

In Acts we read of the apostle Peter receiving a vision. A sheet filled with clean and unclean animals descends from heaven and a voice tells Peter to kill and eat. God is announcing the end of the dietary laws that divided the clean from the unclean.

We just read in verse 19 that the Lord Jesus has declared all foods clean. What comes out of our mouths defiles, not what goes in.

The aim of Peter's vision was to prepare him to go to the God-fearing centurion Cornelius with the gospel. Peter would not otherwise have entered the house of an "unclean" Gentile. But now he does and Cornelius and his household are saved.

And here we read of a similar act that follows the similar declaration. Jesus casts a demon out of the daughter of a Gentile woman from Syria. He then heals a deaf man in the Decapolis, a Gentile region east of the Sea of Galilee. Following that He miraculously feeds a

huge crowd in the same area. It would seem that the time has come for the Lord's ministry to fully embrace the Gentiles.

But, no. He tells the woman "Let the children be fed first," or in the parallel passage of Matthew 15:24, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Although He does grant the woman's request in the end, due to her great faith and His loving grace, He makes clear that she is only due leftovers.

It's not that the Lord is lacking love toward the Gentiles. Rather, God's plan has always been to channel blessings to all humanity *through* Israel. Jesus must first come as King and Messiah to Israel. But "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). It was only after that rejection that the Gentiles will be completely united with believing Jews in the new Church.

Questions:

1. Where are Tyre and Sidon?
2. Matthew 15 tells us that Jesus first responds to the woman's pleas with complete silence. Why would he do that? Are our petitions to God ever met with silence?
3. What qualities does the woman show that would touch Jesus' heart?

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4. When was Jesus last in the Decapolis? What is different about this visit?
5. The Lord restores the woman's daughter without ever seeing her. With the deaf man, however, His healing act is unusually intimate as He touches the man's ears and tongue. Any idea why He would do so in this case, where a simple word would suffice?
6. Why does Jesus sigh before healing the man?
7. What is the crowd's response to the healing? Do crowds always react like this to Jesus' words and actions?
8. What are some differences between the feeding in Chapter 8 and the feeding of Chapter 6?
9. How can the disciples have forgotten the first feeding and react as they do? Are we sometimes like them?