

Matthew 15:21-29

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[0 : 00] This is Aaron, and open your Bibles up to Matthew chapter 15, and we're going to look at verses 21-39.

So if you've got a black church Bible, it's page 8-1. I don't know about you, but one of the things that I love about the Bible is its realism.

People often think it's kind of a fairy tale, a Bibleism once upon a time kind of book. But I don't think you can read the Gospels and come away with that idea. There's a realism. Scripture understands what life is like, and what you and I are like.

And we saw that in our passage last week, didn't we, in Matthew chapter 15, and verses 18 onwards. It says, what comes out of the mouth, what you speak about, what's on your lips, the reason that you speak in the way that you do, is because your heart proceeds from the heart. And this defiles a person. For out of the heart can be for false murder, adultery, sex, and anarchy, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.

[1 : 23] But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. It's not the outward acts. Your problem, and my problem, is my heart. That's very challenging, isn't it?

The Pharisees, they came at the start of chapter 15 with a complaint. They said, your followers, your disciples, they're not doing all the ritualistic stuff. They aren't doing the religious stuff they're supposed to do.

They're not doing it properly. They're breaking the rules. But Jesus says, our big problem, and your big problem, it's not that you fail as through religious duties.

And your biggest problem this week, it's not that you've not succeeded in what your goals were going to be, but your big problem, and my big problem, is my heart. So how does Jesus follow on from this list?

And wonderfully, Jesus follows on from this list with three stories of abundant, extravagant, amazing grace. The undeserved kindness of God.

[2 : 29] What is Jesus' solution to the big heart problem? It's a problem that we can't solve. And Jesus' answer is grace. Overwhelming grace.

Abundant grace. Overflowing grace. And that is what these three stories are about. They are wonderful stories. Because they move you and I to answer the question, how do we move from feeling dirty, or angsty, or weak, and shamed?

How do we move from all of that to feeling clean, and forgiven, and hopeful, and satisfied? How do we make that transition, as much as we can, aside from the new creation?

And the answer is in these verses that we're looking at here. It is the overflowing, abundant grace of God. I love this little chunk of the Bible.

It's another sandwich. Do you remember? We had a sandwich the other week, where there were kind of two little end pieces, two bread, and then a filling in the middle. This is a slightly different sandwich.

[3 : 37] It is a thick white bread, with a little filler in it. Because you'll see that both of the stories, from verse 21 to 28, are about bread, and then the one in 32 to 39 is about bread, too.

And then you've got the little meat in the middle, with the miracles. So let's get into it. Let's look at the first piece of bread, in verses 21 to 28. And you'll see Jesus on the move again.

Verse 21, he went away from there, and he withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. That's an interesting place for Jesus to go, because historically, these places, were where the armies of God, during times of famine, armies from these places, would raid Galilee and territory.

It's terrible business. It's enemy-occupied territory. The two groups of people, these from Tyre and Sidon, they hated each other, and Jesus makes a deliberate trip there.

It seems that his intention is to get some rest, to get some rest, but when you're Jesus, it's very, very hard to stay hidden. When you're well-known, it's hard to get a break, isn't it?

[4 : 57] I was hearing this week, a friend of mine was a sexual health teacher, in Dublin, to teenagers, went around all the schools, there were only a couple of them, he went to thousands of schools, and taught about sexual health, in high schools in Dublin.

He said he finally really enjoyed the job, apart from when teenagers saw him out in the street, they would say, ah, it's a sex man, or they just showed up. And he said that was fine, not when he was walking with his man, or walking with his girlfriend.

It's hard to get a break, isn't it, when you're well-known. It's hard to get rest points, when you're well-known. And Jesus is quite well-known, and he's well-known in a place that is, the enemy of God's people.

And so this Canaanite woman, who knows about Jesus, who he is, hears that he's coming, and goes up to him. It's really interesting, isn't it?

And Matthew calls her a Canaanite woman. That word, Canaanite, doesn't appear anywhere else in the New Testament. It's an archaic word. They didn't use it at the time.

[6 : 01] It points the reader backwards, and pulls them back into the story of Israel. It's like a journalist writing an article on Russia, and calling it USSR.

We think that was odd, wouldn't we? It's not called USSR anymore. He says, what are you doing? What point are you trying to make by using that word? What are you on about? And that's what Matthew is doing here.

He's taking an Old Testament word, and he's putting it in the Gospel. And when we spot it, it's to make us think. Canaanite, that's a word that's not used. What was a Canaanite?

Well, it was an enemy. It was an enemy of God's people. It was an idolater. The Canaanites were unclean. And this Canaanite woman, is shouting at Jesus.

Repeatedly. She surprisingly says to Jesus, do you see what she says? Oh Lord, Son of David.

[7 : 04] So you now became that woman, using the language of the Lord's people, Son of David. She is from the enemy of the Lord's people, and yet she takes the language of the Lord's people on her lips.

And she asks for, can you see it? Mercy. Mercy. My daughter, is severely oppressed, by a demon. And Jesus is silent. doesn't say a word. What's he doing?

Silence is difficult, isn't it? Do you know how it is? Go to the doctor. Go to the GP tomorrow morning. Do your symptoms. Say what's wrong. And there's silence.

Say, what are you doing? Teachers say that one of the most important things a teacher can learn, is when to stop talking. Preachers should learn that one of the most important things a preacher can learn, is when to stop talking.

[8 : 33] Silence can be deafening, can't it? So why is Jesus doing this? We want him to respond immediately, but he doesn't. The silence of Jesus is very difficult sometimes, isn't it?

The disciples say, can I get rid of this woman? I'm guessing, and what they're saying there is, can't you just heal this girl, so we can get out of here? She is drawing attention to us, we've come for a break, she's causing a scene, she's speaking loudly, she's an irritant, this woman is an annoyance, we just want to be left alone, heal her, get rid of her, Jesus.

So Jesus responds with this, this woman whose daughter is severely possessed, and in a terrible state, mercy, mercy, mercy, my daughter is possessed, just get rid of her, Jesus. But he says to her, doesn't he, shockingly, I was sent to the lost sheep of Israel, and that's his first response.

You need to understand the movement of the Bible, God chose the people of Israel. God chose the people of Israel to be his treasured possession. And they were to be like a greenhouse, you know what a greenhouse is?

A greenhouse is where you grow your plants, it's a hothouse, where the plants grow and develop, and are nurtured. And then when they're nurtured enough, and develop, you take the plants outside the greenhouse, into the garden, and they flourish.

[10 : 08] And the Lord had chosen Israel to be a greenhouse, to the rest of the world. It was to show what life with God looks like. And the Lord has taught the Israelites, who he was, he'd resumed himself to them, I am the Lord.

And Israel had had covenant promises established with them, my God, I will be your God, and the God of your children, and you will be my people. God had pledged himself to Israel, and they were

to be the light of the world.

They had to be the greenhouse of God, and from then, God's mission would go out into the rest of the world. And so we see that Jesus, early on in his ministry, is mainly focused on the Jews.

So he's not lying here. But it still sounds just a little bit mean, doesn't it? This little girl is in trouble. Why doesn't he just heal the daughter?

And so the woman moves closer, and this time she falls to his speech, and verse 25, she says these three amazing words. Children, we learn them inside the school.

[11:24] Do you remember what they were? One of the words we learned? Lord, help me. That's all she's got. Lord, help me.

That's 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.

Nothing in my hands I bring, she could see. It's like if you take a child into the operating theatre, or into A&E, and they're really unwell, and you take them into the hospital, they're in your arms, and they are helpless.

And you take them, and you give them to the nurse, or to the doctor. And you are placing your child, and all your hopes, into the hands of that doctor and nurse.

And the woman brings all her hopes to Jesus, and it's a heart-rending request, isn't it? Lord, help me. Jesus is our last hope.

[12:33] What humility for this woman. What courage. And Jesus makes us even more uncomfortable, doesn't he, in his response. Look what he says, verse 26. And he answers, it is not right, to make the children's bread, and throw it to the dogs.

What does that mean? Did Jesus just call her a dog? What's going on? Look at some of the things, that are going on.

Jesus is not calling this woman a dog, I don't think, in the slang sense, that we use for children. It's a tiny little parable. It's a miniature parable. And like most of Jesus' parables, it reflects a kind of typical scene from Jesus' daily life.

And it's a Gentile parable. Jews didn't like dogs. Gentiles were okay with dogs. For Jews, dogs were unclean. They didn't help them. And the dog words here, it's a diminutive, it means like, it's not like a garland dog, it's not a massive, kind of foaming at the mouth dog, it's a house dog.

It's a pet little dog. It's like the raised little bundle of fur. Willow. It's like a level household pet. And he says, you don't take the kids off the, you don't take the food off the kids' plates and give it to the dogs.

[14:01] He's basically reiterating the point. It's the same point. I come for the Jews first. I'm here for the Jews first. I am ministering to the Jews. It's an issue of chronology, of timing.

And to which he says, verse 27, yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. And Jesus answered her, oh woman, great is your faith.

Be it done for you as you desire. And her daughter was healed instantly. And so all of a sudden, Jesus says, your faith is amazing.

Great is your faith. It's only place in the New Testament where somebody is told that. This is great. You are fantastic. It's the highest commendation Christ can make.

And it's reserved for this woman from enemy territory. Who had nothing to bring to the table except this request, this begging, this help me. Now what was it that was so great about this faith?

[15:09] It is in the line, isn't it? Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Here's what's so great about her. She gets it. She's the first person, I think, to hear a parable and actually understand it and believe it.

And she says, Lord, yes, I understand what you're saying. I understand what you're saying, that there is so much grace, so much undeserved kindness, there is so much life, there's so much restoration, there's so much fullness, there's so much healing to go around.

There's an abundance of it. And she says, I'll just take the overflow. I'm just happy with the bits that fall off the table. There's so much of it.

That's enough for me. She says, I know your priority, I know your chronology, I understand that Israel is the greenhouse of God, and it's wonderful, Jesus, that you're here for the Jews, but I'm just happy with the crumbs.

She's actually announcing something wonderful. She's saying, God's grace, which has focused on the people of God, Israel, the Jews, for a long time, is overflowing.

[16:23] It's overflowing its boundaries to the whole of the world. She gets it. It's like she plays poker with Jesus.

You can describe it in terms of a poker game. She says, I see you, I see your mission to Israel, and I raise you the abundant love of God, of creation, that is going to pour across the face of all the earth.

So why is Jesus so reluctant to start? I mean, if you read the story quickly, you might say, when he changed his mind, that is actually the case. And we know that because when you read this in Mark's gospel, he tells exactly the same story, but if you look the grammar of the sentence is a little bit hidden in the English, she's healed right at the beginning at the very first request.

Where she says, have mercy of my daughter. She's possessed, you can heal her, and right at the start, before the back and forth, that is when the daughter is healed. So what is the rest of it about? Why is there this silence of Jesus? Well, because Jesus is drawing out her faith. He is creating the opportunity for her great faith to be exposed.

[17:42] He's creating the opportunity for the great faith of this woman who is part of a country that hates the people of God, but her faith is put on display because it's so great. She realises that from Jesus' table, each crust is a treasure.

each crumb is a banquet, each morsel is a meal. And this lady says, there's enough for me. There's enough for me.

There's enough. And we need to hear this story today, don't we? There's enough grace for you. Because we are like the disciples in the other story, the other slice of branch, so I can get the other slice of branch, verse 32.

And the feeding of the 4,000. It's the lesser known miracle. I've been doing the children's colouring sheets for the last little while. They're not as good as they used to be when they used to be in Lichford.

If you go on and you look for colouring things for children, feeding of the 5,000, it's everywhere. But you cannot find, as far as I can tell on clip art or on the internet, a drawing of feeding of the 4,000.

[18:57] I don't like it. It's like the forgotten about miracle. It's like people kind of erased it. Look at verse 32.

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

And the disciples said to him, where are we going to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed such a great crowd? And Jesus said to them, how many loaves do you have? They said, seven and a few small fish. And directly the crowd sat down on the ground and took the seven loaves and fish and given them thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

And they all acted on the sacrifice. And they took up seven basketfuls and the broken pieces left over. And those were actually 4,000 men besides women and children. And after sending them away, the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadine.

It's not a repeat. It's in a different place at a different time than the feeding of 5,000. In a Gentile region. And there's a couple of details that jump out, aren't there? That question is astonishing, isn't it?

[20:25] Of the disciples. In verse 32, where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed such a great crowd? They say this to Jesus who in the previous chapter had fed 5,000 people.

A chapter ago, he fed more people with less bread. He fed more people with less produce and his disciples asked him, how on earth are we going to feed these people? Because they so easily forget the grace of God.

they so easily forget the grace of God. How stupid can you be like us? We hear about God's grace every week, don't we?

We confess our sin very clearly and very deliberately every Sunday morning. We receive God's assurance of pardon very clearly, very deliberately. and yet many of us are satisfied living with a kind of low grade level of guilt and shame.

There are many of us where our minds go back over and over and over our sins and suffer that which we did years ago, decades ago. Why? Because you and I, we imagine that there's not

enough bread for us.

[21 : 40] Because we think there's not enough bread for us. I'm different. If only you knew, if only you could get inside my head and my heart and see what I like, I'm different.

That's what we think. But there is enough bread, it is overflowing. Look at verse 37. They ate and were satisfied. They took seven basketfuls of broken pieces.

Why that detail? Because the writer wants you to understand there was so, so much. So if you remember the last few years ago, I think a couple of weeks ago, the disciples, there was twelve baskets left over.

Do you remember that? How many disciples were there? Twelve disciples. How many tribes of Israel were there? Twelve tribes of Israel. It's shown you this is volatility that God's grace is enough for the people of Israel.

But you know when he feeds on the four thousand it's about God's abundance. So look at what it says. It says there were seven loaves, seven baskets. God created everything and there is in seven days.

[22 : 51] And here through his son he creates anew. There is more than enough with God. There is more than enough grace for you. There is more than enough forgiveness for you.

And you may be desperately hungry. You may be desperately sick. You may be desperately guilty. But Jesus can feed a crowd with crabs.

And he's able to feed you in needs. There is more than enough to go around. And we forget this, don't we? And the disciples say to you, look at verse 33.

where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed such a crowd? We need the woman's faith in God's goodness. Let's look at the meat and the sandwich really quickly.

Not only is there enough bread for us, but look at the middle section, verse 29 and 31. The meat and the sandwich. Jesus went up from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee and he went up on the mountain and sat down.

[23 : 56] And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mottled, and many others. And they put him at his feet and he healed them. So that the crowd wondered when they saw the mottled speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, the blind seeing, and they glorified the God of Israel.

The way it's written, literally, they are carrying people up to Jesus and they just drop him. drop him in front of Jesus. And he healed them. Here's my son, here's my friend, here's my neighbour, here's my husband.

And so the crowd wonders. Can you imagine the celebrations on the side of that mountain? And they glorified the God of Israel. People are bringing their friends to Jesus. People are bringing their family to Jesus.

People are bringing their colleagues to Jesus. People are bringing their neighbours to Jesus. And they're bringing people who have got no way of getting out of themselves. And Matthew wants you and I to see that God's grace, God's super abundant, overflowing grace is not just sufficient for us, but it's for others.

It's for the people that we love. It's for the people that we care for. It's for the people that we know. God's God's solution for our heart problem is abundant grace.

[25 : 36] And this Canaanite woman trusted in it. There was the fuzzy understanding of the disciples. There was increasingly bitter opposition from the Pharisees, trusting in their religious practices, promises, but her faith is in the goodness of God.

Her ability to trust that he will bring life with his death, and grace where there is shame and forgiveness, where there is guilt.

This moment's belief that someone's faith is like a flare going up into the sky that we see. it is awesome. And it is why Jesus painfully draws it out of her.

So for those of you this morning who do not believe that God is good enough to be really trusted, and for those of you who do not think this morning that there's enough bread for you, and for those who think you've wandered too far away you look in faith, you look in faith to him, because his grace is super abundant and overflowing, and there is bread at the table, and there's wine at the table, and there's more than enough for you.

We're going to use the prayer of humble access before we sing. It's after the hymn of your sheets. This is a prayer from the book of common prayer, and Cranham wrote this.

[27 : 23] It is a beautiful, beautiful prayer that uses the words of the Savior. You'll see that in the third paragraph it speaks about as we come to the Lord's table that we eat the flesh of your dear son Jesus Christ and we drink his blood.

We know we don't do that literally. Don't misunderstand it. But as we come to the table, we do partake. And we do by faith feed on Christ.

Jesus says this is this is my body given for you. This is my blood spilled for you.

The blood of the everlasting covenant given for you. You drink of it. And as we do that, as we exercise faith in Christ, we are made clean by his body. And our souls washed through his most precious blood.

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel saints. Let's just take a moment in the silence. Let's read through this prayer of our own. And then we'll read through it together.

[28 : 32] Amen. Amen. Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Let's pray.