter. Matthew is not simply reporting an incident that took

place in the life and ministry of Jesus when here on earth. Rather, even as Matthew through his Gospel account shows Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior, here he has the purpose of contrasting between this Gentile woman and the Jewish religious leaders mentioned in the previous passage. The contrast is made between the attitude of great humility and faith in Jesus of this person who was a Gentile and therefore in those times as equated by Jews to dogs, outsiders to the chosen people of God, impure, and also being a woman to be seen as second-class in society then, to the attitude of pride and self-righteousness and no faith in Jesus of the Jewish religious leaders. With this we see Matthew progressing through his Gospel account showing how the mission of God's salvation through Christ, meant initially for the Jews during Jesus' earthly ministry and then to be opened up to Gentiles after his resurrection and ascension, is already begun to be given by Jesus to Gentiles like this believing woman, although not considered 'clean' or 'pure' by the cynical Pharisees. In the larger picture, the good news of God's salvation is given to all who will have faith in Jesus, no matter who they are or where they come from and this was and is God's plan always (Gen. 12:3; Ps. 22:27; Is. 56:7; Matt. 28:19; Rom. 15:9-12).

When we approach God and God's word with openness and humility to receive his guidance for what we seek, and not on the basis of any righteousness or right of our own, we will then receive the revealing of God's will for what we seek answers for and although it may come to in a way we don't expect, we will certainly understand it, be personally convinced by it, and find peace. It is not our external observances or our own selves but inward faith and preparedness to honor God from our hearts that will ultimately bring us God's grace and blessing.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

1. With what pre-conceived ideas or ego, desired expectations, and past experiences do we approach God and God's word when we seek to know his will?
2. Like the disciples who were wanting Jesus to send the woman away because she was disturbing them, is it possible to help needy people because of finding them to be causing us inconvenience rather than for the reason of being compassionate and sensitive to their needs? Is it possible to be so occupied with spiritual matters that we miss real needs right around us?
3. Is there any prejudice in our hearts towards any person or group of people like the way the Jewish religious leaders have toward Gentiles?

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Matthew 15:27-28 NRSV
²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' 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 instantly.
3. Prayerfully approach God with sincere humility and seek to engage with God's word regularly and systematically with inward faith and preparedness to honor God so as to know God's will for your life situations.