

## The Six Mountains of Jesus, Part 3

### The Mountain of Feeding

#### I. Three adjacent passages from Matthew in context:

(1.) **Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, ‘Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.’ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.’ He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ He answered, ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’ She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.**

(2.) **After Jesus had left that place, he passed along the Sea of Galilee, and he went up the mountain, where he sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.**

(3.) **Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?’ Jesus asked them, ‘How many loaves have you?’ They said, ‘Seven, and a few small fish.’ Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all of them ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children. After sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.**

**II. Matthew 15: 29-31 (2.) is unique to Matthew and is not a rewording from the other gospels. The passage cannot be understood in isolation, but within the context of the two stories that preceded it – the woman of Cana and the Feeding on the Mountain. The passage is a description of Jesus’s healing ministry among the crowds who have gathered to him on the Galilean mountain. More importantly, Jesus feeds this gathering, which reinforces Matthew’s purpose.**

1. The two miraculous feedings in *Mark* do not take place on the mountain, but the miracle of the feeding in *John* does. John’s and Matthew’s accounts are extremely similar.

2. The Old Testament has no relationship with Matthew’s story, since there was never a “feeding on the mountain” associated with the manna in Exodus or in prophetic writings.

**III.** Matthew did not want the end of Jesus’s ministry among the Galilean crowds to go unnoticed. He wants his readers to understand the theological framework in which this ministry is to be understood.

1. The introduction to the feeding (2.) is a summary statement to introduce the mountain setting and the events that take place on the mountaintop.

2. The dialogue between Jesus and the Canaanite woman (1.) about bread and crumbs anticipates the mountaintop story of the multiplication of the loaves and the remaining fragments. Since the crowd mentioned in (2.) is the same crowd fed on the mountain in (3.) Matthew links both to (1.) as a preparation for the final **Mountain of Commissioning** at the end of his gospel:

a. **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”**

**IV.** Here (3.), like in the other mountains, Jesus gathers to him the beginning of the eternal community formed as the Kingdom of God by the Holy Spirit – an inclusive community, but still exclusive of Gentiles.

1. In Matthew, Jesus’s healing ministry is a sign of his Messianic identity and the age of the Kingdom of God.

2. In Matthew’s time the provision of food was also a sign of the beginning of God’s eternal kingdom. In Israel’s post-exilic community, when Mt. Zion became associated with the promise of God’s Messiah, the **Messianic banquet** was an important part of this belief. Matthew presents Jesus’s feeding on the mountain as a satisfying feast of plenty that points to the identity of Jesus as Messiah. The same community of Jews who were invited to gather with Jesus on the mountain to hear the Sermon on the Mount (**the law of love**) were invited to a Galilean mountaintop to be fed and healed. The mountaintop events are a sign that the age of the Kingdom has broken into the world (which for post-exilic Judaism was the **Age of Return.**)

3. In the introduction to the Mountain of Feeding (2.) Matthew refers to the prophet Isaiah from two passages:

a. **The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the Lord,  
the majesty of our God.**

**Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.  
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,**

‘Be strong, do not fear!  
 Here is your God.  
 He will come with vengeance,  
 with terrible recompense.  
 He will come and save you.’

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
 and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
 then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
 and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.*

A highway shall be there,  
 and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
 the unclean shall not travel on it,  
 but it shall be for God’s people;  
 no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

*And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,  
 and come to Zion with singing;  
 everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
 they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
 and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

b. On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples  
*a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,*  
 of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.  
 And he will destroy on this mountain  
 the shroud that is cast over *all peoples*,  
 the sheet that is spread over *all nations*;  
 he will swallow up death for ever.  
 Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from *all faces*,  
 and the disgrace of his people he will take away from *all the earth*,  
 for the Lord has spoken.  
 It will be said on that day,  
 Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.  
 This is the Lord for whom we have waited;  
 let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.  
*For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.*

V. Regarding the Nations (the Canaanite woman)

1. The debate between Jesus and the woman about who is to be fed points ahead to the miraculous feeding that follows. The crowds who gather are “**the lost sheep of the House of Israel.**”

2. The crowds who gather with Jesus on the Mountain of Feeding are the lost sheep of the House of Israel, harassed and helpless like a leaderless flock, and Matthew depicts Jesus as promised Davidic shepherd of Israel.

3. Once again the presence of Christ is himself Mt. Zion, and not the restoration of the eternal temple. Matthew’s view of Christ is brought into focus on the Mountain of Feeding because it emphasizes Jesus’s **actions**, while the Mountain of Teaching represents Jesus’s **words**.

4. Matthew’s account of Jesus’s encounter with the Canaanite woman (1.) has some particular language that emphasizes the contrast between Jews and Gentiles and highlights the barriers between them. First, Matthew identifies the woman as a Gentile at the outset. Second, Matthew calls the woman a “Canaanite” as opposed to a “Syro-Phoenician” in the other gospels. Canaanites always symbolized the traditional enemies of Israel. Third, Matthew implies that the encounter with the woman takes place on Jewish soil. Matthew usually emphasizes that the Gentiles seek out Jesus rather than he coming to them, unlike the Jewish community.

5. In Matthew’s version of the story, the priority of Israel is absolute. The status of the Gentiles is one of complete exclusion from the benefits of Jesus’s ministry. **YET**, at the end of the story Matthew states emphatically that the woman’s request was granted. There is a two-step movement that is important for the gospels: Jesus seeks out believers from the Jewish community; the Gentiles seek him out.

6. In Matthew there is a tension between the programmatic exclusion of Gentiles from salvation and the participation of this woman in the Messianic blessings. Jesus answers the request because of the woman’s faith, but for Matthew faith does not remove the barrier until the final mountain, when Jesus does so through his commissioning of the disciples.

7. The sign on the Mountain of Feeding anticipates that, as the Kingdom of God has come to Israel, the salvation of the Gentiles is also imminent. The salvation of the Messiah is universal.