

We just heard about three people groups – the Israelites and the Gentiles (non-Israelites), and the Christians (some of whom were Israelites and some of whom were Gentiles.) Jesus had, at first, sent out his Disciples only to the Lost Sheep of Israel. So what of us? How are we included in God’s plan of salvation?

In part, it’s revealed in Matthew 15:21-28, just after Jesus taught the parable about defiled food.

*21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”*

*23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”*

*24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”*

*25 The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.*

*26 He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”*

*27 “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”*

*28 Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.*

What did Jesus just do? Did he insult to woman and her family, stereotype her race?

We can’t make excuses for Jesus. He was not tired as we get tired. Jesus was not testing everyone just to see how they would react to his harsh words. Jesus did not at this moment change his mission or his attitude and become something he was not already going to be. Jesus was not moved at this very moment by pity (as if not before), Jesus did not learn a lesson from this Canaanite woman because of her persistence. But something significant went on here. We, and the disciples, learn – a new thing that Jesus reveals - that great faith saves.

As I said, In Matthew’s Gospel, the first time Jesus sends the disciples out he tells them to go nowhere among the Gentiles (10:5); but by the end of the Gospel, Jesus sent them to make disciples of all nations (28:19).

Paul speaks of grace, too— the grace of God’s gifting. Throughout the book of Romans, he has been speaking to both Jewish and Gentile Christians. But here, he speaks most specifically to the Gentile followers. Some believe this is so because he has heard of a sense of superiority creeping into some of the Gentile disciples. As usual, he tries to put the boasters in their place by reminding them that it is not by their own merits that they have attained their place in the tree of life; therefore, it would behoove them to be a bit humbler.

The thrust of his argument, however, is in Roman 11:29. “For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” While there might be some debate as to precisely what Paul was going for here, it does seem clear that he doesn’t want to write off the Jews who have not claimed Christ. They are still the chosen of God; God does not renege on the covenant, no matter what. His hope, it also seems clear, is that through patience and perseverance, those who follow Christ can live in such a way as to show that this is indeed the way to life. That was his hope for his own life and example, and it would be the same for us. We are called to live in hope with open doors, open minds, and open hearts.

If you add one more verse past the reading for this week, you end with this: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are [God’s] judgments and how inscrutable [God’s] ways!” (Rom. 11:33)

This is what we mean by God’s how is our why. We can’t always figure out what God is doing; we can’t always explain everything that Jesus said and did. But we don’t have to. We just need to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and love our neighbor, all our neighbors, any neighbors, like ourselves. And when they ask why, we say “because God first loved me!”