Jesus's Unexpected Grace

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[0:00] Have you ever been afraid to approach someone? A professor for help, a coach with a special request, a judge.

Have you ever been afraid? I think of Dorothy and her friends, the scarecrow, the tin man, and the cowardly lion as they step into that long green hallway in the Emerald City, approaching to the throne room of the Wizard of Oz, the great and powerful Oz, how they trembled before him, overwhelmed by the pomp and circumstance.
Have you ever felt that way as you've approached others? Have you ever felt that way about approaching God as well? Do you tremble to come to him?
Maybe like Dorothy, you feel like God is overwhelming and unwelcoming, that the God of the universe will have no time for you and that you have no place and no standing to come before him.
Now, it's also very possible in our world today that you don't feel that way at all. You may think, Jesus is our friend. We can walk in whenever we want, invite him to sit down on the couch, have a cup of tea with us.
[1:25] And maybe, as C.S. Lewis puts it, we are even putting God in the dock. We don't approach him in fear and trembling. We ask him to come and prove himself to us.

We put him on trial in our own hearts and minds. And we approach him with not only boldness, but an arrogance that he has to meet our standards and our needs.
However we think about approaching God this morning, the Bible always comes to challenge us, to challenge our assumptions.
And this morning, we're going to look at a passage in the book of Mark, where we see Jesus responding in an unexpected way, ways that will help us see him more clearly, and help us to know how we rightly should approach God.
So, we're in a series in the book of Mark. We're in Mark chapter 7. We're looking this morning at Mark 7, verses 24 through 30.
[2:31] I forgot to look that up in the Pew Bibles. Does anyone have a page number for me? 791? Great. Thanks, Melissa. So, 791, if you're using the Pew Bibles, we're going to read this passage and pray together.

As you're turning there, remember, Jesus has been preaching about the kingdom of God is at hand, and expressing that through his own ministry, to the people that he's around and with.
And so, with that, let's go ahead and read our passage. This is Mark 7, starting in verse 24. And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon.
And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. But immediately a woman, whose little daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet.
Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And he said to her, let the children be fed first, for it's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.
[3:46] But she answered him, yes, Lord, even the dogs under the table eat, yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. And he said to her, for this statement you may go your way.

The demon has left your daughter. And she went home and found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone. Let's pray together.
Lord Jesus, we come to you this morning and we ask for your help. We ask for your Holy Spirit to be with us. Lord, to enlighten our minds, to soften our hearts. Lord, so that we might understand and receive your word to us this morning.

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Lord, help me as I speak, that I would speak as I ought, and that we together would sit under your word today. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.
So as we continue through the Gospel of Mark, we're looking at these portraits of Jesus so that we might understand him and what the coming of the kingdom of God looks like more clearly. And today we have this, in my mind, unexpected account.
[4:53] We see Jesus in unexpected circumstances, we see Jesus responding in unexpected ways, and we hear Jesus affirm an unexpected faith.

So there's your outline if you're a note taker. Unexpected circumstances, Jesus responding in unexpected ways, and affirming an unexpected faith.
So let's just walk through this passage together. Jesus is in unexpected circumstances. This is the one place in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus actually departs from the primarily Jewish world of Israel.
He goes to Tyre and Sidon, which if in your map, your mental map, here's Israel. Tyre and Sidon is modern-day Lebanon. So it's north and along the coast. Historically, this was a place of antagonism toward the Jewish people.
This was the home, after all, of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahaz, who led the king of the northern tribes of Israel into idolatry and worship of Baal.
[6:00] Historically, it's also true that this was a place who, that allied with the opponents of the Maccabeans when the Maccabean Jewish people tried to revolt against the rule of the Seleucids, for those of you who know ancient Near Eastern history.

So this was a place where the enemies of the people of Israel, the nation of Israel, lived. One commentator says, they represented the most extreme expression of paganism, both actually and symbolically, that a Jewish person could expect to encounter.
Why did Jesus go there? Well, it seems like he went away to get away from the crowds and to be in an unknown place.
He was hoping, remember, going back to chapter 6, verse 30, Jesus and his disciples have been trying to get away to a quiet place. They've gone into the wilderness twice and failed both times. The crowd found them both times. So now they decide, and I've done this, I'm going to go to a coffee shop in the middle of a really busy city where I don't think I know anyone because that's the best place to be anonymous and to hide.
[7:20] I think that's what Jesus is doing. It says he wanted to be hidden. He didn't want anyone to know where he was so that he could rest. And yet, as we see over and over again, Jesus plans to rest in that way, seem to be foiled by the sovereignty of God.

And a woman walks in, and Mark makes very clear who this person is. It is a woman, a Gentile, a Syrophoenician.
Again, a commentator. Of all the people who approach Jesus, this is the person most, this is the individual who has the most against her from a Jewish perspective.
The cultural expectation was that Jesus wouldn't even see her, let alone respond to her. She comes in.
She'd heard of what Jesus had been doing in other places. She falls on her knees before him, and she begs him, please help my little daughter.
[8:24] She has a demon. She needs help. She didn't know how he would respond. Did she hope that she would find grace? Did she fear that she would be rejected?

Did she presume that because he'd done it, because Jesus had done these things in other places, he would do it here? The text doesn't say, but it seems like she came humbly, and she begged him for help.
And this is the unexpected circumstances that Jesus finds himself in. How would Jesus respond? Look with me in verse 27.
This is the striking part of the story, isn't it? This is not what you expect. And it's not what you expect because we've read other stories. People have come out of nowhere and encountered Jesus and engaged Jesus in remarkable ways.
Remember the woman that interrupted Jesus going with Jairus to Jairus' house. The woman who was an outcast and unclean, though she was Jewish. And he stops and he cares for her with compassion.

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[9:31] Remember Jesus encountering the man possessed by a demon in the Gerasene wilderness. How he comes to him with compassion and comfort. But here, it doesn't feel this way, does it?

Jesus' response, let the children be fed first, for it's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. It feels off-putting at best.
What we fear that he's saying is things like, this woman is no better than a dog. And being dismissive and rude and shaming.
Or at least looking at her and saying, as a Gentile, as an enemy of the people of God, I refuse you. That he's going to reject her. That's what it feels like he's saying.
But are we right in that first uncomfortable read? Is that really what Jesus means? Let's look a little bit more carefully at what he's saying.
[10:32] Because what Jesus is doing here, I don't think is doing that. Jesus is using a figure of speech, a parable, so to speak, about the nature of families.

He's saying there is a priority. When we sit down as a family, there is food on the table and it's for the children. Right? And the food that's on the table should not be removed from the children and put on the floor for other people in the family, the dogs of the family, who live under it.
The word dog here is a pretty unique word in the New Testament. It is not the normal word for dogs and you see in other places where you see dog used as an epithet towards people in the Bible. Where you see it being used as a derogatory term like you're a street dog that eats the garbage and feeds on corpses and this is the vision that some rabbis had of dogs more generally in the world. But this word is a different word than that. It's the word for foofy. You know? The dog that sits on your lap. Every day for a beloved family pet who is a part of the family.
[11:48] And listen carefully what Jesus says. He says, it's not that the food never gets to the dog but there is a priority here. There is a kingdom pattern here.

Both the children and the dogs are a part of the family. Both of them are loved but they are different. there is a distinction made.
And Jesus here seems to be using this parable to talk about a broad theme of the Bible where there is a kingdom pattern of the Jews first and then the Gentiles.
Why do I say this? Well, go all the way back to Genesis 12. The very beginning. God comes to Abraham. He says, I'm calling you to be the father of a great nation and I will bless you and I will make you into a great nation.
Your children will be the Jewish people, the people of God and I will bless them and I will make them a blessing. Right? In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.
[12:53] And so God chooses one man to show his particular grace to, one people to show his particular grace to, but also more importantly through.

So it's not just terminal in his love for his family, this people of God, but through them to all the families of the earth. And so this is the story of the whole Old Testament.
God raising up a people to display his glory and to be a blessing to the whole world. And we know when we read the Old Testament that they failed miserably about it. So we get to Isaiah 49 where the people of God have completely blown it and are facing God's judgment and God comes along and he says, I'm not done.
I'm going to raise up from among you a servant, one whom I'm going to send. Says it is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel.
He is going to do that, but more than that, I will make you a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. And so God comes in and he says, throughout the Old Testament there is this plan through this people to the whole world.
[14:07] And even in the Gospels, even as Jesus begins his ministry, he does this as well. In Matthew 10 verses 5 and 6 when Jesus sends out his disciples, he says, go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Jesus started his mission as a Jewish man to his people, the Jewish people. It was never the end goal, but it was the starting place for how he was going to do this.
That God would work through the Jewish people to bless the whole world. Now, why does he do this? Well, friends, there are times when we are standing on the brink of the mysteries of God.

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But if I could propose a few thoughts, I have two of them. One is that he's going, he wants to do this to show the particularity of his love. When he chooses Abraham, when he chooses a Jewish people, right, Deuteronomy reminds us that it's not because they were particularly holy or special or large or powerful or anything, but so that he might display the particularity of his love so that those who receive it might know.
It's not this vague general sense that the universe has a well-being towards you, but it's a particular love of a personal God towards his people. And secondly, it's for humility.
[15:42] When in that Deuteronomy passage, God is reminding the people of Israel through Moses, I chose you not because you had anything in you that was particularly lovely or that you could ever earn this.

You didn't deserve my love. You didn't earn my love. You didn't gain it because you were, met some standard of mine. It was purely of grace.
And so, you must know the walk of humility to receive it. To receive it not because you've done anything to earn it or to achieve it, but simply because I have chosen to give it to you.
And so, this is the pattern. And Jesus' little parable about the way families work is to confront this woman with this reality because Jesus is outside of the initial circle for the first time.
But notice that Jesus is very careful in the way, look back with me in verse 27 again. I want you to look with me. Let the children be fed first for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.
[17:03] Right? The children are to be fed first, not the children are to be fed only. Right? Not that the dogs are meant to be put out of the room and would never gain from this, but that there is a priority that Jesus is saying here about how his kingdom works.

That she has no claim on him. She has no grounds to seek his mercy. He is not being demeaning or rude. He is trying to reveal something in her.
So, this is Jesus unexpected response that challenges us. What is he doing? Ultimately, I think he's trying to reveal something in her.
And this is our third point. From this unexpected word from Jesus, he reveals an unexpected faith in this woman. Because the woman's response shows us that she understands what Jesus is saying far better than we do.
She is not offended. Instead, she engages with his words. She recognizes it and is willing to affirm the order and the distinction that Jesus is making. She says, I know I don't have a right to sit at the table.
[18:20] I'm a Gentile, not an Israelite. I know I don't deserve this. And yet, thirdly, you see that she has faith. Isn't the kingdom of God a feast that will feed us too? Isn't there a blessing, a crumb of your kingdom that I can get as well?

R.C. Sproul said it this way and I thought this was just so well said. So forgive me for preaching his words for a minute here. She didn't stand up and protest and say, how dare you insult me and speak to me as if I were a dog even if it's a household pet.
I'm no dog, I'm a woman. That was not her response. Her response was, yes, Lord, I understand. I have no prior claim to your mercy.
I am not numbered among your children. I can't jump up on the table and feast upon the food that you've set before your children. I don't want that. I'm satisfied, Lord, with the crumbs.
All I'm asking is that you would just let one crumb that falls from your table come into my mouth and I'm satisfied. Heal my daughter, please.
[19:29] I know she's not in your family. I know she's not numbered among your children. We are the dogs who wait for the crumbs, but one crumb is all I'm asking for.

What Jesus challenged to her, reveals in her is both humility and faith. This is what we see in her.
One of the reasons why I think this is so important is the context. Remember what Pastor Nick preached on last week, and if you weren't here, let me summarize it. In verses 1 through 23, Jesus encounters the Jewish leadership, the Pharisees and the rulers of the temple, and he challenges them.
He says, you think that because of your pedigree, because of your righteousness, because of your external religious living, you have a right to sit at the table of God.
God, he confronts them because they saw themselves as insiders that had a stake and a presumption that they were going to be blessed by the kingdom.

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[20:37] And in contrast to this, as he confronts that, he says, no, it's instead the nature of the heart that is most important. It's the heart that I look at, not the externals.

And so what I see here is that Mark puts these stories together so that we see Jesus turning from this rebuke on the insiders to this welcoming of the outsider because he sees her heart of faith. He has not turned her away. He has clarified so that everyone knows, so that she knows and her faith is rewarded.
When you read this story, it's almost the throwaway for this statement. You may go your way. The demon has left your daughter. He heals her just like he has so many others throughout the gospel of Mark.
And if you're wondering what in the world casting out demons and healing people like, go back and listen to our whole sermon series because we've talked about that a couple of times. So I'm not going to dwell on this today.
[21:45] But what it does mean is that the kingdom of God that you came here afraid that you might be rejected, uncertain as to how you would be received, Jesus says, the kingdom of God has come to your household today.

The kingdom of God has come to your daughter today by faith. And friends, is this not what we see? Is this not what we see in the rest of Scripture?
For we know that after Jesus' death and resurrection, the kingdom of God looks different in new and particular ways. Right? So God comes to the apostle Peter in Acts 10 and reveals to him that what he declares clean is clean.
And he declares all food's clean. And he breaks down the barriers and the distinguishing marks of the Jewish people. And he says, in this new, post-resurrection people of God, the thing that matters is faith in me only, not the law, not the keeping of the law because Jesus has come to fulfill the law and to then bring the law into our hearts.
And so he reveals this so that Jews as well as Gentiles have access to the kingdom of God without distinction. And so the apostle Paul as he writes to the mostly Gentile Roman church in Romans 1 says, I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.
[23:18] Now, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile, the order still continues. There's still this sense that even now today the church is built on the foundation. As Romans 11 says, those of us who don't have Jewish heritage, we are grafted in.

We are orphans that have been adopted into the family of God in new ways. But ultimately, the kingdom of God is for all who come in faith.
And this is the good news of the gospel that he shows an unexpected grace to us. Because the fact is, we are all Jew and Gentile, Syrophoenician women coming.
Because in our sin, we are all undeserving. We have no claim before God to say, you must accept us because these things. Instead, in our sin and our trespasses, we are enemies of God, the unrighteous who need God's cleansing.
And the call of the gospel is for us to come in humble, desperate faith. and confident faith.
[24:33] Because Jesus says, he who comes to me, I will in no way turn away. He wants us to see that it's of all of grace. Some of you in this room probably have grown up with a Jewish heritage.

Some of you may have grown up with the privilege of a Christian heritage. You may have neither of these. And you may have come out of families that neither honored nor worshiped nor knew the God of the Bible.
But the good news of the gospel is that the abundant gospel of grace is for you. Jesus has come and by his life and his death and his resurrection, he has achieved a salvation for all who believe.
And we can come and when we get to the end of the Bible, do you know what the beautiful thing is? We're invited to a feast. And there are no dogs under the table in this image.
There is a banquet feast for all to sit in and to feast on the grace of God and the undeserved love of God that he has showered on all of his people.
[25:43] Right? You who have no milk, you who have no bread, you who have no money, come and eat. That's what we read from Isaiah 55. And in Revelation, it says, come and eat in the abundance of the kingdom of God at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Come and taste that the Lord is good. We know that we deserve none of it, but have it all by God's grace. Friends, this is the good news that we learn through this unexpected encounter.

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Let's pray. Amen. Lord, I pray this morning that if we're those who fear to come to you because we think you will reject us because we're not good enough, because we fear that you would know our uncleanness, that you would know that somehow we feel like we're unacceptable to you, Lord, I pray this morning by your spirit that you would pierce our hearts with the reality of your kindness and grace.
Lord, and that you would fill us with a faith that would cause us to come, surrender our lives to you, to follow you. Lord, for those of us this morning, Lord, whose hearts may be hardened, who might presume that of course we are yours even though, Lord, in fact we walk in neither faith nor humility. God, I pray you would pierce our hearts so that we might see our presumption and repent of it. And Lord, I pray for us as a community, Lord, that we would know the joy, the joy that the gospel of grace is for all people, that we would know the joy of that being for us and Lord, that we would be those who embody that welcome to others for our good and for your glory.
[28:00] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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