

Jesus, a Racist?

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[0 : 00] Thanks Jan. Well, it's good to be with you tonight as we come together to worship Jesus as our great God and Saviour. As we pick up the story that we started two weeks ago in the book of Matthew, we've taken the middle chunk of Matthew and we're going through passage by passage seeing who Jesus is, what he's done and what that means for us as his followers.

And it's great to be with you to take another great passage from Matthew. It's an incredible passage. I hope we see that tonight as we walk through it together. I wanted to start out tonight by introducing myself, which I didn't do.

And just so you know, my name is Jono Smith. I'm one of the pastors here at Holy Trinity. If you're new, I'd love to get to know you straight off the surface. Come and get me and bring me some supper. If you wouldn't mind.

I want to start off by saying just three things. Talking about three themes when we look at this issue of God's blessing of his people throughout the history of the Bible.

And so I want to talk about race. I want to talk about land. I want to talk about gender. Let's talk briefly about those three things and then we'll jump into the passage.

[1 : 17] First of all, race. We know from reading our Bibles that Genesis 12, God spoke to a man named Abram. And he said to Abram that he would make of him, of this man Abram, a nation, a race.

And this race was going to be blessed by God. It was going to be God's own special race. And the race was going to enjoy covenant blessings from God. A covenant is like a promise that God gives a certain people.

And he was going to bless these people. And that people were going to be called the Jews. The people of Israel. And so you can see in Genesis 12, you don't have to go there.

I've got it right here. Genesis 12, 20. Now the Lord said to Abram, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, a great race.

And I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you. I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

[2 : 27] That's how God called out for himself a people whom he was going to love in a special way. He elected this people called Israel to love and to bless.

So race is very important in the Bible. This issue of race, of God choosing a race for himself, this Jewish people. But we're going to see tonight in this passage that God starts to push at the boundaries of that blessing.

That the dawn of God's blessing is starting to spread over all the nations of the earth. That in this passage, Jesus is going to bless someone and some people who are outside of that race, outside of that nation, outside of that Jewish heritage.

He's going to bless Gentiles, pagans, dogs, as he would refer to them as. The dawn is starting to appear on the horizon as God's blessing flows out across all nations.

Let's look for a minute at land, this issue of land. Again, tied to God's covenant blessing of that people, the Jews, was this notion of land.

[3 : 44] That their identity would be tied to a certain land called the promised land. That God has promised them in that covenant. That a way for him to show them that his love and his particular blessing was to give them a land.

A land flowing with milk and honey. The promised land. And so for Jewish people, this issue of land is very important. That their identity is tied to this theme of land.

God-given land. And I think we've lost this today, if we ever had it, because we live in such a transient mobile society. That we move house every few years.

That we buy and sell land. That our identity isn't tied to the land that we live in. But for the Jewish people, it was very different. And evidence of God's blessing and love was the land that he was going to give them.

I spent the last week, from Tuesday through to last night, with Renee visiting her dad in Queensland. Rural Queensland. Everyone's got at least a thousand acres. And they've still got this. [4 : 47] This kind of heritage of land. That they're very proud of their land. That their identity is tied up with their land. And that they subside off the land. That they pass the land on to future generations.

And so for them, they might be able to relate to this a little better than we can. But you need to know that land is important. And again, in this passage tonight, Jesus is going to push out of those boundaries. That have been set in the past.

That he's going to step outside of that Jewish land into pagan territory. Gentile territory. He's going to do miraculous things there. Thirdly, I just want to talk really briefly about gender.

The Bible tells us in the very start of Genesis that God made male and female in his image. That they have equal value and dignity and worth in his eyes.

Because each gender has been made in the image of God. The Bible does gloriously celebrate our differences as men and women. That it promotes the idea that each of us have a role to play.

[5 : 53] Men have a role. And women have a role. And to work as complementary. In a complementary fashion in relationship. But the Bible says that each of us is made equal.

In terms of dignity, value, worth. But by the time Jesus came on the scene, the men of Israel had, in some cases, pushed down women to be of less spiritual value than themselves.

That some of the men would pray prayers like, God, I thank you that you have made me a man and not a woman. That you have given me the extra blessing of being a man and not a woman. And yet Jesus, we'll see in the passage tonight, comes and he blesses and gives grace to a woman.

And again, he's pushing at the boundaries that had restricted God's blessing in a way to a certain people in a certain land, in a certain way. And the light is dawning for God's blessing to spread across the nations.

And you see it culminating at the end of this book of Matthew. Matthew chapter 28, verse 18 to 20, Jesus will tell his disciples to go into all the nations, baptising them.

[7 : 11] That he wants the good news to go to all people. That all people should enjoy God's blessing. In an even richer way, perhaps, than what the Jews had in the past.

Not that the Jews are now discounted at all. The Jews receive the blessing first. But that God's grace spreads to people of all nations.

So this passage is really pivotal and really important for us to understand. Why don't we dive into it? I'll pray for us and then we'll open the Bible together. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for what you've been doing in salvation history.

That since you called Abram out to make a nation of him, you've been working to draw people to yourself, to redeem that people, to show them your grace and mercy and love.

We praise you that in this passage tonight, we start to see your blessing, your love, your redemption, your grace spread outside of that nation to people of all nations, including us here tonight.

[8 : 15] I pray that we would see it, that we would praise and worship you for it. In Jesus' name. Amen. Let's go. Matthew 15. Start at verse 21.

Love you to take your Bible out and we'll track through it together. Verse 21 says, Jesus left that place and went away into the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Okay, so Tyre and Sidon, this is important that we understand. Tyre is 50 k's away from Galilee. Sidon is about 85 k's away. I think this may be where Paul is right now, like even as I speak.

So it gives an added dimension. He said it's really hot there. I don't know much else about the place except that this is the region of the Gentiles, the pagans, right?

Not Israel, not the Jewish people, not God's chosen people. This is the region of pagans, of Gentiles like you and me. And something we need to understand also is that if you remember last week, the Pharisees were accusing Jesus and his disciples of defiling themselves by eating without washing their hands, that they would become sinful because they were transgressing, they were

disobeying this tradition that they'd made up really about having to wash before you eat.

[9 : 36] And Jesus' point was, it's not eating without washing your hands that makes you sinful, it's what comes out of your heart that makes you sinful. It's the way that you speak and the actions that you do that reveal the kind of heart that you have.

And faith is about what's in your heart, not whether you wash your hands or not. And so again, this is a reinforcement of what he said there because for the Jews, walking through this area would have defiled you, would have made you sinful.

And so Jesus in walking through here says once again, it's not where you walk, it's not what you eat, that's not what defiles you, that's not what makes you sinful, it's about where your heart is in relationship to God.

And so he keeps pushing at these boundaries, he keeps ushering in a new stage of salvation history where God will bless people of all nations and all lands.

Let's move on, verse 22. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting. You need to know that the Canaanites were ancient enemies of Israel.

[10 : 44] That from time out of mind, the Canaanites were at war with the Israelites and so this should flag something to us here that a Canaanite woman in a Gentile land has come out to Jesus and she's shouting, saying, have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David.

That's the title for the Messiah, for God's promised one. Remember last week, the Pharisees were blind guides because they didn't see that Jesus was the Messiah.

They had all this knowledge about the Bible and yet they still didn't see who he was. She's come out, a pagan woman from an ancient enemy nation and in a pagan area and she's come to Jesus and said, have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David, the Messiah.

My daughter is tormented by a demon. If you track back to Matthew 12, 23 I think it is, so verse 22, let me read you a little story about another demon oppression and deliverance.

Verse 22 says, Then they brought to him Jesus, a demoniac, who was blind and mute and he cured him so that the one who had been mute could speak and see.

[12 : 06] All the crowds were amazed and said, can this be the son of David? Can this be the Messiah? See, they saw his actions in performing this miracle and they could see that, well, that's what the Messiah does.

Could this be him? And then some believed, some confessed him as the Messiah, but again, the Pharisees were blind and they said, it's not because he's the Messiah, it's because he's in cahoots with the devil himself.

And so they, again, they reject Jesus and condemn themselves in the process. But this woman calls him son of David and asks him to deliver her daughter from being tormented by a demon. She comes to him, she kneels before him and she asks him for mercy, have mercy on me, she says. She understands that she can't perform the miracle on her own.

She comes as a frightened mother in need of grace, in need of mercy. What's the response? Verse 23, but he did not answer her at all and his disciples came and urged him saying, send her away for she keeps shouting after us.

[13 : 40] When they say send her away, what they mean is please grant her request, just heal her daughter so that she'll leave. We know that that's what they mean because he answers them. Jesus says to his disciples, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

So they've said to him, why don't you just heal her daughter then she'll leave us alone. She's really annoying, she's really persistent but Jesus says something really interesting. He says, I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Israel. See, Jesus' earthly ministry was to Israel, was to the Jews. They'd got lost on the way, they'd started rejecting God and while there was a remnant who still honoured God, many of them had gone astray and so Jesus' mission was to bring them back into the fold as the shepherd brings the sheep back in to the pen.

You might be thinking, what's going on here? Didn't Jesus come for all people? Didn't we see that a few weeks ago that Jesus died for the whole world? What's happening here? She goes on, she came and knelt before him saying, Lord help me.

He answered, it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. It's kind of offensive, do you get what he's getting at?

[15 : 16] He came for the children of Israel, it's not fair to take their food, not fair to take their provision, not fair to take their grace and throw it to the dogs, the Gentiles. See, Jesus knows exactly what's going on here, let's not make any mistakes.

John 10, he talks about himself being the good shepherd, he says, that he had come to bring the sheep in, that is the sheep of Israel, but he also said that there are sheep not of this fold that also have to come in.

Jesus knows that in Matthew 28, he's going to say, go out to all the nations. Jesus knows exactly what's happening, that God is shifting focus not only in on the people of Israel, but spreading it wide so that all people can come to know him.

but he also knows that he has a very particular purpose in his earthly ministry and so he rightly says to her that he's come to give grace to, come to bless the children of the house of Israel, not the dogs.

But she persists. She said, verse 27, yes, Lord, for even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

[16 : 37] Then Jesus answered her, woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish. And her daughter was healed instantly. There's a very profound interaction going on here.

Jesus rebukes the woman for presuming to enjoy the covenant blessings of God that only the Jews enjoyed and she comes back at him, not as a counter-stroke, not as an argument back at him, but actually as kind of admitting that he's right, accepting his judgment that she is a dog, that she doesn't enjoy the blessings of God.

She accepts that, she agrees with him. It's profound she says for even, that's what it should say in your Bible, for even a dog like me, it's the crumbs at his master's table.

She doesn't protest. She doesn't say it's not fair that only Jews enjoy the blessing. You're a racist. I'm going to call up the union. She doesn't go down that road. She doesn't argue with God in his sovereign electing purpose like we often do.

We've seen her the last few weeks. Many of us push back at God's choice for whom he'll bless and who he doesn't. She doesn't. I'll read you a quote. I think it's a really good summary.

[18 : 04] Verse 27, those two words for even reveal immense wisdom and faith.

She does not phrase her answer as a counterstroke, as an argument, but as a profound acquiescence. She accepts what Jesus has said. She does not argue that her needs make her an exception or that she has a right to Israel's covenanted mercies or that the mysterious ways of divine election are unjust or unfair.

She abandons mention of Jesus as son of David and simply asks for help. She simply asks for grace. grace. And she is confident that even if she is not entitled to sit down as a guest at the Messiah's table, gentile dog that she is, yet at least she may be allowed to receive a crumb of the uncovenanted mercies of God.

She comes in humility. She doesn't presume upon God's favour. She doesn't argue with the son of God. She just asks for grace.

And Jesus in verse 28 sees her faith seeking grace and he honours it. He grants her a request and without even seeing her daughter from afar he heals her with a word.

[19 : 46] The dawn of God's covenant blessings and promises is starting to spread. It's spread to a Canaanite woman, a Gentile in Gentile territory.

Something's changing, something's shifting here. And then just so that we don't think that this crumb that's fallen to this Gentile dog is all that God is going to give.

Not that the crumb represents a small amount of grace because it was a huge thing for Jesus to do. But just so we know that that wasn't a one-off, Matthew puts this next passage right in there so that we'll see that Jesus chooses to bless hundreds and thousands of Gentiles.

And the grace spreads even further. Let's check it out, verse 29. After Jesus had left that place he passed along the Sea of Galilee and he went up the mountain where he sat down.

Great crowds came to him bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute and many others. They put them at his feet and he cured them so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking and the blind seeing and they praised the God of Israel.

[21 : 09] These Gentile people are coming to Jesus for mercy and he's blessing them. How do we know that they're Gentile people? Well, there's a few things.

First of all, at the end of that passage, you see that they praised the God of Israel. That's just not a phrase that the people of Israel would have used. It's a given that their God is the God of Israel but these people are saying, this God, this God of Israel, you know the Israelite God who blesses the people of God, the God of Abraham, we want to praise him now because he is blessing us. There's other sort of geographical hints there about the remoteness of where they are along the Sea of Galilee and other reasons but this leads us to think that Matthew is showing us God's blessing to the Gentiles.

Two weeks ago, Martin taught us from the feeding of the 5,000. That was Jesus feeding 5,000 or 15,000 to 20,000 Jews. Here we're going to see Jesus feeding 4,000 upwards of 15,000 to 20,000 Gentiles.

And in the meantime, he's healing them and they are responding with praise. They're becoming Christians. They're praising the God of Israel. It's an amazing thing.

[22 : 28] This is a massive shift in paradigm. Hundreds of years of God blessing the Jews only to the exclusion, the very deliberate exclusion of the Gentiles.

And here we see grace poured out. Let's look at verse 32. Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion for the crowd for they have been with me now for three days and have had nothing to eat.

And I do not want them to send them away hungry for they might faint on the way. Guys, here we see Jesus' compassion. Last week we saw Jesus rebuking Pharisees.

We saw him going fists up, not shy to jump in to a blue with these Pharisees. We've seen him give some pretty blunt words to this woman before he went ahead and healed her.

But here we see his compassion for the details. He notices that they've been with him for three days. He notices that they haven't been eating. He doesn't want them to faint on their way home.

[23 : 36] Do you get this? We've been talking about the big picture history, salvation history of the world. God's big broad plan to save people from their sins.

That this God of the universe has planned out salvation history to reconcile people to himself and yet this same God, Jesus, notices the details.

He has compassion on people in the details. miracles. Currently running this baptism preparation course with a young lady during the morning service and one of the things we've been wrestling with is the fact that the Bible presents to us this great big God who creates all that there is and who rules over everything that there is.

And yet that same God and ruler cares for each one of us for the little details of our life. She said to me today, are you saying that God has a plan for me, for my life?

I said, yes, he does. It's incredible. He's the God of the details and Jesus here shows compassion on these people in the details.

[24 : 55] They haven't had anything to eat. So he wants to feed them. Jesus is focused on his mission. We've seen that. And yet he stops to notice these little details.

Let's read a chunk here, 33 to 39. Let's see how he works this out. The disciples said to him, where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?

They've just seen him feed 5,000. They're not quite there yet. They're like you and me. They're a bit dull, but they are in the desert. The question is valid. Where are we going to get enough bread for this many people?

Jesus asked them, how many loaves have you got? They said, seven and a few small fish. Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish and after giving thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples and the disciples gave them to the crowds and all of them ate and were filled.

And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Those who had eaten were 4,000 men besides women and children. After sending away the crowds, he got into a boat and went to the region of Magadan.

[26 : 06] I think, again, Matthew's purpose in putting this story here and emphasizing this part of the story is to show us that God's blessing of the Gentiles isn't limited to a crumb.

It's actually the feeding of the 4,000. God's blessing is for them. This great, huge amount, number of Gentiles is going to be blessed by the hand of Jesus and in so doing, he shows them that God's blessing is for them.

I think we're going to see this. If I can just draw an analogy, I hope it's a good one. Next week, when we come together here, we're going to share in the Lord's Supper together.

We're going to receive a meal from Jesus that's designed to remind us about how he lived and died and rose again for our salvation.

That when we take the bread and the wine, we're remembering his body and blood broken and shed on the cross for our sins. And we receive this meal purely out of grace.

[27 : 17] And I wonder if next week when you come along, you can think about it like this. That once we, as Gentiles, as most of us here are, once as a nation, as a race, as a group of people, we were cut off from those blessings from God.

That God was blessing a particular nation for a particular time and a particular purpose. But when Jesus came, he died for the whole world. And in so doing, we were enfolded, enveloped into those blessings.

So next week when you take that bread and you take that wine, I want you to think about these people here who are in a similar situation, cut off from the blessings of God and yet when God shows up in human form, he blesses them by feeding them and so shows them that they are included in those covenant blessings.

blessings. At one stage in history, we were cut off from God. We did not enjoy God's favour or blessing in a particular way. And yet because of Jesus, we can come here next week, take of the bread and the wine and remember that God's covenant blessings are for us.

The Anglican prayer book talks about the, or Anglican liturgy and doctrine talks about the Lord's Supper being a means of grace.

[28 : 42] And what it means by that, what it's trying to get at there is that as we take the bread and we take the wine, we remember God's promises to us. His covenant promises to us.

That Jesus died for us, that he was raised for our salvation and because of that, we can enjoy eternity with him, worshipping him. I hope you've seen tonight what a dramatic passage this is. A real pivotal passage in salvation history, in this big picture history of God reconciling people to himself. No longer will he limit his blessing, his covenant blessing to one people and one nation, but he's opening it up to all people.

And that means that if you're sitting here tonight and I look out here and I see people of many different nations in terms of heritage and background. And here among us, we also have many different cultures and tribes and socioeconomic status.

Many of us come from different kinds of families, some single parents, some, you know what I mean. We're all coming from different places. And so we should be encouraged as we look around and we see so many different kinds of people that God's blessings surely have spread across the earth.

[30 : 09] I'll finish with that passage from Matthew 28. He finishes his gospel with it and I think he had this passage in mind as as he quotes Jesus.

Matthew 28 verse 18 to 20. The risen Lord Jesus says to his disciples, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of one nation. No. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and the son and the Holy spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for your grace.

Please Lord, help us to be blown away tonight. By the extent of your grace. that you would have been perfectly within your rights to limit your blessing to one people, to one race, even to one gender if you wished.

[31 : 21] But you didn't. You spread open the gates to all nations, all cultures, all tribes, all tongues. And so you invite every one of us tonight to come to you, to know you, to love you, to worship you.

Lord, now as we stand and we worship you again, I pray that out of our heart would flow great thanksgiving for the graciousness that you extend to us.

We pray all these things in the name of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Thank goodness.

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