

Inside Out - Evangelism With Jesus

Part 3: Simple Is Not Always Best

Text: Matthew 15:21-31

BIG IDEA: The simplest (or easiest) approach is not always the best & we need to take this into consideration as we engage with others evangelistically.

Intro – Cringe Moments

Have you ever had a cringe moment when you or someone else said or done something cringe-worthy, out of place or inappropriate? I think we all know the feeling. Sometimes those cringe moments can happen when our non-Christian friends meet that extra weird Christian friend who is like a ticking time-bomb of cringe-worthy comments. I remember a preacher saying once that when he meets someone & they tell him they met someone from his congregation he said he always thinks; ‘okay, this could either be really good or really bad depending on who they met.’ Cringe-worthy moments... When we read this story of Jesus & the Canaanite woman with our modern ears we can maybe be tempted to cringe a bit & think; ‘Jesus why did you have to say that, it sounds demeaning & even racist.’ However I don’t think Jesus is being demeaning to the woman or racist at all. I think the woman knows what he is doing because Jesus is showing the same wisdom evident in his conversations with the rich young man & the lawyer.

1. Don't Assume Simple is Best

As we move from story to story one thing we quickly notice is that Jesus has no ‘one size fits all’ approach to people. He has an amazing ability to adapt & discern different people & situations. Imagine if this happened in one of our Home Meetings; how would you feel if you brought a friend for the first time & the person leading the study took this approach with her? Her daughter is in great need & this mother is at her wits end (the cry of her heart is “Have mercy on me...”, “Lord, help me...”) & Jesus decides to get all theological about the priority of his mission to the lost sheep of Israel. It seems totally inappropriate. However obviously Jesus knows exactly what he is doing & one thing we learn from this is that the simple approach is not always the best approach.

Jesus could have simply healed the woman’s daughter & then shared the simple truth contained in John 3:16 but he doesn’t. Instead for some reason he chooses to go a more complicated route? Why does Jesus do so? This leads us to our second point.

2. Know the Mindsets of Others Present

Jesus knows the mindset of his disciples which would have mirrored the mindset of his own Jewish culture. So what does he do? He initially ignores the woman leaving space for the disciples' prejudices to come to the surface. Listen to verse 23; **"But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came & begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."** Only racial prejudice could cause people to be so heartless & intolerant towards such a desperate mother. The reason we find this so hard to read is because we know & are influenced by that others things Jesus taught – like the story of the Good Samaritan...

Note at this point that this woman has reached out to Jesus & to do so she has had to cross racial & gender barriers. She has at one level had to humble herself to ask for help from a Jewish man who she calls **"Son of David..."** Jesus initially ignores her, his disciples tell him to send her away, & then when Jesus does speak he says; **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** This would have been theologically challenging for her to hear as a Canaanite woman yet still, in the words of verse 25; **"she came & knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."** And then Jesus replies with the most shocking statement of all; **"It is not right to take the children's bread & throw it to the dogs."** Now at this moment if you or I were there we would have been cringing big time... What is Jesus at?

Here I think Kenneth Bailey helps when he writes; *"Jesus chooses to take on the theological attitudes of the disciples & press them to their ultimate conclusion... He verbalises their thinking in very shocking language... It is acutely embarrassing to hear & see one's deepest prejudices verbalised & demonstrated..."* This is what I believe Jesus is going here & notice that in the story there isn't another cheep from his disciples. Jesus knew the mindset of his own disciples, he interacted with this woman with an awareness of who else was there & communicated to them as much as her. Likewise we need to be aware of who is in the room so to speak... This is not about being politically correct, Jesus was no such things, but he was always sensitive to who was in the room & where their minds are at.

I think the woman's response shows clearly that she understands Jesus' heart here. For she replies; **"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the masters' table."** She replies on the same wavelength, she is discerning. Jesus assumes this woman is more clued in than his disciples in some ways... This brings us back to the big idea of this message. Over simplifying the gospel doesn't work for everyone & it doesn't always accomplish all that needs to be accomplished in terms of the kingdom. We tend to think the simpler we make it the better & the more chance there is people will respond. So we spoon feed people like babies. This does not always help. In fact it can lead us to come across as either quite patronising or very naive. We live in a world that in many ways is more educated than ever before & for that reason we often find ourselves sharing faith with people who are much smarter than us. For this reason the simpler the better is not always a good approach & we need to take this into consideration as we engage people & share our faith. Of course there is a time to share the gospel in the most simple of ways, & it can be shared in very simple terms, but the tone & approach all depends on who we are talking

to, who else is present & in this regard we need to be discerning. In this story I believe Jesus is talking to a smart & discerning woman who is able to read between the lines better than Jesus' own disciples!!! To the disciples this woman was a pest to be sent away; to Jesus she was important, intuitive & great in faith.

3. Encourage Faith When You Find It

People may not have all their Gospel T's crossed & I's dotted (who does?). This woman was a Canaanite, a Gentile. She would have had a very different world-view than Jesus. Yet she still recognised Jesus as the Son of David & came to him for help. She was also more clued in to Jesus than his disciples on this occasion & she passed tests Jesus set for. So Jesus encourages her faith when he said; "**O woman, great is your faith!**" No doubt, being a Canaanite, she had a lot of changing of mind to do but Jesus recognised & encouraged the faith she had. I believe we should do the same & I believe doing so encourages people to keep moving towards the Kingdom even when they have not yet arrived at a full understanding of the Gospel. Sometimes we can try to change people's minds about too much too soon. Jesus did challenge this woman in some ways but he finished the encounter by encouraging her great faith & answering her request.

One thing's for sure, she would never forget Jesus! She would have left remarkably encouraged by her encounter with Jesus, glad that she had come to him & no doubt longing for another encounter. My prayer is that people would feel the same after encounters with Jesus today, after encounters with you & me.

4. Meet People at their Point of Need

Even though Jesus kept the bigger picture of his Kingdom in view in this encounter he did meet the woman at her point of need. Not only this he also went on in the remainder of our reading & met many others at their point of need. It's important to note here that the area he was in was a predominantly non-Jewish region. So in the wider story of we see Jesus showing the same compassion to non-Jews as he does to Jews. This woman understood the purposes of God better than Jesus disciples & they would have seen that with as Jesus met the needs of all sorts of people in the crowds. Which leads me to my conclusion...

Conclusion - Reflecting Christ's Heart For All

As his disciples we need to get over our prejudices & learn the way of his Kingdom by reflecting Christ's heart for all. And as we do not let's not assume simple is always best... lets seek to understand the mindsets of those present... lets encourage Christ-ward faith when we find it... & lets seek to meet all manner of people at their point of need...