

From Crumbs to Abundance

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Good morning. I'm Ben Roberts. I'm still fairly new here, so I feel the need to keep introducing myself to you, but you've probably seen me around. I've been on staff since the fall as the director of Artizo, and it's great to have the opportunity to preach this morning.

You should know that David Short was originally scheduled to preach this morning, but then he looked at the passage and he immediately booked a flight to Australia. It is actually a great passage, though it's challenging, as we'll see. It'll help you if you have Matthew 15 open in front of you. And I have two points this morning. Great faith and abundant grace. Great faith, abundant grace.

But let's start by remembering our context. This section comes clear in contrast to the things that are around it. It's bookended on either side of this text that we have today, with Jesus absolutely skewering the Jewish religious leaders. And so you'll remember last week, Jesus says, you hypocrites. You do things in the name of God, but your religious tradition is dead set against God. You're blind to the sickness of your heart, and you need saving. Not from the outside in with your traditions and the laws you've added on top of the law, but from the inside out, by God's work in your hearts. That was the bad news, right? Our hearts are terminally ill. This week, we're back to the good news. Jesus drawing out faith, pouring out abundant grace as people come to him. So if last week was the diagnosis, this week is the cure. So let's talk about this woman's great faith. Well, this is a real setup by Matthew. It's quite surprising as we get into it. Right out of the gate, this passage doesn't promise us much. In verse 21, we see that Jesus went away. He withdrew to Tyre and Sidon. Jesus essentially steps back from the religious explosion that he's created with the Pharisees. And he does that by going somewhere that they don't want to go, which is into Gentile territory. You know, we might imagine that Palestine in Jesus' day was just kind of this Jewish place.

[2 : 30] Actually, it was more like a checkerboard. Different areas inhabited by different cultures and peoples. There's Jewish areas, Samaritan areas, Gentile areas. They're all very segregated by an ancient animosity that they have for each other. And for the Jews, by this idea of religious purity that they're pursuing. And so here we are, very interesting. We're in Gentile territory, hostile territory.

And this Canaanite woman comes to find them. This word Canaanite, it doesn't appear anywhere else in the New Testament. It's actually an archaic word.

It points the reader and pulls us back into the history of Israel. So if a writer today, if you're reading the newspaper today and someone were to start calling Russia USSR in the newspaper, you'd be like, what are you doing there? What are you on about? That's kind of what Matthew is doing here. He's taking an Old Testament word and he's put it here. And when we read it, he wants us to think enemy, idolater, unclean. I mean, historically, these are the people who are wanting to destroy God's people and push them back out of the land that God has brought them into.

So this Canaanite woman is shouting at Jesus. She says, have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David. My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.

[3 : 58] I think this is our first clue that something really interesting is about to happen. When she calls Jesus the son of David. This is the language of God's people and it's coming from the mouth of their enemy. This Canaanite is speaking of the Jews promised king that is coming.

Yet if you look there at what happens next, it says Jesus is silence, not even a word back. I'm trying silence as a teaching technique. Is it working?

Silence can be quite uncomfortable, can't it? It can also be an invitation. My wife is a teacher. She says one of the most important things a teacher can learn is when to stop talking.

So we look at this and we think to ourselves, why is Jesus doing this? And we want him to respond immediately. We want Jesus to just drop everything that he's doing and run over to this woman and say to her, oh, that must be so hard. Your daughter is sick.

You know what? She's healed. It's done. I've done it. As we look at this, we might be offended at Jesus or at least confused when he doesn't answer.

[5 : 20] Why is he being so rude to this woman? But Jesus isn't a miracle vending machine. So if you look at the miracles across the Gospels, you'll see that Jesus heals in very different kinds of people, in very different ways, and that all those differences have a purpose.

And so some of the miracles, you'll remember as we've gone through Matthew, some of them reveal the power of God. Other miracles really reveal compassion. Still others, how the power of God is able to work through the disciples in various miracles.

And what we can take from this is that Jesus sees into the heart. He works to heal and save from the inside out. And so he meets people, he meets us for who we are.

He meets us where we are. And he calls us from that place to come towards him. Jesus is after something deeper here than just distributing miracles, although he does care about healing people. He's after faith in the human heart. And of all of Jesus' ministry, he goes around and he sees faith in people's hearts. He sees the gift of God that has been put there, and he fans it into flame.

[6 : 35] He draws it out of them. It's beautiful. But we have to remember that that process doesn't always feel good. Well, sometimes we come to Jesus by his word, and it hurts us, doesn't it?

It offends. Yet faith can actually be revealed and grown in a hard word or a challenge.

Here, faith is called forth in silence. As I prayed for this sermon this week, as I was working on it, I thought to myself, Lord, how many times have you been silent when I've prayed?

And what is it that you were working, perhaps, in that silence that I couldn't see at the time? But as we look back to the disciples, we see that they're not very impressed by Jesus' silence.

Now, this woman may have started off as being an irritation for them. Now she's obviously a full-blown annoyance. And so they say, send her away. She's crying out after us. And most likely, what they mean is not, tell her to go away.

[7 : 53] They mean, just give her what she wants. Just heal her already. Or whatever. So she leaves us alone. And we can see that by the way that Jesus responds, because he says back to them, but I was sent to Israel.

And if that's what's happening here, then there's a callousness in the disciples that's very disturbing. I mean, give her a miracle and just send her on her way, honestly?

Jesus' answer is fascinating. I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Jesus is wonderfully clear about his own mission, even though all the people around him seem to really struggle with understanding it.

But he used the same language, didn't he, in chapter 10. And he sent the disciples out and he said, go only to the cities and towns of Israel. Don't go anywhere into Samaria. Don't go anywhere among the Gentiles.

And this is good for us to remember. Jesus wasn't sent to first century Rome. He didn't go to Athens. He didn't go to Ephesus, any of these other big cities. Jesus wasn't sent here to 21st century Vancouver as a baby.

[9 : 08] He went to God's people as their king, the son of David, who would ultimately become the king of everything. But God's people would be the first to accept or reject him.

That was the place where God is going to fulfill all these generations of promises, of covenant that he's made to his people. Well, that's the epicenter of God's work of redemption. That's the seed that's going to flower into this worldwide mission.

And it's so interesting, isn't it? Some of these same dull and callous disciples are going to be the very ones that are going to take up that message and take it to the Gentiles and to the ends of the earth.

And so what Jesus is saying here, it's pregnant with meaning. I mean, it's completely true. He goes to Israel first. And yet it's so ironic in terms of God's final purpose, what he's going to do after cross and resurrection through these disciples.

This ultimate mission that he's preparing these disciples for to go to the ends of the earth. And so the now and the not yet are kissing each other here. They're coming together, right?

[10:14] We see Jesus' mission in that moment, and yet we get a glimpse of the future and what he's going to do. Okay, so where are we? We came to this thinking about the Pharisees and their blindness and their hypocrisy.

Now we've looked at the disciples who seem to be overly used to Jesus' ability to heal and callous. They don't seem to have much compassion for this woman. They seem to want Jesus to heal the woman to sort out their annoyance.

But look at this Canaanite woman. She recognizes Jesus. She has faith in him. She looks at Jesus, and she sees grace available for her.

She isn't put off by Jesus being a Jew sent first to the Jews. She believes that his grace and power that was going to God's people first was going to be able to leak over the edges even to her and her daughter.

And this, I mean, this is the miracle here, isn't it? This woman can see past the horizon of Jesus' ministry, beyond even what his own disciples are able to understand, and see Jesus' ultimate mission to save the world.

[11:33] Look what she does next. She comes and she kneels before him. Lord, help me. Lord, help me. What humility.

What courage. What else can people with sick hearts say to God when we come before him? Lord, help me. But Jesus then takes it one step further, making us even more uncomfortable.

This is really challenging. Bread goes first to the children, not the dogs. You should know that the Jews used to call Gentiles dogs in Jesus' day.

And it's not like today on the internet when everybody just thinks dogs are super cute, and we love to look at pictures of dogs. This is not a compliment. This is brutal. This is insulting.

So why does Jesus say this? It lights the wick for the flare that's about to go off. This flare of faith that's about to blossom.

[12:33] Jesus may see and be able to draw forth from the human heart this faith, this beautiful faith. But we can't see it and his disciples can't see it until it's born into the world.

Jesus calls her faith out into the open. He's not scoffing at her. He's not insulting her. He's calling the question. He says, why are you asking me for help?

I mean, we're the children and you're the dogs, right? Why is it that you think I am the one that's going to help you? And I think he genuinely wants to know what she's going to say, doesn't he?

And her answer here is brilliant. I mean, you look at the scribes' sophistication. You look at the Pharisees' kind of self-righteous rule-keeping.

And even you look at the disciples and their kind of cluelessness. And her answer just eclipses all of them. Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

[13:36] Do you see how she matches wits with Jesus here? And Jesus loves it, doesn't he? He's delighted by this reply.

I mean, we think, oh, I can't believe she said that back to Jesus. He loves it. Why does he love it? Essentially, he's saying, you know, this woman is saying, Jesus, I see you.

I see who you are. I see your mission to Israel. We could do this in terms of a poker game. I see your mission to Israel. And I raise you the eternal and abundant love of the God of creation that is going to pour across the face of the earth.

I mean, with this bread, each crumb is a treasure. Each crust is a banquet. And there's even enough left over for the dogs to get the crumbs, and that's more than enough.

With this God, the God of creation, there's always enough. It's abundance. It's good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over the edges. The God of Israel and his son are so full of love and mercy that every morsel that drops off the edge of the table is a meal.

[14:51] And so this woman sees there's enough for me. There's enough even for me, the enemy, the adults or the unclean. That's what she sees.

She sees who God truly is. And Jesus says, now that is faith. That is putting your trust in who I am, seeing who I am and acting on the basis of it.

That's how I save. And so her daughter is delivered that very hour. This is the only place in Matthew where Jesus calls someone's faith great.

And the only other person in the Gospel of Matthew whose faith Jesus praises is actually a centurion in chapter 8 who is, interestingly, another Gentile. This is the guy that says, I'm not worthy that you would come under my roof.

Just say the word and my servant will be healed. And Jesus says, I haven't found faith anywhere in Israel that's like that. I realized as I was looking at it this week that when we pray the prayer of humble access, we actually pick up on these two stories.

[16:02] They're both mashed together and then set in the context of communion, right? Lord, I'm not worthy even to pick up the crumbs under your table. And what that prayer says to us, especially in its context, is remember, this is what it looks like to come to God in faith.

This is your example. This woman, she crosses through this racial hatred. She pushes past annoyed disciples. She names Jesus by his true name, Son of David, King, Messiah. She kneels down and begs help from the only one who can help. She perceives in these crumbs the very character of God. In her ignorance, so-called, she can see exactly what the religious and educated people cannot see.

And so the point is very clear, isn't it? The hypocrite, the self-righteous, is blind and hopeless. But what a beautiful thing, the needy are fed to fullness.

Just take a look at the abundant grace that's so lavishly poured out in the rest of this chapter. While this woman, with the eyes of faith, rejoices over crumbs, in verse 32, Jesus takes crumbs, seven loaves and two fish, and makes a banquet for thousands.

[17:25] Jesus has compassion on this hungry crowd that is following him. He feeds them to fullness and then he feeds them beyond fullness. This is the abundance of God on display. Seven baskets of crumbs beyond what is needed for everyone to eat.

If you remember on the flip side of your, the other side of your Bible there, the other page, when Jesus fed the 5,000, his disciples are the point. There's a basket left over for each of the 12.

But here, when he feeds the 4,000, it's about God's abundance. Notice seven loaves and seven baskets. God created everything that exists in seven days.

And here, through his son, he creates anew. A beyond full fullness. Seven baskets left over. This is the message.

There's more than enough with God. You may be desperately hungry. You may be desperately sick. But Jesus can feed a crowd with crumbs.

[18:32] He can heal the sick. He can deliver us from evil. He can save in everything that that verb implies. Forgiveness, life, and health into our death. Jesus is able to feed you and me.

I'm very forgetful about this. I need to hear it over and over. Just like the disciples here in verse 33. This is amazing, isn't it? Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?

It's like there's an echo here. Seriously? He just fed the 5,000 and healed a mountaintop of people. And you know, we laugh at them, but we're just like them, aren't we?

How quickly our wonder at God's works grows cold. How quickly we're used to this idea of grace. How quickly we look at the crumbs and pfft. And we think that because in our world we face scarcity, so it must be with God and his grace and provision for us.

It's just not good enough. Let's look again then at these miracles in verses 29 to 31. Great crowds come, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others.

[19:51] They put them at his feet, and he healed them so that they wondered and they glorified the God of Israel.

Our Lord is wondrous here, isn't he? I mean, the image is of people just dragging people up this mountain, dragging their sick friends and relatives up this mountain to find help for them, literally dropping them at the feet of Jesus and then they're made well.

And as we've seen throughout this whole passage, it all happens at the feet of Jesus. So as we also see that our hearts are sick, we can go to that same place, can't we?

We can come to Jesus asking for help, just like this woman. Sometimes we may even need our friends to drag us up that mountain, but Jesus is abundant with grace. He will help.

He'll look into our hearts, He'll see that gift, and He'll fan our faith into flame as we come.

Sometimes we grow callous to the wonder of this grace, but I think that our hearts are softened as we look here, aren't they?

[21:08] As Jesus calls forth this woman's faith, He calls forth ours. Look again, He says, see her need, see her desperation. See yourself there at Jesus' feet.

And look how just a crumb satisfies. Amen. Amen.