

BIBLE STUDY
August 14, 2023

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah 56: 1, 6-7

Matthew 15: 21-28

Romans 11: 13-15, 29-32

1. Isaiah 56: 1, 6-7

- Chapter 56 is the beginning of the Third Isaiah, chapters 56-66. The second Isaiah (chapters 40-55) were unconditional promises of God's restoration of the people from exile. The Third Isaiah is an exhortation to set up the community now that it has returned from exile. The conditions are to observe the sabbath and refrain from evil according to the covenant laws.
- V. 1: The beginning of the exhortation encourages the newly returned exile to order their lives according to God's covenant.
- V. 2-5: Those who were excluded are now to be included. Foreigners and eunuchs are to be part of the community. Eunuchs who keep the sabbath and the covenant commands will receive "a monument and a name." They will be remembered even though they do not have children. Parents were thought to live on in their children.
- V. 6: Foreigners, who love the Lord, and keep the sabbath and the commands of the covenant, will be joined to the community.
- V. 7: They will come to the holy mountain mentioned in Isaiah 2:2—to which all the nations will stream toward. This continues the theme of God's desire for universal salvation. In Isaiah 49:6, Israel was to be a "light to the nations," and salvation would reach "to the ends of the earth." They will be welcome to offer sacrifice in the temple. The temple will become "a house of prayer for all peoples."

2. Matthew 15: 21-28

- V. 21-22: A Canaanite woman---not a Jew---a Gentile comes to Jesus begging him to cure her daughter from possession by demon. She calls Jesus 'Lord' and 'Son of David.' Jewish terms that express her belief in him.
- V. 23: Jesus meets her request with silence. The disciples complain that she is following them and ask Jesus to send her away.
- V. 24: Jesus states the reason for her silence—that his mission is only to the house of Israel. This is the traditional understanding of the mission of the Messiah: to Israel and not to the Gentiles.
- V. 25: The woman does not give up. She does him homage—bows down before him and again pleads for his help.
- V. 26: Jesus answers with what is probably a popular saying of the time that echoes what Jesus said in Mt. 7:6: do not give what is holy to dogs and cast pearls before swine. It is the popular belief of the time that salvation was only to the house of Israel.

- V. 27: The woman persists. She debates with Jesus and points out that dogs even get the crumbs that fall from the table.
- V. 28: The woman wins Jesus over. He is amazed at her faith. Her persistence wins Jesus' healing of her daughter.
- This story can be seen as a dramatization of the early church's coming to an understanding that their mission is universal. The preaching of the Gospel is not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. Jesus' change of mind reflects their change of mind in accepting Gentiles. In Matthew's Gospel, there are hints at this change. The magi are Gentiles who come to faith by natural means of the star and whose faith surpasses that of Herod and his advisors. Jesus heals the servant of a Roman centurion and marvels at his faith which is greater than the faith he has seen in his own people.

3. Romans 11: 13-15, 29-32

- Paul is attempting to understand God's plan in calling the Gentiles to salvation while Jews did not accept Jesus as Messiah. He wonders if God's plan is that when the Jews see the Gentiles receive salvation, they will become jealous and then accept Jesus as Lord and Messiah. He also grapples with the mystery of how it is that some believe, and others never arrive at faith.
- Paul speculates that the tragedy of the Jewish rejection of Jesus may have been "a happy fault" to bring about the conversion of the Gentiles. How great will be the result when the Jews come to faith.
- Paul warns the Gentiles not to grow proud because of their coming to faith and look down upon the Jews who did not believe. The Gentiles are a branch grafted on to the root. They should remember that they are dependent on the root, their Jewish ancestors in the faith.
- V. 13-15: If the lack of faith of the Jews lead to the inclusion of the Gentiles, how wonderful will be the coming to faith of the Jews!
- V 29: God's call to the Jews was irrevocable. There is still an invitation to them to come to faith.
- V. 30: Gentiles were disobedient but received mercy because of the disobedience of the Jews.
- V. 31: Now Jews who have been disobedient are poised to receive mercy.
- V. 32: All were disobedient. All are shown mercy.