

"Are You In or Out?"
A sermon preached at Heritage Presbyterian Church
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Romans 10:5-10
Matthew 15:21-28

Romans 10

⁵Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” ⁶But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷“or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

Matthew 15

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just 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.” ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” ²⁴He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” ²⁶He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷She 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.

I. Introduction

I love to read, and I loved Robin Williams as an actor and a voice actor, so it should come as no surprise that one of my favorite Disney movies that I watched when Tyler was my young son was the animated movie "Aladdin," which adapted however loosely a book I enjoyed reading in my youth, "1001 Arabian Nights." The movie came out in 1992, three years before Tyler was born, so Tyler and I watched it on a VCR or a DVD player - I can't remember which 😞. If Wikipedia dot org can be trusted, it was "the [highest-grossing film of 1992](#) with an earning of over \$504 million in worldwide box office revenue. Upon release, it became the first animated feature to reach the half-billion-dollar mark and was the [highest-grossing animated film of all time](#) until it was surpassed by *The Lion King* (1994)" ([Aladdin \(1992 Disney film\) - Wikipedia](#), accessed 16 August 2023).

"Aladdin" spawned a TV series and a couple of sequels, one of which was "Aladdin and the King of Thieves" which was released in 1996. Created as a direct-to-video piece, "Aladdin and the King of Thieves" was not nearly as successful as "Aladdin" was, selling about "10.3 million units" in the US and generating more than \$130 million in sales revenue ([Aladdin and the King of Thieves - Wikipedia](#), accessed 16 August 2023) - a far cry from the \$500 million that the first movie earned.

I mention these movies because the second one is the one from which this morning's sermon title is derived. The main antagonist, Sa'Luk - voiced by Jerry Orbach of "Law and

Order" fame - sings a 2-minute song that asks his co-conspirators whether they are "in or out" with him. Part of that song includes the following lyrics (**Slide2**, set for the lyrics only and to automatically play when the slide is clicked):

Are you in or out?
Gotta know without a doubt
I'm the one you need for a dirty deed
I'm the best, success is guaranteed
Are you men or mice?
Take a slice of my advice!
You want a fearless leader, one that's strong and stout?
Better vote for me
Are you in or out?

We'll see in a moment how that question will help us respond to our Scripture lessons this morning.

II. Pivot to Matthew

Our passage from Matthew 15 is both short and troublesome. One commentator introduces the passage with the following sentence: "The narrative (~~especially in its Matthean form, where Jesus' negative attitude is more emphatic and harsher than in Mark~~) causes understandable concern to many readers,¹¹ as Jesus appears insensitive and downright rude not only in his refusal to act but also in speaking of Gentiles as 'dogs' and implying that they can expect no consideration from him as the Jewish Messiah" (France NICNT 590; FN 11 cites Beare's commentary which uses language like "brutal," "offensive," "the worst kind of chauvinism," "incredible insolence," "atrocious" [Beare 342-43]).

(**slide3**) Interestingly enough, the passage does not start that way nor stay that way. We read in verse 21a that "Jesus left that place," just as he had done previously in Matthew 12 ("But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. When Jesus became aware of this, he departed," 12:14-15)

and 14 ("Now when Jesus heard this [that John the Baptist had been beheaded], he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself," 14:13). What place did Jesus just leave? That isn't 100% clear, because the gospel writers, including Matthew, aren't always concerned with providing the details that pique our curiosity, but the last named place in Matthew is Gennesaret (Matt 14:34 [so Newman and Stine, UBS Handbook 492; Hagner WBC 13B: 440 (who also notes, "Gennesaret was the last place mentioned [14:34], but there is no necessity to hold that the events of 15:1-20 also occurred there"); Harper Collins Study Bible]). If, then, Jesus left Gennesaret following the confrontation and conflict with the Jewish religious leaders over hand washing and unclean foods, what he did wasn't unusual in the slightest based on Matthew's narrative to this point.

What was unusual was what ensued. He departs "to the district (εἰς τὰ μέρη; elsewhere only Matt 2:22; 16:13; Mark 8:10; Tobit 8:3 [longer version based on Codex Sinaiticus]) of Tyre and Sidon" (verse 21b). So if you look on the map, you will see Tyre and Sidon in the upper part next to the words "Jesus travels to Caesarea Philippi," and if you trace the red line back to the right, you will see that it lands on Gennesaret. The names Tyre and Sidon may be familiar to you because Matthew has already used them in chapter 11:21-22: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you" (|| Luke 10:13-14; interestingly, the reference to Tyre and Sidon in Mark 3:8 || Luke 6:17 is not present in Matthew). Plus, those two places are often associated together in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Josh 19:28-29 [note that the name "Sidon the great" (צִידֹן הַגְּדוֹלָה) is simply a variant for Sidon]; 2 Sam 24:6-7; 1 Kings 5:1-6; Jer 25:22; 27:3; 6), and not always positively. In Jeremiah 47:4, Jeremiah proclaims that the day is coming "to destroy all the Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Sidon every helper that remains" (see also Isaiah 23; Ezekiel 27; 28; Joel 3:4; Zech 9:2). So when Jesus walks "about thirty to fifty

miles" (Newman and Stine, UBS Handbook 492; Hill, NCBC 253) to get from Gennesaret to the district or area or region in which Tyre and Sidon are located, he arrived at a predominantly Gentile area, and one that wasn't necessarily famous in the good sense of that term.

(slide4) That's the context for the excruciating conversation we read about in verses 22-27, a conversation that definitely doesn't show Jesus at his best (Beare, Matthew 343, rightly notes that "the attitude attributed to Jesus in this atrocious saying of verse 26 is completely out of keeping with everything else that is reported of him"). When he arrives in the Tyre-Sidon area, something completely unexpected happens (The introductory "Just then" in verse 22, καὶ ἰδοὺ, is a literary device that directs the reader's attention to something new and unexpected that is about to happen [see, e.g., Newman and Stine UBS Handbook 492 ("a frequently used attention getter"); Hagner WBC 13B:440 ("calls attention to the remarkable occurrence")]. It does not carry the temporal connotation given it by the NRSV translation). A woman - and a Canaanite woman at that! - comes to Jesus, shouting and saying "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon" (verse 22). That is a remarkable event indeed. Each element of the woman's cry has echoes elsewhere in the gospel of Matthew. "Have mercy" is used by two blind men in Matt 9:27 and Matt 20:30-31, and by the father of an epileptic child in Matt 17:15. In each case, the one who is suffering is healed without any hesitation on Jesus' part (Matt 9:28-30a [When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." ²⁹Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." ³⁰And their eyes were opened]; Matt 17:17b-18 [Bring him here to me." ¹⁸And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly]; Matt 20:32-34 [Jesus stood still and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³³They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." ³⁴Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him]). She calls Jesus "Lord, Son of David," the same address to Jesus by the two blind men in Matt 20:30-31. And her daughter, who is "tormented by a demon" is suffering from something that Jesus heals all the time in Matthew (4:24; 8:16; 8:28-32; 9:33; 12:22-23; 17:18). And so we would expect Jesus to show

compassion to the Canaanite woman, to ask her what she wants Jesus to do, and for Jesus to do it, acknowledging the importance of her faith to his miraculous healing.

(slide5) That's not what happens here. Instead, verse 23 tells us that Jesus "did not answer her at all." Did that stop the Canaanite woman from begging for help from the one she calls "Lord, Son of David"? Not at all. In fact, she continues crying for help to such an extent that the disciples get involved in an equally inexcusable way when they "came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us'" (verse 23). How hard is that for us to imagine? So let's say that your son or daughter struggles with, say, math, and has, say, a certain tall Asian dude for their math teacher. We're working on solving equations or finding the area of a circle, and your child doesn't get it, so they raise their hand and say, "Can you help me with this problem?" and the tall Asian dude just ignores them. They ask a second and a third and a fourth time, and they continue to be ignored. Finally, the class TA goes to the teacher and says, "Tell them to leave class because they won't stop asking questions." Is that the way you'd want your child to be treated by a math teacher? How about the school nurse? Your child starts complaining about some pain in their stomach and they are ignored, no matter how long or how loud they complain, and then the principal walks in and says, "You are making too much noise. Please step outside so we can have some peace and quiet in here." I'm going to guess that most of you wouldn't agree with the math teacher, the school nurse, or the principal.

But that's exactly what is happening here, and that is what makes things so incongruous with the Jesus that heals the sick and the demon possessed elsewhere in Matthew.

(slide6) Now, you might think that when the disciples come and urge Jesus to send the woman away, he might come to his senses. But he actually ups the ante, as it were. He

answered - who he answered is left unsaid by Matthew (Newman and Stine, UBS Handbook 495 ["The Greek text does not indicate to whom Jesus is speaking ... But ... it is most natural to conclude that Jesus is here addressing the woman"]; Nolland NIGTC 633 ["Jesus' response, though provoked by the intrusion of the disciples, is addressed to the woman"]; but see Hagner WBC 13B:441 [These words appear to be spoken to the disciples"]; France NICNT 593 ["Jesus' words are a reply to the disciples"]) - and says, "I was sent only (Οὐκ ἀπεστάλην εἰ μὴ) to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (verse 24). Nor is that a statement out of the blue for Jesus. Back in chapter 10, he sends out the disciples on their first missionary trip and tells them in verses 5 and 6, "~~These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions:~~ "Go nowhere among the Gentiles (Εἰς ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν μὴ ἀπέλθῃτε), and enter no town of the Samaritans (εἰς πόλιν Σαμαριτῶν μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε), ⁶but go rather (πορεύεσθε δὲ μᾶλλον) to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." There is an alignment here between what Jesus tells his disciples to do in chapter 10 and what Jesus himself says in chapter 15: "I was sent *only* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This is why Matthew emphasizes that the woman was a *Canaanite* woman. Why emphasis? Because this is the *only* place in the entire New Testament where someone is called a "Canaanite." And that is highly inflammatory language because the word "Canaanite(s)" in the Old Testament is a code word for the enemies of Israel who lived in Palestine prior to the conquest of Canaan under Joshua and the establishment of the Hebrew kingdoms in 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings (so Beare, Matthew 341 ["Matthew's word has overtones of the derogatory use of the term in the Old Testament, linking the woman with the older inhabitants of the land of Israel who were dispossessed by the Hebrew invaders ... there was to be no fraternization with them," citing Judg 2:1-5]). To call this woman a "Canaanite" is like being called a "Yankee" in the deep, deep south. It highlights the racial animus between Jews and Greeks that was still present in the social culture of first century Palestine.

Now, I can't speak for everybody, but I have to admit that when I'm ignored or asked to go away, I normally leave, especially when I'm told I'm not part of the party. Why stay with

someone who is ignoring you? Why ensconce yourself in the middle of a conflict that you create by your mere presence? That's not typically a fight I'm willing to fight.

(**slide7**) But the woman was far braver than I would have been had I been in her shoes. Instead of leaving, she in turn ups the ante: "she came and knelt (προσεκύνει) before him" (verse 25), an act of submission and worship (see Louw-Nida 53.56 ["to express by attitude and possibly by position one's allegiance to and regard for deity," though Matt 15:25 is not specifically referenced]; BADG sv προσκυνέω ["**to express in attitude or gesture one's complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully**"]), and when Jesus is the one knelt before, it is an act which recognizes him as the "Messianic king" (BADG). In this position, she asks for help again ("Lord, help me," verse 25b). We'd expect Jesus to act out of compassion now, but that doesn't happen; instead, he continues his refusal and says, "It is not fair (καλὸν; the NRSV and NJB translations are not optimal as the adjective in question has to do with something good [versus something not good] as opposed to something fair [versus not fair]. It is better to translate this word as "right" [versus wrong; see NET, NIV, NAB] or "good" [versus bad; see NASB]) to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs (τοῖς κυναρίοις)" (verse 26). Regardless of how we interpret the word "dogs" and whether we take it as some kind of ethnic slur (Hagner WBC 13B:442; France NICNT 594; Keener SRC 416) or a simply prioritizing of Jews first and non-Jews second (Newman and Stine, UBS Handbook 497; Luz Hermeneia 2:340), Professor John Nolland is certainly right to call it "a harsh statement of Jewish privilege" (NIGTC 634; France NICNT 595 says Jesus' reply "seems to add insult to injury" while Beare, Matthew 342, says, "These words exhibit the worst kind of chauvinism"). Once again, I have to admit that this is not the Jesus I have come to know and love both from the New Testament and from my experiences with Jesus within the Christian community. Had I been that woman, I'd have been crushed. It's as if Jesus is saying, **repeatedly**, "You don't belong here." And I'd have tucked my tail between my legs and quietly walked away, probably crying because of the humiliation I'd just received.

But once again, the woman doesn't act the way I would have acted. Instead, she stands up to Jesus and corrects him, reminding him that "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" in verse 27. While she is willing to accept her status as "dog" instead of "child," or at least she does not contest it, she reminds Jesus that dogs get fed too. They may not get fed first and they may not get fed best, although I seem to recall Tyler wryly commenting that our Giant Schnauzers ate better than he did when he was at college a few years ago 😊. But whether they get fed first or last, best or worst, dogs still get fed. And so should she - even if she is just a dog in comparison to the Jewish people.

And that is the game changer for Jesus. He instantly changes from the Jewish privilege, ignoring and insulting teacher that you'd never want your children to have, into the welcoming and affirming Messiah that we've all come to know and love. He commends the woman for her faith and says, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish" (see also the healing miracles in Matt 8:13; 9:29) and the daughter is healed instantly (ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης; elsewhere in the NT only Matt 9:22; 17:18). If only the interchange contained in verses 23-27 weren't in our Bibles, this would be just one more amazing story of Jesus' miraculous healings. As it is, it's still an amazing story but in quite a different sense.

III. Pivot to Today

There are a couple of different ways to apply this passage to our daily Christian walks, so this morning I want us to focus on how important the "In versus Out" question is for the church.

(slide8) The Gospel of John tells us that on the night before Jesus died, he prayed a prayer for the church that would bear his name, asking "²¹that they may all be *one*. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you

have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be **one**, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely **one**, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:21-23). Three times in three verses Jesus repeats his prayer that the church that bears his name may be one. The apostle Paul will say much the same thing in 1 Corinthians 10 when he says of the celebration of the Lord's Supper "¹⁶The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷Because there is one bread, we who are many are **one body**, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16-17). And as if to make the oneness of the church and its rootage in the oneness of God crystal clear, he also writes in Ephesians 4 that "⁴There is **one body** and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6).

At the same time, the church has always had its conflicts and its differences of opinion. That's not a new thing. As early as Acts 15, there was controversy within the church about whether Christians had to be circumcised in order to be saved or not. Fifteen centuries later, the one holy Roman Catholic Church was split in two because the church thought that there were seven sacraments and Martin Luther thought there were only two. Early translators of the Bible like William Tyndale were burned at the stake because they weren't upholding the tradition according to which the Bible and the church's Mass should be conducted in Latin. And more recently, there are controversies around book banning, abortion, the ordination of women, and inclusion of gays and lesbians within the church, and so on.

That is not the way the church goes about celebrating its oneness in the eyes of God. And that is why the first Scripture reading for this morning focused on Romans 10, because that chapter makes as plain as day who gets to be "in" and who ends up being "out." Paul could not be clearer about this when he writes, "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved" (Romans 10:9-10). Notice that the only two things that are mentioned here are the public confession that "Jesus is Lord" and the personal acknowledgment that "God raised him from the dead." And now think of all the things you've been told a "bad" quote unquote Christian can't do and still be considered a "good" Christian: Can't drink, can't smoke. Can't dance, can't listen to rock music. Boys have to have short hair. Girls can't wear jeans. No public displays of affection while dating. Can't play card games except for Rook and Uno because the 52-card deck of cards is a Satanic tool. And that's just what I heard at Wheaton in the late 1970's! Nearly fifty years later, that all sounds so stupid to me. But history is history whether it is stupid or not, and that is the way it was way back then.

Even today, we still have our litmus tests that determine who is a good Christian and who is a bad Christian, tests that fifty years from now might sound just as stupid as my old Wheaton counsel was. And all because we've forgotten that being in versus being out doesn't depend on anything except your public confession that Jesus is Lord and your acknowledgment that God raised him from the dead. We can disagree on everything else and still be brothers and sisters in the faith. Perhaps that is why Paul says, over and over and over again, that in Christ there is no Jew nor Greek. Being a child of Israel doesn't get you in and being anything else doesn't keep

you out. Paul says there is no male nor female. Being a guy doesn't get you in, and being a girl doesn't keep you out. And if Paul were to write to us today, I imagine that he'd add to that list. In Christ there are no Democrats or Republicans. There are no whites or blacks. There are no rich or poor. There are no straights or gays. There are no young or old. No pro-Barbie movie and no anti-Barbie movie. Whether you are pro-choice or anti-abortion, pro student loan forgiveness or anti student loan forgiveness, in support of affordable housing or you think it is just a colossal waste of money doesn't matter when it comes to being included within the kingdom of heaven. Everyone and anyone is welcome in the family of faith as long as they confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead. That doesn't mean that you can do whatever you want without any divine consequences. Paul speaks to that misunderstanding quite a lot in his epistles. But that's a sermon for another Sunday.

"Everyone and anyone is welcome in the family of faith." That is the kind of inclusivity I've striven to model for you as your pastor, and it is the kind of inclusivity that you yourselves model to our visitors. And my prayer for all of us is that we can continue to be models of that kind of inclusive oneness, so that "the world may believe that you have sent me" and that all might come, even a Canaanite woman, and pledge allegiance to the Risen Savior, and be welcomed into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Hallelujah! And amen.