

Problem

Many fear that Jesus will reject them. That is a valid fear, but not why you think.

Intro

View the online sermon to hear the story of a single black woman in Fort Scott, Kansas, hearing about the Prodigal Son for the first time. She couldn't believe that God would accept her. Many life-long Christians wouldn't believe that God would reject them. Both are wrong. God does reject people. That sounds harsh, but fact check me in the Bible. In fact, Matthew 14-15 is a pretty good template: one is welcomed in and one gets the stiff arm. Here is the question I want to answer today: What would make Jesus reject you? In this passage we have two big miracles, three individuals, and a couple of crowds.

- I. Two BIG miracles: 5,000 & 4,000
 - A. 5,000 for Jesus
 1. Jesus needed a bit of rest: “When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns” (Matthew 14:13). If you back up one verse you see why Jesus was so emotionally exhausted. His mentor had just been killed: “John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus” (Matthew 14:12).
 2. The disciples want to send the crowds away. “Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food” (Matthew 14:15). But Jesus refused. “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat” (Matthew 14:16).
 3. Jesus has just fed 5,000 people, the size of a Roman battalion.
 4. John 6:15 says, “Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.” Why? Because he acted as the father of the nation by praying over the bread and successfully feeding, but more than that, by picking up 12 baskets of leftovers. It was Passover time and political expectations were always heightened. Many of the crowd were most certainly on route to Jerusalem and wanted to usher Jesus in prematurely.
 5. “Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd” (Matthew 14:22). Notice Jesus didn't send them away when they were hungry. He sent them away when they wanted to force him into their mold, to use his power for their advantage. Why?
 6. He walks on water (Matt 14:22–36). This looks a lot like Gen 1:1-2: Jesus is the creator God. When we try to reduce Jesus to what we want, he will push us off so he can become what we need.
 - B. Then Jesus fed 4,000 on the opposite side of the lake, which was Gentile territory (Matt 15:29–39).
 1. This is the exact opposite side of the lake. “Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them” (Matthew 15:30). These are categories of people who are ‘sinners,’ the *hoi polloi*, who no one wants to touch. He not only touched them, he fed them. Then there is this very strange and important observation—they took up seven baskets of food. They took up seven baskets of food. Numerologically, this is a sign of Gentile inclusion.
 2. “After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan” (Matthew 15:39). Now we have two examples of Jesus sending the crowds away and for the same reason. They can't latch onto him as a genie; they must bow to him as Lord.

3. Last week in Eswatini I met the Supreme Court justice and the Minister of Finance. This is one of the two remaining monarchies in the world. When they enter the king's presence, they must get on their hands and knees and crawl into his presence, always making sure their heads never rise above his.
4. Those are the two miracles and two times Jesus sent people away. Matthew interweaves these stories around three people who encountered Jesus.

II. Three Responses to Jesus

A. Herod Antipas = Political Power (Matthew 14:1–12)

1. Retell the story of his birthday party and the beheading of John the Baptist.
2. This is the response of political power—they fear Jesus because he could take away their power and pleasure. Rulers are ruled by their desire for power.

B. Pharisees & Scribes from Jerusalem = Religious Power (15:1–20)

1. They complain because Jesus' disciples were not washing their hands properly. This was not for hygiene but religious ritual to wash off the cooties of Gentiles.
2. This was a mechanism God established through dietary restrictions to separate people who could embed idols in your home (as Solomon's wives did). It was a real danger until Jesus, who embeds his Holy Spirit in us. Now we should engage the world so the influence of Jesus can spread to all people. This is the very table talk that opened the Gentile world to faith.
3. Jesus has a little bathroom humor here, speaking more specifically than our translations allow, about where food goes when it passes through your body. But that was not what was most offensive. What was most offensive was his citation of Isaiah 29: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules” (Matthew 15:8–9).
4. This is the response of religious power—they fear Jesus because he could take away their positions and authority.

C. Canaanite Woman (15:21–28)

1. Mark calls her a Syrophenician. Matthew is using the archaic term for the enemies of ancient Israel. The fact that she was a woman makes it worse.
2. This follows directly on the heels of the Pharisees' objection that his disciples didn't wash their hands (of these very kinds of people).
3. “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’” (Matthew 15:22).
4. “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’” (Matthew 15:23).
5. He answered, “‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel’” (Matthew 15:24). “The woman came and knelt before him. ‘Lord, help me!’ she said” (Matthew 15:25).
6. “‘It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs’” (Matthew 15:26).
7. “‘Yes *it is*, Lord,’ [OR “I agree, but”] she said. ‘Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table’” (Matthew 15:27).
8. “Then Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.’ And her daughter was healed at that moment” (Matthew 15:28).

III. What's at Stake

A. Many were healed:

1. “And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed” (Matthew 14:35–36).
2. “Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed

when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel” (Matthew 15:30–31).

- B. When we respond to Jesus with power, he will send us away because our very use of power prohibits healing of the nations.
- C. When we come to him as a beggar, as a dog, he responds with healing because he knows that we know we need him.