

Making Disciples Who Make Disciples
Ministry year 2021-2022
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Pastor David Palmer
July 10, 2022

TEXT: Matthew 15:21-28



Good morning, Beloved. This Sunday we follow Jesus outside the land, outside the borders of the land of Israel. We continue to follow Him in our series that we are looking at this year, taking His last command seriously, to “make disciples of all nations.” Disciple-making is joyful. Disciple-making requires commitment. Disciple-making is something that happens over time, and this morning we look at a passage where Matthew, the Gospel writer, was present. What he saw in this passage changed him, and I pray this morning that we would be changed in the way that he was changed. We’re looking throughout this year at taking Jesus’ Great Commission seriously. If you remember, back in September we looked at what it means to “go.” In October, we looked at “make disciples of all nations—the gospel is for all peoples. In November, we looked at what it means to baptize people, to express our public commitment to Christ. In December, we looked at the Trinity. In January, we looked at Jesus’ statement to “teach them to obey all I have commanded.” Then, we looked at Scripture and prayer, and we looked at relationships, sexuality, marriage, family and children. We looked at our work, our calling, our vocation. We looked at the yearly calendar, what it means to have holy time. In May, we looked at money and giving and generosity. In June, we looked at righteousness in society, and now, in July, we are close to the end, and we’re looking at Jesus’ making disciples of people; we’re looking at sharing Christ in the world; and we’re looking closely at how Jesus Himself actually does this. In August, we will finish this year-long journey by looking at the return of Christ and His teaching and how we are supposed to live now in light of His return. Let’s say our definition together and then look at our text.

*Disciples are committed followers of Jesus
who learn to obey Him over time
and joyfully share Him with others.*

Our passage this morning starts in Matthew 15:21 where we read:

“And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.”

Tyre and Sidon are in modern-day Lebanon. They are Phoenician cities along the coast. If you look at a satellite map of the Middle East today with the geographic borders of modern states, you can see how green Israel is compared to the surrounding area. Remember that God said: “I will bring you to a land that I water Myself.” You see Israel; you see the Sea of Galilee, that great inland lake. You see the Dead Sea south from there. The straight lines on the edges to the right are the land of Jordan. Syria is to the north. Israel is along the coast, and as you go up the coast, you see two white strips. You might be thinking it’s cloud cover because that’s what is off the coast over Cyprus, but actually, the white and the land are the twin mountain ranges of the Lebanon Mountains and the anti-Lebanon mountains. Tyre and



Sidon are on the coast, Phoenician cities. Lebanon is a spectacularly beautiful place. There are snowcapped mountains and Mediterranean beaches. You can ski or swim. It is a beautiful land, a very fertile land. The Beqaa Valley that is in

between these mountain ranges is one of the most fruitful places in the world.

Lebanon has mountainous forests, and it was famous in antiquity for the cedars of Lebanon, which are the biggest trees that grow in this region. In the very bottom corner of the next image, just beyond the base of the



tree, if you look carefully, you'll see an adult standing there, giving you a sense of how big the



tree is. These are really huge trees, great trees for building, and in the Old Testament there are moments of good relationship between Israel and Tyre. When Solomon, the son of David, becomes king in Israel, he resolves to build a house for the Lord, the temple of the Lord. He sends ambassadors to Tyre, to Hiram the king, and asks to make a treaty with him. They make a treaty arrangement were Hiram agrees to cut down cedars of Lebanon, take them to the coast,

and send them down. These are the cedars that are used in part to build the temple in Jerusalem. Hiram says that in exchange, Solomon would provide food for his household. In 1 Kings 5:11, we read what it cost to feed Hiram's household:

“. . .Solomon gave Hiram 20,000 cors of wheat as food for his household, and 20,000 cors of beaten oil. Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year.”

That's what it took to feed his house.

The coastal cities were wealthy. They were cities of trade. They were cities of immense wealth. Most of us think that life gets better if we just have a little more money, but in the Bible, wealth can be dangerous and the blessing can become a curse. That's the case for these wealthy, coastal cities. In Jeremiah 25, Israel's prophets rebuke the Phoenician cities for their extravagance and their wealth. In Ezekiel 28:15-16, the king of Tyre receives a prophetic lament. The Lord says to him:

“You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.”

Sometimes wealth can be an incentive for greed and exploitation of other people, and this happened to the coastal cities. Ezekiel goes on to say to the Phoenician cities in Ezekiel 28:17-18:

“Your heart was proud because of your beauty; . . . By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries;”

The Phoenician cities were famous for all kinds of luxury goods, but there was one good in particular that they were most famous for. They were famous for the trade that derives from

the murex snails. The murex snails is where you get purple. Purple is extracted from the gland in the center of the murex snail. It takes thousands of these snails to dye one purple garment.



These snails were in abundance just off the coast of Phoenicia. This area is known for this in deep antiquity. In Acadian, the inhabitants of this area were known for this trade. They were referred to in ancient Acadian text as *kinahhu*. They called themselves and this area *kinahhum*, meaning “purple.” When the Greeks took over this area and traded with them, they called the people who lived there *Phoenikes* in Greek, which means “purple.” So, the Canaanites and the Phoenicians are the same people. The Canaanites lived in this region. The Romans, when they

conquered the Greeks and took over, they knew this land as the land of the Phoenicians, and they translated it as the *Punic* group, and that's why they're called the *Punic* wars with the Phoenician settlements that reached all the way to ancient Carthage. Phoenician and Canaanite refer to the same culture. Archaeologists referred to the Canaanites as the Bronze Age inhabitants and the Phoenicians as the Iron Age inhabitants. Some of you are wondering why we are talking about this. It's important because the people that live in this region when Jesus enters this region are foreign people. They are also ancestral enemies of ancient Israel. In fact, archaeologists have shown the continuity between the ancient inhabitants of the land and the modern inhabitants of the land. A 4000-year-old Canaanite cemetery was discovered recently with human remains, and they did DNA testing and compared it with modern inhabitants of the land. They did studies with 99 modern Lebanese people and compared the DNA with the Canaanite remains and they found that there was a 93% correspondence. You can read more about it in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*.

I got excited about it because I reached out this week to one of the godliest people I know, Pastor Hikmat Kashouh, pastor of Resurrection Church in Beirut. I asked him about this passage because we've talked about it before. He said: “I love that passage because my ancestors were addressed by Jesus.” This passage is challenging. It's challenging for the disciples. Remember that the disciples are devout Jews. These are Israelites, and they left the country and traveled outside the land, around the area of Tyre and Sidon. The first time you travel outside the country when you're younger, you think: “Oh, this is great. This is exciting. How fun.” As you get older, you become more aware of dangers and things that can happen to you when you're traveling internationally, and you always feel really glad to come home. They left, and for many of them, this was crossing not just a geographical barrier, not just a cultural barrier, but a spiritual barrier. Matthew tells us in Matthew 15:22, that when they got there:

“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.'"

Mark tells us that the woman was a Gentile, a Syro-Phoenician woman, so we see that even in the New Testament, this language is used. Mark uses the Greek term and Matthew uses the Hebrew term. Matthew tells us in the Greek text of Matthew 15:22 that she came out from the mountains. She must have heard of Jesus, and she calls Jesus "Lord." Isn't that powerful? She calls Jesus "Son of David," knowing that her ancestors had helped supply the material for the construction of the temple. Her plea to Jesus is for mercy because her daughter is ill: "My daughter is badly demonized," the text says. "She has the influence of evil, and it's overpowering her life." When she says her daughter is severely oppressed by demonic power, I imagine that if we put ourselves in the spot of the disciples, a whole rush of thoughts would come into the disciples' minds and maybe into yours. When you see someone and meet someone whose life is an absolute disaster, what comes your mind? Most of us, if we're honest, start to formulate the chain of causation that led to that. Most of us don't have our first thought as "How can I help you?" Most of us think: "Whoa! That life's a disaster. I'm going to just step to the side and hope that doesn't flood into my boat."

I imagine that for the disciples there was a very specific set of associations when she says her child was severely oppressed by demonic power. I can imagine the disciples were thinking: "That's right. You worship Baal. You worship Asherah. God's Word tells us to stay far back from you. The land promised to Abraham was your land, and yet God said you were being kicked out of the land because of your idolatry, and the land has been given to us, and it's actually spiritually dangerous for us to be in close association with you." Deuteronomy 7:2b-6 says:

"You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. . . . you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God."

That's all in their minds. And so when Jesus replies with silence, I think the disciples were thinking; "That's right," and maybe they were hoping that she would go away. The disciples step forward in this moment in Jesus' silence. Have you ever faced the temptation to answer for Jesus when He is silent? That can be embarrassing. It can also be an opportunity for growth. Sometimes we think we know what Jesus thinks, so we'll just go ahead and say it for Him. The disciples step forward in Jesus' silence and say: "Send her away." It's more than just irritation with an individual. There's a lot more at stake here. Beloved, this is the only time in the Gospels where we see Jesus doing public ministry outside the land of Israel, and the disciples are

watching. "What's He going to do? This is our ancestral enemy. She's connected with an idolatrous people. It's dangerous for us to be in close proximity with her. Send her away!" Jesus does not answer her, but He speaks to the disciples. In Matthew 15:24, He says to them:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

I can imagine the disciples in this moment breathing a sigh of relief. "Amen, Brother, You are for us. She is not our problem. We're supposed to stay away from people like that." Do you ever hear people talking in this way? It's a very strange way for Christians to talk about people. Sometimes Christians say that you should not go to a certain part of the city. What a strange thing for Christians to say, but they do: "This part of the city is dangerous, so you should stay where you are." The only Christians who could ever say that are the Christians who stopped reading at Matthew 27. Jesus, Beloved, in this text is teaching us in His encounter with this woman. He says: *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"* and I can imagine the disciples saying: "Phew, that's right. That's what He told us. I mean that's what He said just five chapters earlier Matthew 10. He sent us all out by name and told us go nowhere among the Gentiles. Don't enter the town of the Samaritans. Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The kingdom is for us. This is our promise. You are our Savior who cares about everyone else?" There is a lot of tension in this story, and the temptation is closer at hand for all of us to think that the Kingdom of God is really just for us.

The story continues, and the woman comes, and, the ESV says, she knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, help me." In the silence of Jesus, in the disciples request to send her away, she steps closer. It is worth learning Greek just for this verse. The ESV says she knelt before Him, but the word that is used here is the word for "worship." She calls Him "Lord" for the second time, and she bows down before Him in worship. What's going on? Aren't we supposed to love the Lord? And here's this Canaanite woman worshiping Jesus! What's going on? She calls Jesus, "Lord, Son of David," even before the disciples do. This is chapter 15 of Matthew's Gospel, and the next chapter, chapter 16, is when Jesus takes the disciples up to Caesarea Philippi and asks them: "Who do you say that I am?" They give the answers of the crowds, and then Peter finally says: "You are the Christ, Son of the living God." The Canaanite woman confesses Jesus as Lord and Son of David before the disciples do. Isn't that surprising? Jesus amplifies the tension. He finally answers and speaks and says in Matthew 15:26:

"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

This language is very strong. The writing on Jesus of Kenneth Bailey, who lived in the Middle East for many, many decades, is fantastic. Bailey says that dogs in the Middle Eastern traditional culture are almost as despised as pigs. Pigs are worse but only slightly so. Dogs are never pets. They are kept as half-wild guard dogs and left to wander unattended as street scavengers who often subsist on garbage. Dogs in the Bible are not like poodles and gold

retrievers. The Bible's dogs are closer to wolves. They live on the street. They are scary, unclean, threatening. The only people who get close to them are their handlers. Yet, the reference to dogs is primarily for the disciples' education, I think. Bailey says that the disciples are thinking that these are the outsiders. Dogs are used this way in the Bible itself. In the New Testament, Revelation 22 says: *"Outside are the dogs, sorcerers, immoral, murderers, and everyone who practices falsehood."* It's an image of the outsider, and even in Jesus' language, that sounds harsh. It challenges the disciples. It's almost as if Jesus is saying to the disciples: "I know that you think that the Gentiles are dogs, and you want Me to treat them as such." But pay attention to the scene. This is where your bias leads. It's almost as though Jesus is asking us: "Are you comfortable with that?" and we wonder how the woman will respond.

The woman responds in Matthew 15:27 by saying:

"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

For the third time in this passage she calls Jesus "Lord." This woman, in this scene that is tense, confesses Jesus is Lord again. There is a tenderness in the imagery in that the language for dog that Jesus uses is the diminutive that can be transited as "the little dog," an affectionate term. Her reply publicly is: "Even the little dogs eat from their master's table." Jesus hears in her confession, and the disciples hear in her confession. "You are my Lord and You can help me." Sometimes the faith of the stranger is greater than our own. Jesus answers her directly and says in Matthew 15:28:

"O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly."

Great praise for a woman of great faith in Jesus.

Let's try to hear this together on two levels. The first level is to hear this ***through the ears of the Syro-Phoenician woman, this Canaanite woman who believes***, who has heard about Jesus and is going to Him for help. Whatever you know of Jesus, or whatever you have heard of Jesus, I want to tell you this morning from this passage that you can come to Him and you will be received. She confesses faith in Him and trust in Him, and He receives her. Ibn Tayyib was a doctor. He was one of the most distinguished medical doctors of the 11th century in the Middle East, just about a thousand years ago. He wrote in Arabic. He wasn't just a medical doctor, but he was a commentator on the New Testament, and the medical doctor-commentator from this part of the world has tremendous insight into this woman's story. Ibn Tayyib says the woman does not cry out, "Oh Lord, have mercy on my daughter, but, oh Lord, have mercy on me," because she was in pain. Ibn Tayyib noticed that the caregiver in this story is at the end of her rope. He says that her motherly love is displayed in the very best way, and that is to ask help

from Jesus. Her persistence and the relentlessness of that persistence inspire us. Her humility is seen in that she lowers herself to the place of a dog, and her deep faith is seen in that just a small amount of food from Jesus will be enough. And this faith is praised by Jesus, for it is the primary virtue and the foundation of all others. She comes to Jesus in need, and she is the caregiver, and she steps across this cultural barrier, and she is received by Jesus Christ. That's beautiful, and we can hear this story, and we can grow on that level.

For our journey at Kenwood this year, I want you to go with me to a second level of hearing the story. The second level of hearing the story is to hear this story ***from the perspective of the disciples and people called to disciple-making***. I believe that this incident had a profound impact on Matthew, because Matthew, who is also called Levi, is from a priestly family and is deeply concerned with matters of purity. He places this story right after Jesus' teaching on ritual purity, and Jesus says it's not what we take in that makes us unclean but what comes out of the heart, and then he tells the story. He tells the story in such a way that Matthew, who is trained in Scripture, comes to see, together with the other disciples, that Jesus is not just for us, He's for all the world. Brothers and sisters, that's a big step. That's a big step for Matthew, and it's a big step for us. It's a big step to say there are no places in the city where we shouldn't go, and the ones that are in need and particularly dangerous are probably the ones we should go to first. Oh, what would happen if that got written in our hearts. I think this incident just opened up a vista for Matthew, the Gospel writer, and I think we can tell this by the way he wrote his Gospel. Matthew in chapter 1, if you look back, weaves into the genealogy of Jesus two Canaanites. He mentions Judah, through whom the line of kingship would come, Judah the father of Perez by Tamar the Canaanite. Matthew tells us that Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, the Canaanite. David's great grandmother was a Canaanite. Matthew tells us in chapter 2 that Persian Magi came from the East to adore Jesus as King. Matthew tells us in chapter 8 that a Roman centurion came to believe in Jesus and He says of him: "I haven't found faith like this in all Israel." Matthew tells us in chapter 11 that if the miracles He had done in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago. And then, Matthew tells us about this woman, a Canaanite woman of great faith, and Jesus teaches us in this moment, Beloved, that Jesus is for all the world. If you don't feel the bigness of that step, I want to challenge you to examine your mind and heart and practice where in this world have you cornered people off and thought, "I need to stay back from those people"? Sometimes we do this in the high school cafeteria, and we section off the cafeteria as people like me and people not like me, people who are safe to be around and people who are unsafe. Sometimes we do this in our city. Sometimes we do this in our geopolitical map. But Matthew was stirred by what he saw Jesus do with this woman, and really, how He taught the disciples about who He was in the scope of this mission. It's not coincidental that it's Matthew, at the end of his Gospel, who records for us Jesus' words: "Go and make disciples of all nations." It is woven into

the story. That's why we are called to be disciples who are committed to follow Jesus, who learn to obey Him over time, and joyfully share Him with others. May there be no limits, Kenwood, on where we will go, whom we will receive. All are welcomed and invited to Jesus' table and into His house.

It's an exciting time at Kenwood because I see Jesus writing this truth into our hearts. I see you going in new ways. I see you sharing in new ways. We had the highest percentage of community children at Vacation Bible School that we've ever had. I think that's awesome, and this is an exciting season, Kenwood. It's an exciting season to watch you following Jesus into new places and new ways and sharing Him with others. He's doing this, and He taught the disciples that's what He's about. So, can we freshly resolve to follow Him and learn to obey Him joy and share Him joyfully? Let's pray.

Oh, Lord Jesus, You are good. You are good and You love this world. And, Lord, thank You for teaching the disciples the greatness of the scope of Your saving mission. Help us, Lord, never to limit or restrict where You are calling us to go. Lord, help us to recognize the faith in the other and to make room at Your table. Lord, forgive us for ever setting false boundaries and limiting what You came to do. Lord, forgive us for ever saying or describing a people or a place as somewhere where Christians shouldn't go. Forgive us, because the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost wherever they might be. Build us into disciple-makers, Lord Jesus, and we thank You for including story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, the Canaanite woman, who came to believe in You. Teach us Lord to follow You, that Your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.