

Matthew 15:21-28

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 September 2019

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] In Matthew chapter 15, it's on page 982, if you're using a church Bible. Matthew chapter 15, and we're going to read the whole of this chapter.

So let's hear God's Word together. Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?

They don't wash their hands before they eat. Jesus replied, Jesus called the crowd and said, Listen and understand.

What goes into a man's mouth does not make him unclean, but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean. Then the disciples came to him and asked, Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?

He replied, If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.

[1 : 40] Peter said, Explain the parable to us. Are you still so dull? Jesus asked them. Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?

But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

These are what make a man unclean. But eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean. Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him crying out, Lord, son of David, have mercy on me. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.

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. He answered, I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.

[2 : 41] The woman came and knelt before him. Lord, help me, she said. He replied, It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs. Yes, Lord, she said, But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

Then Jesus answered, Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted. And her daughter was healed from that very hour. Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee.

Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Then 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. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion for these people.

They've already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way. His disciples answered, Where can we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?

[3 : 50] How many loaves do you have? Jesus asked. Seven, they replied, and a few small fish. He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he'd given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people.

They all ate and were satisfied. Afterwards, the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was 4,000 besides women and children. After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

Amen. But thinking about this, so we're continuing to look at grace in the Gospel of Matthew.

And here is our theme for this morning, that you and I are invited to the feast to enjoy God's grace. In 19th century High Society New York, there was a group that was simply known as the 400. They were led by a lady called Mary Astor, and they were very carefully ranked.

[5 : 05] They were called the 400 because that's how many people she could fit into her ballroom. That's how many people she would invite to her great banquets. And she was very careful about who was in and who was out.

To be 401 in 19th century New York was to be a nobody, to find yourself with no place at the party. Different day, different era.

But do we recognize that mindset in our own day? Jesus' day had barriers of division based on religion, based on gender, based on geography.

We also, we have different labels, but there are still divisions within society based on economics or based on the work that we do, based on our appearance perhaps.

There are still this tendency, there's still this tendency to divide into insider and outsider. It has been said, I think rightly said, that we are by and large a graceless society.

[6 : 15] We are so busy competing with one another, we are so busy comparing ourselves, sometimes jealous, sometimes proud, that there is little or no room for mercy, for apology, for forgiveness, or to extend a welcome to somebody outside of our group.

I think we've seen that even this week in our national politics. Maybe you come here today and that's your life. You are exhausted because you're very aware that there is a grade that you want to make.

You're looking for approval and you're finding that to be tiring. Perhaps you may be in that state of despair. I know I'm never going to be in that group.

I'm never going to be that person. I'm never going to make it. Or maybe we're just looking around thinking, does life really have to be this way? Or is there a better way?

Is there a way of grace? Do you know when we think about the way people tend to divide and label and judge? It's really important for us to ask the question, is this what God is like?

[7 : 28] Does God label? Does God have a 400 club that we need to earn our way into? Do we need to measure up to make the grade?

That's why Matthew chapter 15 is good news for us. Because in Matthew chapter 15, we find Jesus once again offering the greatest of all invitations.

We're going to see Jesus offering the invitation to life with God, to enjoy in God. And that comes not on the basis of performance or background.

It comes on the basis of God's grace, God's free and undeserved kindness to sinners. And that's something that's received, again, not by working really hard to receive.

We get it through faith in Jesus. So we're going to hear an invitation to God's feast. In some of our readings, some of our singings, we've heard of this theme that the kingdom of God is pictured throughout the Bible as a feast.

[8 : 36] It's a repeating theme. We could see it, in fact, from the very beginning. When Adam and Eve, the first people were made, they were placed in the Garden of Eden, which was this wonderful garden where there was plenty, there was generous provision.

Or we could go to the story of the Exodus. We can remember that God set the people free from being slaves in Egypt. They found themselves in the wilderness and they had nothing to eat. And what did God do? God literally rained down food on them so that they would be satisfied. And they were heading towards the promised land, which was described as a land flowing with milk and honey.

God's place was a generous place. God wants to meet with His people to provide for them. Even when things began to go wrong in Old Testament Israelite history, when they turned to other gods, when they walked away from God's law, there was still hope of restoration.

So you come to a prophet like Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 25, he gives this wonderful picture of life at the end of the age where there's no more death and pain and crying.

[9 : 45] And God has laid out this great feast so that He can provide for His people, for those who have faith. And then Jesus comes. And if you know anything of the teaching of Jesus and the parables of Jesus, He spent a lot of time teaching at meals, using meals and feasts as a picture of the kingdom of heaven.

And two of His most famous miracles, the feeding of the 5,000, in this one that we read, the feeding of the 4,000, again, here is Jesus saying, I am God. And just like God did in the Old Testament, I am here to provide a feast so people can enjoy grace and to enjoy it freely.

So that is a big theme that you can trace all the way through the Bible. And we can also see it working its way through chapter 15. So we met in the first 20 verses, the Pharisees, the religious leaders.

These were the guys who considered themselves to be the insiders. You know, we judge everyone else who's not like us. We are sure we are in God's team. But what happens is because they don't have faith in Jesus, because they reject His authority, because they are hostile to Him, they won't sit and eat with Him and with His friends.

That's a picture of being outside of, receiving God's grace through Jesus. But then by contrast, we come to verses 21 to 28. And we see Jesus in conversation with a Canaanite woman.

[11:17] And we see that proverb in verse 27, from verse 26 rather, it's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs. Jesus is using a proverb based around the family table.

And what we discover is that this Canaanite, this enemy by nature of God's people, she has faith. And so she gets to enjoy grace.

And then it moves, Jesus moves from there towards the Sea of Galilee and He feeds 4,000 people in great need who are also outside of Israel, outside of sort of the line of the covenant promises, but they enjoy a feast in the wilderness.

So this is a really significant chapter for Matthew. He's saying to us, Jesus is God. He is doing exactly what God did in the Old Testament.

He's come by grace to invite people to enjoy life with Him, which is pictured as a feast. And Matthew is telling us, here is the way to enter into that, and it's by faith.

[12:29] Not by claiming our own goodness or self-righteousness like the Pharisees, but coming aware of our need, coming with faith. And for those who do, there is a feast of God's goodness to enjoy.

So the feast, that's our theme for today. So two questions for us. First one is this, who is invited to the feast? And we can make that personal, am I invited to the feast?

Look with me at verse 21. Simple words, but with great significance. Verse 21 begins, leaving that place.

So where has Jesus been? He's been in Israel. He's been with those religious insiders who reject Him, who are hostile to Him. So He's leaving that place. Where does He go?

We're told Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Now that might not mean too much to us, but to Matthew's first century readers, there are alarm bells going off all over the place.

[13:34] Because if you hear Tyre and Sidon, you hear enemies of God. Tyre and Sidon was one of those groups in the Old Testament that made a habit of attacking Israel as the people of God.

They robbed the temple. They took some of Israel away to be slaves. These are not the good guys. And yet here is Jesus, and He's on a long walk, 50 to 60 miles.

He's walking here, not to judge enemies, but to show grace to enemies. And so we're presented with this almost shocking contrast.

You've got the insiders, the Pharisees, and they reject Jesus. They want nothing to do with God's Savior. But by contrast, this former enemy, this Canaanite woman, she receives the invitation, and so she enjoys grace.

Jesus is on this mission of extravagant grace. And the guest list, just as was the case last week, the guest list highlights that for us. So we're told in verse 22 quite explicitly that Jesus is dealing with a Canaanite woman.

[14:51] And again, the label that would have been attached to her from a religious society would be, this is a sinner. This is somebody to avoid, but not Jesus.

And once he's finished ministering, helping her, Jesus then moves on. And look at verse 30 and 31. We read, 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.

So here are some foreigners in desperate situations. We know they're foreigners because in the end, they turn and praise the God of Israel. Implication, that's not naturally who they belong to.

But here are some of the lowest in society. Those who have, as it were, nothing to bring to the table except their own need. And what we discover is that Jesus feeds them.

[15:57] Jesus shows grace. To these two, this woman and this group, they know their place. They know that they have no claim on Jesus' love and mercy and kindness.

The Pharisees thought, absolutely, they earn it. And so they get nothing. But for those who see themselves as needy, with no claim, Jesus instantly heals the woman's daughter.

Jesus heals this vast crowd. And then he provides a feast in the wilderness, just as God had done in the Old Testament. It's so that we're beginning to see that life in God's kingdom is about enjoying God's grace as it comes to us in Jesus.

And we are invited to receive that as a gift with thankfulness, with humility. One of the truly unique things about Jesus and about Christianity compared with every other religion is this.

Your religion says, climb the ladder up to God. Work really hard. Make merit. Go on great walks and make great sacrifices in the hope that you can do enough that the gods might be pleased with you.

[17:18] The Bible reveals to us that our God is perfect and that He is holy and that He is without sin and that He hates sin. And so Christianity is very honest in saying, in the first place, well, as sinful people, we cannot ever be good enough for a holy God if our hope rests on making our way up to God's standard.

We have no hope. But then there is this wonderful news that Jesus has come down. Not that we go up, that Jesus has come down to be Emmanuel, to be God with us.

And that He's come to do that to bring us to God as an act of undeserved grace. Our King has come near to save us and to provide for us.

I watched a documentary from Bhutan. The former King of Bhutan in 2016, he was celebrating his 60th birthday.

So his son, who was the new king, put on this lavish celebration. It was a day of national holiday. And then there was, I think, 30,000 tickets issued so that you could go to the national stadium and you could watch singing and dancing.

[18:33] And then at one point, the king came and he sort of did a walk around the pitch. And the person who was doing the documentary, he interviewed one excited student who'd spent two days on a bus to have the chance to see the king.

And he was like, this is the happiest day of my life to be able to see the king. He was very glad. What Christianity offers is much, much better than that.

The amazing news of the Bible is that Jesus is God's king who invites us in and not just to see him at a distance in a stadium, Jesus invites us to feast with him, to enjoy grace from him, to enjoy God's love through knowing him, to find peace and joy and eternal security in him.

He is inviting us to a feast. It's what makes Jesus so different. Jesus, the one who came to break down barriers in order to show grace to people that don't earn it and deserve it.

Here is Jesus on a long walk to Tyre and Sidon, but we can think of another long walk, another long journey of Jesus. Think about Jesus leaving the glory of heaven to come, to take on human nature, to live among us and think about the walks that Jesus does on his mission to show compassion and mercy and love to those who are rejected, despised, and hated by others and then see Jesus' long walk to the cross.

[20:10] Think of Jesus there being regarded as the ultimate outsider, rejected by the people, feeling forsaken by his father so that you and I, we might become insiders, we might receive that grace that's promised.

Jesus has come to die on the cross to deal with the greatest of all walls of division, the barrier of sin that separates us from a holy God.

Jesus takes the sin of his people on himself, dying, facing the penalty that sin deserves so that by faith in Jesus we might know and enjoy life with God.

This is our good news message and this is our church mission, this is the walk we are to take to tell people of a God of grace and love.

This explains the work of our global mission partners. We can think of Manuel and Patty Rianno in Colombia as they work with teens who live on the streets in Colombia.

[21:21] Or we can think of Patrick Jock in South Sudan who's caring for refugees. We can think of Hendro from Indonesia who's training evangelists to go and share the gospel with unreached Muslim people groups.

Why? Because our God is a God of grace and a God who wants to break down barriers of division so that all people can hear of his great love for them seen in Jesus.

And this is to motivate our mission to in our day to day that we would pray, please make me an agent of grace. To ask God for help for us to make our long walk of grace.

Perhaps to walk across a room to talk to a student who looks lonely or looks stressed. Perhaps it's crossing the street to spend time with a neighbour that you know is going through hard times.

Perhaps like Jesus we can share a meal as a way to extend something of the grace of God to others. To buy a coffee to invite someone into a deeper friendship.

[22 : 34] To welcome someone into our family meals. For those of us who have received grace it is then to motivate us in our mission to share Jesus with the hope that anyone who will trust in Jesus is invited to this feast.

Second question to think about and this is where we're going to concentrate on the faith of the Canaanite women here. How does someone enter this feast that Jesus provides?

How do I enter the feast of God's grace? You know so we're saying that King Jesus has come to do all that God had done in the Old Testament to give us this wonderful access into his kindness into his love into his joy.

That's only good news if we see that that's something that we need. That's only good news if we will come to him in faith. And so we're going to think about the faith of this Canaanite woman for a few moments.

Let's think about her situation. Verse 22, a Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him crying out, Lord, son of David, have mercy on me.

[24 : 00] My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession. Here is a desperate parent. I met a friend this week whose child years ago now had been seriously ill and he was speaking about living with that trauma still.

And so it's important for us to think how is this woman feeling as she sees day after day her daughter who she loves controlled by the forces of evil.

What's she going to do in that helpless situation? She comes to Jesus. And as she comes to Jesus we're presented with one of the most, on one hand, fascinating on the other hand, difficult conversations that Jesus has with another person.

It can seem like Jesus is being harsh with his silence. He can seem like he is perhaps unwilling to help if we read it at a surface level.

And so it's important for us to do our background work to think what do we know, what have we discovered about Jesus? So remember we've already been told he's coming to Tyre and Sidon, he's leaving behind those who are hostile, he wants to show grace and kindness to outsiders.

[25 : 21] So we know that, that's why he's on the move and we see that because he feeds a great crowd of people who aren't Jew. And that ties in with all that we know of Jesus' mission.

Jesus said it's not the healthy that need a doctor but it's the sick. He's not come to call the self-righteous but those who know that they are sinners to repent and to come to him.

We also saw a couple of weeks ago in Matthew chapter 1 we were clued into this fact in Jesus' family tree, family history where you discover here are women who are outsiders who have surprising sometimes shocking stories and they are brought into the family line of Jesus.

A few chapters back we also meet another person who's said to have great faith. Two times Jesus said in Matthew's gospel somebody had great faith. One was this woman from Canaan, the other was a Roman soldier, an enemy centurion who is also said to have great faith and he too receives help.

So we understand at least in part something of the heart of Jesus and the mission of Jesus and the disciples know that as well. They have never seen Jesus turn anyone away who comes to him for help.

[26 : 41] So let's think about how this goes and especially let's think how do we see her faith? First of all I think we can see it in the posture that she adopts.

Verse 22, what does she look for from Jesus? She cries out for mercy. She wants Jesus to look on her in her helpless misery and to act.

She's not claiming any right or merit. And then in verse 25 is she draws near to Jesus. What's her posture there? The woman came and knelt before him.

She is humble. She is begging for help. Faith is humble. Faith sees our needs and recognizes that by rights we have no claim on God and his love.

But faith comes. We also see that faith in this woman's case is extremely persistent. So we hear her crying out for help in verse 22 but then in verse 23 perhaps surprisingly Jesus did not answer a word.

[27 : 56] She keeps on going. And again Jesus says to his disciples, I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. So he's been silent and he said I'm only sent to the lost sheep of Israel.

Then as she continues to beg Jesus then says it's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs. Which again sounds on a surface level like Jesus is being harsh or being unwilling. What's going on here? Well two things I think. First of all Jesus is making a point that his first priority is to the people of God to Israel because he has come to fulfill all the promises of the Old Testament.

He has come to be the true king in the line of David, the one who will reign for God forever. And he's also come to be the seed of Abraham that will bring blessing not just to Israel but to the nations and that's significant.

So Jesus is talking about his priority and we see Jesus is very focused in his mission. He makes occasional forays into sort of outsider or enemy territory but most of his time he is on this mission to fulfill the promises that God had made in the Old Testament that he had come to be their saviour.

[29 : 14] But there's one other thing I think that Jesus is doing and we see him do it in other places. He's wanting to see this woman's faith, to exercise faith. Will she keep on asking?

Will she trust that Jesus has grace sufficient to meet her needs? And her faith is amazing. So even after that family table proverb verse 26 where Jesus is saying you know if you had children and you have a dog in the family home it is natural that you feed the children first and that's what we do if we have dogs.

But here her persistent faith in verse 27. Yes Lord she said but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table.

She says yes I agree absolutely that Israel has priority but remember you've given that that family proverb and there's a dog in there. I'm happy to be considered a dog if you would just give me even a scrap so that I can get help for my daughter.

I know this isn't my time perhaps until after Jesus' death and resurrection that when when the gospel goes global but she says please feed me anyway. Please give me grace and mercy anyway.

[30 : 34] And what we see is that her faith is in line with the message of Matthew and the mission of Jesus. Very beginning we have that genealogy that reminds us that God's people has always just been wider than simply national Israel.

We get to the end of Matthew 28 and we come to the Great Commission and we see go and make disciples of all nations. And so her faith stands in that line that says God's kingdom is bigger and wider than we imagine and that's good news.

Does the woman get scraps? Verse 28. Woman you have great faith. Your request is granted.

And her daughter was healed from that very hour. She don't get scraps. She gets a feast of God's kindness. She has faith. She's part of the family of God.

And so Jesus lovingly provides for her. The crucial thing about her faith is that it rests in the person of Jesus.

[31 : 42] Look at how she talks about Jesus in verse 22. She calls him Lord. There's honor. There's respect. But then she calls him son of David. And son of David is savior language.

That she understands that this man standing in front of her is God's promised king. God's promised savior. And so she knows by faith to come to him with her needs.

And that's the wonderful lesson that we receive from her story. You and I, we need to come hungry to Jesus. To see our need of his grace in our lives.

And when we do, we will discover that he can and he does truly satisfy our deepest needs. Whatever that might be.

So you might be here and you feel burdened by sin and guilt and you want to be right with God. You know that all is not well between you and God and you know that you can't fix it.

[32 : 57] So you need to come to Jesus in faith and recognize that his work on the cross is for you. That he has died so that you might be forgiven.

That you might be reconciled to God. That you might be adopted into the family of God. But perhaps we're here today and our need is different. Perhaps burdened by responsibilities.

Perhaps caring for family and friends. Perhaps working through some difficult situations and we feel empty or we feel tired and again in faith we need to invite Jesus in there too.

To invite him to be our strength when we feel weak. To be our wisdom when we feel like we don't necessarily have the answers. To be that friend that we need as we seek to be a friend to others. Because grace doesn't just sustain, doesn't just save us, it also sustains us. And so every day as Christians we also need to put our faith in God to receive grace from him day by day.

[34 : 05] Truth is whoever we are today, whatever our story coming into this place today, grace is on offer to each one of us and grace is what we need.

And so all of us, whoever we are, we are called like this woman to come to Jesus, to trust in him. If we are here today and we're tired of the graceless culture that we see, tired of division and separation and competition and rivalry and you want a new way, you find it in Jesus.

If you're aware of guilt and wanting rescue, you find that in Jesus. If we're spending ourselves on others and we feel empty, we find grace through Jesus.

So the message to all of us is the same. Come to Jesus in faith and feast on the grace that he longs to provide for us.