

Introduction

What unites the account that we read in the Scripture reading earlier (Mat. 15.21-39)? Kingdom bread for the Gentiles is a unifying idea in these verses (cf. glorifying the God of Israel has the ring of the outsiders view looking in; for this and other reasons, commentators like Ridderbos and Alexander take the entire account to be among the Gentiles, though, of course, many Jews are surely present). On one hand, the Gentiles “along the Sea of Galilee” (15.29) receive more than enough broken pieces of kingdom bread (15.37; **And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over**). On the other hand, in a unique encounter, a Canaanite woman pleads for breadcrumbs of the kingdom (15.27; **And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."** ²⁷ **She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."**).

You should note that we are speaking here of *kingdom* bread while the text does not mention the kingdom of God. You might ask, Why call it kingdom bread? The answer to this question flows automatically when we think about the context and the big picture of Matthew's Gospel. This is the Gospel of the king; this particular account is an extension of kingdom proclamation in word and deed (cf. 4.23, Jesus proclaims the kingdom by teaching and healing; 5.3-6, the poor in spirit who inherit the kingdom also find satisfaction for their hunger for righteousness). The narrative continues the spreading fame of Jesus after the death of John (14.1) that now even reaches the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon (15.21).

If we approach the text in this way around the theme of kingdom bread for the Gentiles, then our focus will be on the following things: the source of kingdom blessing (Christ via the apostles), the nature of kingdom blessing (the now of eternal Sabbath glory), the means of kingdom blessing among the Gentiles (faith). Another way to outline this material in briefest form would be Christ, kingdom blessings, and faith.

1A. The Source of Kingdom Blessing among the Gentiles

At the very heart of things here, the source of the blessings that come to the Gentiles is the Lord Jesus Messiah. Our narrator has already cited the prophecies of Isaiah (9.1-2; 42.7) that spoke of Christ as a light to Gentiles dwelling in darkness along the Sea of Galilee:

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Mat 4.15-16).

There is more at work here in Matthew 15 than the bare events themselves because they are part of the Lord's proclamation of the kingdom in word and deed, and because these events are unique in location and audience *among the Gentiles* who plead for mercy and glorify the God of Israel (15.22, 31). In this light, the source of kingdom blessings is our compassionate and determined Sabbath king.

1) Compassionate

Besides the loving kindness displayed in the healing miracles, Matthew records our Lord's account of what was in His heart toward the multitudes. It was a heart of compassion: **Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way" (15.32).** Moreover, if you pause for a moment and wonder how there can be compassion in the comparison of the Canaanite woman with a dog, you simply have to remember that He granted her request for mercy. The process of showing mercy is full of purpose, love, and mercy as well, as we shall see. Knowing what is in His heart helps us deal with unexpected things.

2) Determined

The idea of strong determination to bless the Gentiles comes out in 15.32b: **I am unwilling to send them away hungry**. I love to hear about the will of Christ, especially when the text puts it in the negative for emphasis. Jesus is *not willing* to send these people away hungry. It is His *determined will* that they receive food to sustain them. Therefore, through limited resources and through forgetful and frail disciples, Jesus will see to it that those He seeks to bless with kingdom bread will in fact receive it. Recall that Jesus had recently fed more than five thousand Jews (Mat 14.13-21), but the disciples appear to be totally in the dark as to how they can feed more than four thousand Gentiles (15.33, **And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?"**). Nonetheless, Jesus will bless the Gentiles through His disciples (15.36). He is the source of blessing to both Israel and the nations, and He is determined to grant the blessings of the kingdom to them through His disciples. Thus, we have full assurance that Israel and the nations will find satisfaction for their need of kingdom bread (this is no ordinary bread; it reeks with symbol and gospel promise and leaps beyond this historical event to the time between that begins after the resurrection; cf. history of redemption).

3) Sabbath king

We have already stated why it is that the bread here is kingdom bread and thus symbolic of kingdom blessings. Now we are in a position to solve a puzzling fact in the account by emphasizing the Sabbath kingship of Christ. The puzzling fact is the mention of the seven loaves of bread that feed thousands (15.34) and the seven baskets of bread left over (v. 37). Jesus draws attention to the seven loaves by asking about the *number* available (v. 34, **And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish."**). Coupled with the feeding of the five thousand, this feeding miracle shows us that the kingdom that Christ brings includes both Jews and Gentiles. They both have a place at the table feast of kingdom blessings. Accordingly, the twelve baskets of the first miracle represent the coming of the new twelve tribes, the new Israel and this account (Mat 15) shows us that the Gentiles are part of that feast as well; they have a place at the table, so to speak, as they sit in the presence of Christ to receive His blessing. Thus, the Gentiles are part of the new Israel! This is an outstanding fact that emerges subtly from the text, especially when we connect the feeding miracles (14.13-21; 15.32-39).

In this context, we can now enquire about the number seven, the seven loaves, and the seven baskets of bread left over. Let me tackle this by a sub-question. What does the number seven bring to mind if we think about the history of redemption and the movement from OT to NT? It reminds us of Genesis 1 and the seven days of creation that promise Sabbath rest and ultimately, per the fall, restoration (both now and not yet) to Sabbath rest through the coming Sabbath king (cf. the jubilee feast of the Sabbath and the ten-fold jubilee promised in Daniel that come through Christ, Lev 25; Dan 9). In other words, what we have here is fulfillment blessing that gives kingdom bread to the Gentiles along with the Jews. Kingdom bread will sustain them for the journey through history in a six and one process leading to eternal Sabbath rest and the feast of eternal glory (cf. Mat 22.1-14; Rev 19.10).

Regarding the many commentators who do not think that Matthew has the Sabbath seven in mind (like Ridderbos), two things are worth saying: 1) if this is correct, then the number of baskets is purely arbitrary and without consequence. The event and the attention Jesus draws to it are empty of meaning. However, that view is difficult to accept (cf. Does God incarnate need to ask about the number of loaves? There must be something of importance here if God the Son enquires about it for our benefit). 2) Even if Ridderbos and others are correct, we can affirm that the seven baskets full of leftovers is a great illustration of the kingdom blessings that Christ has for Gentiles with Jews throughout the weekly cycles of history. Intuitively, the sevens of history move relentlessly forward toward the goal that the church will reach by His loving determination

as risen Lord, universal sovereign, and Sabbath king. They so move because each day of each weekly cycle has more than enough daily bread, more than enough kingdom blessings to sustain the people of God and bring them home to glory.

Therefore, the source of kingdom bread among the Gentiles, as surprising and astounding as this fact may be, is Jesus Messiah, the compassionate and determined Sabbath king. We have here another anticipation of the Great Commission (Mat 28) and the proclamation of good news to all nations throughout the sevens of history until the end of the age (cf. 10 anticipates 28).

2A. The Nature of Kingdom Blessing among the Gentiles

What does it mean to receive kingdom bread? We might do well to stop and meditate awhile on what leaps from the text in the way of gospel promise buried here in the healing miracles. Again, we need to remember that miracles are not an end in themselves, and they are not on the pages of the NT to cause us to try to duplicate them. They are not examples to emulate. Instead, they are definitions of the gospel to embrace, study, and believe. They are miraculous historical events that serve as enacted parables of restoration. Thus, they show us the astounding blessings of the kingdom that Christ came to procure for us. We can highlight the blessings in three summary steps.

1) First, Jesus satisfies those who are hungry.

Of course, He in fact gave physical bread to thousands to meet their needs lest they faint in the wilderness (15.32b). However, as an embodiment of the gospel that He preached, this account promises satisfaction to those who are hungry for righteousness. He thus says, "They shall be filled" (Mat 5.6).

2) Second, Jesus gives deliverance from demonic oppression

The Canaanite woman sought mercy for her daughter that a demon severely oppressed (15.22b, **And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."**). The provision of blessing among the Gentiles is a provision for restoration from demonic deception and oppression. From the very time of the fall, God promised the coming of one who would crush the serpent's head. This is an encouraging promise in light of the fact that Satan is the father of lies and murders in his opposition to the kingdom of God. If he could, he would deceive that very elect, but that he cannot do (Mat 24.24). As Luther puts it in his famous hymn, God is a mighty fortress and so even though the craft and power of the evil one are great, one little word from our Lord "shall fell him."

3) Third, Jesus saves the whole person, body and soul

The way to approach these miracles is to take them in as gospel, as gospel bread and provision for all that we need to sustain our lives. The bread of the kingdom that comes to us from Christ through His disciples is restorative, saving bread. The lame, blind, crippled, and mute receive Messiah's blessing so that the mute speak, the crippled have health, the blind see, and the lame walk. What a warm word is this: health, health for speaking, seeing, and walking. That is the gift of Christ to sinners in great need; that is sustaining kingdom bread indeed.

Now consider the fact that these are the very things that we lose in the aging process as we face dying and death in this fallen and sin cursed world. However, the text tells us that Jesus is the source of astounding blessings now and not yet in the kingdom of our Sabbath Lord who is Sabbath Lord by His resurrection from the dead. He can give us health in the fullest conceivable sense because He is the Lord of life and death, the redeemer of God's elect, and our risen Lord. His victory over death, hell, and the grave insures our victory over death, hell, and the grave. His resurrection is the firstfruits of our resurrection (1 Cor 15). We have the privilege of drinking

from this fountain and of eating at this feast that sustains us now on the way and guarantees our happy arrival in glory at the end of our journey.

As the apostle Paul put it, although our bodies are subject to dying and death because of sin, the Holy Spirit is our life because of the righteousness of Christ:

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you (Rom 8.10-11).

What a marvelous promise of health: the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus Messiah from the dead and that indwells us presently will give life to our mortal bodies in resurrection glory.

3A. The Means of Kingdom Blessing among the Gentiles

How then do we receive these blessings? This point is in effect the application of this text for us today. Gospel in enacted parables of restoration gives us many aspects of the coming of the kingdom, what it brings, and now for our purposes, how we receive it in the post-resurrection time of the kingdom.

It should be of no surprise to us to learn (again) that God's blessings among the Gentiles come to them by faith, just as it comes to the Jews by faith. In reverse order, Paul makes this point in Romans 3, **Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith (vs. 29-30).**

If we can say on one hand, that Paul particularizes our Lord's teaching on faith and kingdom blessing for Jew and Gentile, we can say on the other hand, that Jesus amplifies the meaning of faith for the Gentiles and with them what it means for the Jews. Like always, Paul and Jesus compliment one another, rather than being at odds with each other, as unbelieving thinkers are prone to affirm. What then does Jesus teach us about faith in this encounter with a Canaanite woman? He gives us a number of ingredients in faith and its greatness.

1) Faith is instrumental

In the end of what appears to be some tension in this dialogue, Jesus makes it clear that this woman's faith is something great, and saying that, Jesus then granted what she desired (15.28, **"O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire"**). Without question, Jesus teaches us that faith is the victory that overcomes satanic deception in this world. Of course, we know that the power to conquer does not reside in our faith *per se*, but as we learned from the Peter account, it resides in the object of our faith (Mat 14.28-33). Therefore, we should repeatedly speak of the instrumentality of faith to keep our focus firmly on Christ. What this means is that it is not faith that saves, but Christ that saves through faith. Furthermore, we know that our faith is something that we have (and it is in fact ours) by God's gift through Christ by the Spirit working with the word. For one example, recall the parable of the leaven that teaches that the gospel of the kingdom is efficacious in bringing us out of darkness through the gift of faith (Mat 13.33; cf. Jn 6.44, 65).

The gift of faith brings up the question of the greatness of faith, what makes it great *per* this account? The remaining ingredients help us see the greatness of this woman's faith and of the faith of all who come to God through Christ.

2) Faith is humble

This woman seeks Christ for mercy acknowledging her need of him like a beggar. She pleads with Him to have mercy on her (15.22) and to help her (15.25). Like this woman, we humbly acknowledge our need and utter dependence on Christ when we plead for His mercy on behalf of our unsaved sons and daughters who are under demonic oppression in the acute form of deception that it takes in our modern culture. They are lame, crippled, blind, and mute in the things of God. We pray with humble faith that God will enable them to speak, see, and walk in true health of soul and body. We humbly seek Christ for mercy too.

In her humility, this woman will take the crumbs from the table of Christ. Her faith is such that she believes that if she even receives the breadcrumbs of the kingdom that she will have God's blessing indeed. Thus, she kneels in the presence of Christ with respect and worship (15.25). Her faith in Him is truly a humble faith and that makes for greatness.

Faith says, "Break the bread of life dear Lord to me, O Lord, grant me a taste of kingdom bread, grant me even the crumbs and I will be blessed indeed!"

3) Faith is persistent

Interestingly, this is an account of the great faith of a Gentile who stands outside of the people of God at a distance that she overcomes with persistence. At first, the distance receives accent in the silence of Christ who gives her no answer, not even a single word (15.22-23, "**Have mercy on me O Lord...but he did not answer her a word**"). Then, all seems hopeless when Jesus refuses the request of the disciples to bless her (**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."** ²⁴ **He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"**). This surely accents the fact of the distance between Jew and Gentile, but the woman came and knelt before him and said, "**Lord, help me**" (v. 25).

Now, appearing to add insult to injury, Jesus compared this woman to a dog, and he did so directly in His reply to her: **And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"** (v. 26). What would you do, if you went to someone begging for mercy and that person compared you to a dog? In this language, there is the hint of how Jews viewed Gentiles, but the choice of words that our Lord uses softens the point by referring to domestic dogs, not wild dogs but pets *within* a home. Nonetheless, this is a steep hill for this woman to climb in that it brings up all the prejudices of the Jews and aggravates the fact of her personal distance from the covenant people and the God of the covenant.

What then does she do? Does she turn away in disappointment? No, she persists with the humble reply that "**even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' tables**" (v. 27). She will not go away. The Lord's carefully crafted answer to her does not turn her away. Her faith is the kind that acknowledges that Jesus Messiah is the master and she claims a place of humility beneath His table. How can she do this? How can she have this great faith?

4) Faith is Christ-centered

Whatever He chooses to give is good enough for her, and she acknowledges with persistence that He may well choose to bless her as a master chooses to give children's bread to dogs. In other words, she persists because she acknowledges that Jesus is sovereign Lord and He can span the gap between God's children, the Jews, to reach her there beneath His table like a dog. We have another example like the case of Peter. She persists because she has her heart fixed on Christ as Messiah, Son of David, and covenant Lord (**Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David**, v. 22).

Great faith is faith that seeks mercy from Jesus as Messiah and Son of David, and it seeks His mercy with humble persistence. In other words, great faith fixes the eyes of the heart on Jesus Messiah, universal sovereign, and Sabbath king.

To Jesus Messiah, universal sovereign, and Sabbath king be all glory both now and forevermore, amen.