

A White Bread Sandwich

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[0 : 00] So Tad last week left us with a very challenging sermon, I thought. Just to remind you, it was the beginning of Matthew 15, and just to remind you what he had to preach from here, the text.

It was immediately before our one. So the bit just before our one was this. What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person, for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. So challenging sermon. So the Pharisees had come to Jesus with these complaints, and they're saying, look, the disciples, they aren't doing all the ritualistic stuff.

They're not doing the religious stuff they're supposed to do. They're not doing it properly. And Jesus said, our big problem is not that we fail to perform sort of religious duties. Our big problem is our hearts.

So how does Jesus follow on from this really full-on list here? With three stories of grace.

[1 : 07] Abundant grace. So what's Jesus' solution to this big heart problem? A problem that we can't solve? It's grace.

It's overwhelming grace. It's abundant grace. It's overflowing grace. And that's what these three stories are about. And it's wonderful.

And they're wonderful stories. Because they answer the question for us, how do we move from feeling sort of, you know, dirty or angsty or weak and ashamed? How do we move from that to feeling clean and forgiven and hopeful and satisfied?

How do we make that transition? As much as we can this side of the new creation. The answer is in the verses we're looking at here. It's the overflowing, abundant grace of God. And that's what this section is about.

So let's get into it. And I love this little chunk of the Bible here because it's a white bread sandwich. Let me tell you why.

[2 : 10] The first story is about bread. The last story is about bread. And the middle is these healing stuff. It's just a white bread sandwich. And I love, it's just about my favorite thing in the world.

So let's get into it. So verses 21 to 28, you see there, Jesus went to these places. These places called Tyre and Sidon. Now Tyre and Sidon, this is an interesting choice for Jesus because these places were historically the enemies of God.

During times of famine, armies of, the armies from those places would raid the Galilean territories. Like terrible, terrible business.

These guys actually sort of hated each other. And yet Jesus makes a rather deliberate trip there. But it would seem that when you're Jesus, you know, if you want to go somewhere to get some respite, it seems.

But when you're Jesus, it's hard to stay hidden. I used to work in high schools in New Zealand doing sexual and mental health presentations.

[3 : 17] So I was like the visiting speaker that you'd have during assembly. And so I'd travel around doing sexual and mental health talks. And I would literally, you know, speak to thousands, like I think about 20,000 teenagers a year.

And so I became well-known amongst this sort of generation. And I'd be walking down the street and a car would go past me and all these people would lean out the window and go, Hey, it's the sex guy, which is fine.

Except if I was out like walking with my mom or, you know, like on a date or something. When you're well-known, it's hard. I know, because it was always like, what was that about?

I'll tell you. Don't worry about it. It's fine. So when you're kind of well-known, it's hard to get a break. That's my point. I notice you're not taking notes.

You haven't been taking notes for the last 30 seconds of that really interesting story I just told. So Jesus is quite well-known. And he's even well-known in this place that's, you know, the enemy of God's people.

[4 : 27] So this Canaanite woman who knows Jesus hears his coming or sees him and goes up to him and repeatedly says to him, Mercy, mercy, my daughter is possessed.

And Jesus is silent. He doesn't say a word. What's he doing? And the disciples say, Jesus, can you just get rid of her? Now, I'm guessing it's either, Jesus, would you just heal the girl so we can get out of here?

Because she's drawing attention to us and we're kind of here for a holiday. We just want to be left alone. So Jesus responds with this.

So this woman, whose daughter is severely possessed and has just this terrible state, Mercy, mercy, mercy, my daughter is possessed. Let's just get rid of her, Jesus. And Jesus says, I was sent to the lost sheep of Israel.

That's his first response. So God chose Israel to be the sort of greenhouse to nurture the faith.

[5 : 33] So the Lord taught the Israelites who he was, established a whole lot of stuff with them, that they would be the light of the world, that they would be the greenhouse for the mission that would go out to the rest of the world.

So early on, Jesus' ministry is primarily focused on the Jews. So he's not sort of lying here. But it still sounds a little bit mean, doesn't it? Like this little girl's in trouble.

Why doesn't he just heal the daughter? Why not just do that? And, you know. So the woman moves closer and this time falls at his feet. Verse 25, Lord, help me.

That's it. That's all she's got. Lord, help me. That is her whole pitch. Help me.

She has nothing to barter with. She has no credentials to present. And she knows that. And she knows that apart from grace, her daughter is lost.

[6 : 38] I've told you this story before, but if you knew, this is a good example. My daughter, Bea, who's the very vocal one up the front, she was born with a very serious heart condition.

And they said without any intervention, she'd live for about six weeks. And surgery was the only option. So she was basically born dying. And so we had to feed her through a tube and we had to give her all these drugs.

And the doctor said, you've just got to keep her alive for three months so that her heart is strong enough for heart surgery, open heart surgery. And my wife and I, well, I remember so vividly at three months, we go to the hospital and the nurse, we're holding Bea, and the nurse gives her something in her mouth.

It was an injection, I can't remember, but she goes limp. And we just hand it to the nurse. And the nurse holds her and just walks out of the room with her to OR. It was brutal.

She had one shot at survival. This was it. We rested our whole hope on the surgeon's hands. You know, her heart was the size of like a mandarin.

[7 : 48] So this woman here in the story brings her all her hope for Jesus. And it's a heart-wrenching request. Jesus, help me.

Jesus is her last hope. And Jesus says, Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. What? What does that mean?

Did Jesus just call her a dog? What's going on here? Well, let me tell you what I think's going on. Jesus is not calling the woman a dog, I don't think.

It's a tiny little parable. Just this little miniature parable. And like most of Christ's parables, it reflects some kind of typical scene in daily life.

And it's a Gentile parable because Jews didn't like dogs. Because Gentiles were okay with dogs. For Jews, dogs were unclean things. And the dog word here in the Greek, it's a diminutive.

[8 : 55] It's diminutive, so it means not like a big, you know, homeless dog, but more like a little pet, like a little dog. So I think what's going on here, it's a household scene. And Jesus is saying, Look, lady, you don't take the food off the plate from the kids and give it to the dogs.

He's basically reiterating the bit about, I'm here for the Jews first. I'm ministering to the Jews first. So it's an issue of chronology. To which she says, and it's great, she says this, Yes, Lord.

Yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumb. And Jesus said, Oh woman, great is your faith. Be it done for you as you desire. And her daughter was healed instantly.

So all of a sudden, Jesus says, Oh, your faith is amazing. This is great. She's fantastic. And she's actually the only one, I think, whose faith is called great.

It's the highest commendation Christ can make. And it's reserved for this woman from this enemy territory who had nothing to bring to the table except this request, this begging, help me.

[10 : 05] Now, what was actually so great about this faith? What's in this line? Again, Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. It's a great line. Here's what's great about her.

She gets it. She's the first person to actually hear a parable and understand it and believe it. She says, Yes, Lord, I understand. I understand what you're saying.

But there is so much grace. And there is so much life. And there is so much restoration. And you have so much healing to go around. There's an abundance of it.

And I'm just happy with the overflow. I'm just happy with the bits that kind of fall off the table. There's so much of it that that's enough for me. She says, I know your priority.

I know the chronology of this. You're here for the Jews, but it's so awesome. I'm just happy with the crumbs. And she's actually announcing something really wonderful, isn't she? She's saying God's grace, which was focused on the Jews for a long time, is overflowing the boundaries to the whole world, to all.

[11 : 10] She gets it. So why is Jesus so reluctant at the start, though? I mean, if you sort of read the story quite quickly, you'd think, oh, she changed his mind.

But that's actually not the case. And we know this because if you go to Mark's Gospel, which tells exactly the same story, if you look at the grammar of the sentence, the daughter is healed.

It's kind of hidden in the English. But the daughter is actually healed right at the beginning, at the very first request, when she says, have mercy on her. My daughter's really possessed. Can you heal her?

Right at the start, before all the back and forth, that's when the daughter is healed. So what about all the rest of it? What's all that about? Why the foe refusal?

Why the silence? Because Jesus is drawing out her faith. He's creating this opportunity for her great faith to be exposed. He's creating this opportunity for the great faith of this woman who is part of a country that hates the people of God for her faith to be put on display because it's so awesome.

[12 : 24] Now, why do we need to hear this story here today? Because we're like the disciples in the other bread story, the bottom slice of bread.

Verse 32, the feeding of the 4,000, the lesser known feeding. There's something in this that is in us.

Let me read it to you. And this healing is not a repeat of the same healing. It's a different healing in a different place in a Gentile region. But there's a couple of details that jump out. Let me remind you of it here.

Verse 32, then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion on the crowd because they've been with me now for three days and I've got nothing to eat and I'm unwilling to send them away hungry lest they faint on the way.

And the disciples said, where are we going to get enough bread in such a desperate place to feed so great a crowd? So this question to Jesus, to the guy who had just fed 5,000 people a chapter ago with less bread.

[13 : 27] Jesus in the previous chapter, chapter 14, had fed more people with less produce. And these disciples ask him that?

They so easily forget the grace of God. They so easily forget the grace of God. Like us. We hear about God's grace each week, hopefully each day.

And yet we're satisfied living with this sort of low-grade guilt or shame. Our minds perseverating on sin.

Some of it committed years ago. Why? Because we imagine that there is not enough bread for us. Because we think there's not enough bread for us.

But there is. It's overflowing. Verse 37 says, They ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of broken pieces left over.

[14 : 37] Why that detail? Because the writer wants us to know there was so much. There is more than enough grace for you.

There is more than enough forgiveness for you. We need this woman's faith in God's goodness. Now the meat in the sandwich. Very quickly. Not only is there enough bread for us, but let's look at this middle section.

Verses 29 to 31 there. And Jesus went on and sat down. And great crowds came to him, bringing their lame, their blind, the crippled, the mute, many others. And he put them at his feet. And the way it's written, it's like they literally are carrying people up to Jesus.

And they're just dropping them in front of Jesus. And he healed them. So that the crowd wondered when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled, healthy, the lame, walking, the blind, seeing.

Imagine the celebrations on that mountain. And they glorify the God of Israel. People are bringing their friends to Jesus. But they're bringing people that have no way of getting there themselves.

[15 : 39] Matthew wants us to see that God's grace, God's abundant, overflowing grace is not just sufficient for us. It's for others. It's for the people that we love.

We can trust it for other people. Let me finish up here. Christ's solution to our heart problem is abundant grace.

And this amazing Canaanite woman trusted in him. There was this fuzzy understanding of the disciples. There was this increasingly bitter opposition from the Pharisees trusting in their religious practices.

And her faith in the goodness of Jesus, her ability to trust that he will bring life where there's death. Grace where there's shame and forgiveness where there is just guilt.

Her belief in that is like this flare going up into the sky. It's awesome. That's why Jesus painfully draws it out of here. Folks, for those of you who do not believe God is good enough to be really trusted.

[16 : 46] For those of you who don't think there's enough bread for you. Pray. And pray with Sean now as he comes up.

Pray.

Pray. Pray. Pray.

explains Let's pray. Pray. Pray. Pray.ância