



**August 20th**

## **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved – Romans 10:9**

### **Jesus keeps to his script: in Him scripture is fulfilled**

After Jesus manifests His divinity by walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee, the Pharisees and teachers of the law inquire as to why our Lord's disciples ignore the traditions of the elders by eating with unwashed hands. In this context, Jesus addresses their hypocrisy, spiritual blindness, lukewarm hearts, and vain adherence to the Law. This weekend's reading from the Old Testament, Isaiah echoes this notion that those who "keep justice," "do righteousness," "keep the Sabbath," and "hold fast my covenant" will be acceptable to the Lord. In other words, our love for the Lord must be genuine, not merely perfunctory. These are all words of action, doing words for that is what faith means.

This sticking strictly to the Law of Moses becomes important when Jesus encounters the Canaanite woman with the demon-possessed daughter. While the Jews presume that this woman is unacceptable to the Lord because of her Gentile heritage, Jesus acknowledges her faith and heals her daughter. This event is a fulfillment of Isaiah: righteousness comes from the Lord and is manifested in love and obedience. The Gospel is first for the Jew, but also the Gentile, the people "besides those already gathered."

Yet, as the apostle Paul explains, the Jews are not cast off. Indeed, the Gentiles facilitate the Lord's work of calling His chosen people to Himself. Paul's fervent prayer is that bringing Christ to the Gentiles will serve "somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them." God works His plan through both groups—salvation comes from the Jews in Christ and returns to them through the Gentiles. "Being first" is not meant to be read as though the pagans come second or third in ranking. It is simply the pathway by which the Good News of the Reign of God on earth is revealed. It was for this reason God called the Jews in the first place and made covenant with them. They were the people chosen to be God's way of speaking to all men and women on earth.

### **The woman's faith contrasted to the unbelief of Pharisees**

Although the Canaanite woman comes to Jesus in humility, she speaks assertively, saying, "have mercy on me". Notice the imperative form of her speech. She seems to presume to command Jesus. She is certain not only of His divine power but also His merciful willingness to use that power to help her. Naturally, this sure faith is worked by the Holy Spirit, as Jesus comments, "you have great faith!" Interestingly, she calls Jesus "Son of David," a title we would expect from the Jews, not a Gentile. Her address suggests she understands the Old Testament prophecy, which so many Jews of the flesh did not, and that is a significant point Matthew is stressing here.

Although from Luke's Gospel, another story that assists us in understanding is *parable of the rich man and Lazarus*. Jesus notes how Lazarus spends his days outside the rich man's gate, covered with sores, and wishing merely to eat what falls from his wealthy counterpart's table. The Greek for sores relates to ulceration that produce pus and would no doubt render one unclean. If the Jews are represented by the rich man, and the Gentiles by Lazarus, Jesus' comparison of the Gospel to children's bread is amplified. The Jews, rich with God's favor

and feasting on the bread of the Promised Messiah, share only crumbs with the Gentiles, who are spiritually covered with Lazarus' unclean sores. While many Jews will suffer in anguish, the Gentiles will be taken to Abraham's side. One wonders if the Canaanite woman made this connection.

### **There were lots of reason for shunning the filthy pagan**

Although it is possible that the disciples shunned the woman because of her annoying cries, we might also assume they rejected her because of her gender, her status as a Gentile, and her demon-possessed daughter. Woman had little standing in a society that needed men to serve as intermediaries in legal and spiritual matters. Since she was a Gentile, the Jews saw her as not only unsaved but also unworthy of salvation. At the same time they viewed themselves as worthy. Finally, the Jews assumed that calamity in life, such as a demon-possessed child, was divine punishment for individual sin, as opposed to corporate culpability. If these beliefs were among the reasons for shunning the Canaanite woman, they reflect a blatant self-righteousness on the part of the disciples present.

The Gospel is expressed directly to the pagan-woman as the Lord acknowledges her faith and heals her daughter. He forgives the pagan woman because of her faith and not because she is a member of the Jewish people. That must have been perceived as a massive insult to all that is Jewish and godly for the Pharisees watching and an equally shocking deed for the disciples to witness from their master. Indirectly, the Lord also shows mercy to the Jews present. Jesus' remark, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," is also intended for the Jewish disciples, not for the woman only. The Jews must understand two things: **1) without Christ**, they are the lost, the unsaved sheep of Israel; **2) salvation through faith is for them just as** it is for the woman. Although these words are more an action of the Law to convict the heart, Jesus' desire is to move His disciples to the Gospel.

It is also worth noting that most baptismal rites are expressed as an exorcism. We connect this to Jesus' act of healing the woman's demon-possessed daughter. Jesus removes the demon so that the Spirit can enter. In doing so, the Lord brings her into the true house of Israel, through the gate, to the table where the Bread of Life is served.

### **God's love is for everyone – only we seek to limit it**

There are days that we pray and appear to receive no answer. We speak our words, express our feelings, make known our needs and nothing happens. We wait. We listen. God is silent. It's like talking to the walls of our room. That was the situation with the pagan woman.

What do we do when that happens? Where do we go? Do give up? Get mad? Quit the church? Sometimes someone will come to me and ask, "Why? Why is God silent? Why am I ignored?" I wish I knew. I don't have an answer. Even if I did I doubt it would be satisfactory. So I do the only thing I can do. I send them back. "Go pray," I say. "Just show up. Regardless of what God does or does not do you show up. Even if it seems God does not." That's what the Canaanite woman did.

Jesus was silent. She could have gone home, argued, or asked, "Why?" But she didn't. Instead she came closer to Jesus, fell before him, and kept on worshipping him saying, "Lord, help me." That doesn't make sense but that's what she does. This woman who was ignored and *seemingly* rejected by Jesus moves even closer, entering deeper into his silence, and begs like a dog. She continues to show up trusting that somehow it is enough to just be there before him. At some point he has to act. She doesn't know when or what he will do. She only knows that she will be there when he does do something.