

CCW, 20<sup>th</sup> Aug 2017

## A Study in Inclusivity

Isaiah 56 v1, 6-8      Romans 11 v1-2, 29-32      Matthew 15 v21-28

Who deserves to go to heaven or more evangelically who deserves to be saved? In answer I refer you to Romans 3 v23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” So, no-one then deserves salvation. This could make for a very short, depressing sermon if it weren’t for the BUT of the gospel of Jesus. Christ died, once, for the sins of all – we will hear these words later in our communion prayer.

Let’s assume we’re all going to make it to heaven (if you’re in doubt, see me later), so 3 questions for you to think about:

- Who do you want to see there?
- Who do you expect to see there? They may be significantly different answers?
- Who will actually be there? We may not be able to answer that one.

In ancient times, the Jewish people were the chosen people, the people of promise but it wasn’t a promise of exclusion. When Abram (2000BC) was called to lead his family out to a promised land, God said, “I will make you into a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you **and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**” In our reading from Isaiah (700BC) recorded over 1000 years later, we hear this same message, Salvation for Others, “the foreigners, all who keep the Sabbath and hold fast my covenant – these will I bring to my holy mountain, their sacrifices will be accepted; for my house shall be called a house of prayer **for all peoples.**”

And this is where Paul picks up this exact same message, “Has God rejected his people? By no means! The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” And this is Paul the Perfect, Paul the Prefect

– “If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” Phil 3 v4ff. Yet even Paul is saying that the Law and the Prophets, all that Judaism is founded upon, like the Gospel, the new covenant – none of these is exclusive.

God orders that each group will bring blessing to the other - even in their failures, they benefit each other. When God shows mercy to one group, the other group is blessed. In God’s original plan, we heard earlier that Jews were to be the source of God’s blessing to the whole world: “**and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**” When the Jews were unfaithful, this plan failed but God was born as a human into a Jewish family, God made flesh and the Messiah was given to the whole world. God’s gift hasn’t been rescinded or replaced: it has been enlarged. And even though the chosen nation was unfaithful, they who have been disobedient “**may now receive mercy.**”

And the perfect example of this is wrapped up in the gospel story of the Canaanite woman seeking healing for her daughter.

Let’s ask the question I started with again, this time in the context of the gospel record: who deserves to be healed? This woman’s daughter? No. A Canaanite, to boot – ancient enemies of the Jewish nation. You probably couldn’t have compiled a more objectionable character to include. Who deserves to be healed? Practically anyone ahead of this Gentile woman. Nor does Jesus doesn’t make it easy for her. He seemingly ignored her in the first place (v23), “he did not answer her at all.” But what had she asked for? Read it carefully – mercy. This woman is a pagan, an enemy, a non-believer. She has no rightful claim whatsoever on the God of the OT covenant. Yet she still comes and asks for mercy. Even the crumbs of mercy will suffice – she doesn’t even think herself

worthy: **“and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”**  
**“The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”**

Once given, God’s gift cannot be returned to sender. Jesus was making sure, in the hearing of his disciples, that this pagan knew what it was she was asking for. She didn’t deserve mercy, and in that she’s not unique - no-one deserves mercy. But she received it in abundance, mercy and healing for her daughter – gifts in abundance, like anyone who asks.

Who deserves to be saved? No-one. Who will be saved? Anyone who asks. Did Jesus ever say ‘no’ to the Canaanite woman? Does Jesus ever say ‘no’ to anyone who calls on him? No, **‘great is your faith! Let it be done for you.’**

So who will you see in heaven? There may well be some surprises for us because Jesus excludes no-one who calls on him. Even those we may today think of as odd-balls; those who are different to you or to me; those we consider unworthy (someone may well think you’re the unworthy one, think about that)! Jesus doesn’t consider you unworthy. God won’t exclude you from eternal life if you call on the name of Jesus.

As Christians, we are now the chosen people and it’s our job to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, making disciples of all nations, starting with those you know, not just those in far distant lands that we see and read about in the Tear Fund or Oxfam magazine but those on our doorstep. Expect to see them in heaven. Tell them so, I dare you!