

# The Outsiders Welcomed In

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, sometimes, sometimes Jesus says some quite shocking sounding things, doesn't he? Things that make you go, what did he just say?

I think it'd probably be fair to say that this is one of those passages, one of those passages where the way Jesus speaks certainly kind of makes us sit up and take notice, but perhaps initially more with shock than with wonder.

But sitting up and taking notice is exactly why I think Jesus does speak the way he does. It grabs our attention, doesn't it?

The attention of the disciples listening in. And that's exactly what Jesus wants because something really important is going on.

I wonder what you thought when we read verse 26 there. It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

[ 1 : 19 ] Sometimes Jesus speaks in surprising ways. And maybe at those moments what we're tempted to run and hide, just kind of gloss over them and pretend they're not there and just carry on with our Bible reading and wait till we get to a bit that's a bit easier to understand.

Or perhaps, more dangerously, we think these moments are showing us a few flaws perhaps in the life and ministry of Jesus.

That's why I've been quite surprised to find, to be honest, that this week many people think is happening here. That Jesus is showing his kind of fallibility in the language that he uses or showing a lack of understanding of who's invited into his kingdom.

Even one of my more trusted commentaries this week said, and I quote, that Jesus' interaction with the Canaanite woman shows his capacity was limited.

I want to say right away this evening, that is not what we are seeing here. And I'm addressing it straight away because I reckon there's a good chance it's what caught your attention as we read through and where your mind will linger until those questions are answered.

[ 2 : 47 ] But it's one of those moments that is so important we get right. Because if we get this wrong, we get Jesus wrong.

And if we get Jesus wrong, we'll get our response to Jesus wrong. But if we get this right, then I think I certainly found this as I was studying over the last week.

If we get this right, I think this goes from perhaps one of the more shocking passages in this gospel to one of the most beautiful. So let's just look together, dive straight into our first point this evening, where we see a great faith in a gracious Savior.

Our passage begins there in verse 21 with Jesus on the move. We see in there traveling, presumably from Gennesaret, which we saw at the end of chapter 14, which was kind of still on the fringes of Jewish territory, up towards Tyre and Sidon.

Now, important things for getting our head around these verses, Tyre and Sidon were absolutely not Jewish territory. Up along the coast, kind of modern-day Lebanon, these were Gentile lands.

[ 4 : 05 ] That means they were inhabited by people who did not know or worship the God of Israel. And that meant to the Jews, they were outsiders.

Okay, they were unclean. Considered especially so by the Jerusalem-dwelling Pharisees further south in the Judean heartlands.

Now, if you remember anything of where we were a fortnight ago, at the start of Matthew chapter 15, you might start to be joining some dots. Just look back there to verse 1 of chapter 15, where we see the Pharisees and scribes come to Jesus from Jerusalem.

And they start probing Jesus, don't they, about why his disciples eat in a manner that defiles them, makes them unclean. And Jesus responded, didn't he, by explaining to them and the unlooking crowd, we are not made clean from the outside in.

We are made clean from the inside out. So, the discussion that has just happened before this moment in Matthew is that external cleanliness is the factor for the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

[ 5 : 27 ] And it is a non-factor for Jesus himself. And so, Jesus immediately, okay, off the back of this interaction, immediately marches straight into Gentile or unclean territory.

And I think what we see here happening is Jesus kind of, he's going from the lecture hall to the lab. He's taking his class, the disciples, out on a field trip.

I don't know what field trips were like for you growing up. I don't have the greatest memories of them, to be honest. I vaguely remember once kind of being taken to the local bog to stick some litmus paper in a puddle.

The execution might not have been great by my teachers, but it is spot on here, okay? Jesus knows exactly what he is doing. And the idea, isn't it, with any field trip, is that you go and put the theory into practice.

Jesus has explained how this works in verse 1 to 20. Now he's going to show you how it works in verse 21 to 39.

[ 6 : 36 ] As Jesus goes on, verse 22, A Canaanite woman comes crying out after him, Have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David.

My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon. Now Matthew's doing a lot of things here.

First, he calls the woman a Canaanite. And again, that helps us understand what's going on here, what Jesus is doing, what Matthew's doing, because nobody in that day was actually a Canaanite.

Canaanites didn't exist anymore. They hadn't for a thousand years. It would be a bit like calling someone a barbarian today. You're not describing their ethnicity, are you?

You're sort of describing their relationship to society. The Canaanites were long gone, but they were the historical enemies of God's people, who the nation of Israel was to have nothing to do with, so that they would be, as a nation, clean, pure, holy.

[ 7 : 48 ] So here, Matthew says, was a Canaanite. And here was a woman. Again, in their culture, Jewish men, and particularly rabbis, that is teachers like Jesus, would not have engaged in conversations with women.

It's why the disciples are all shocked in John 4, when they find Jesus speaking to the woman at the well. Here was a Canaanite. Here was a woman. And here was someone from a demon-possessed household.

What's Matthew doing? Well, he's showing us, isn't he, that this is someone who, in the eyes of the Pharisees at the beginning of the chapter, could not be more unclean.

For them, right, the length of a barge pole was nowhere near far enough to be from someone like this. There were countless factors not to go near her, because she was, by every metric, unclean.

There were outsiders, and then there was this woman. But what has Jesus just taught in the classroom? It's not what's on the outside.

[ 9 : 08 ] It makes you unclean. It's what's on the inside. Remember, we're going from the lecture hall to the lab. Who is it that needs to work out what they've heard in that setting?

It's not the teacher, is it? He's done the work. It's now time for the students to show that they've understood what they heard.

So, verse 23, Jesus initially responds by not saying a word. What good would a field trip be if the teacher went around doing all the work and left the students on the bus?

He takes a step back to see how the disciples will respond. And that not only fits with the immediate context. It is, I think, the only reasonable explanation to Jesus' silence, given what we've already seen from Jesus through Matthew.

Some people, again, read into Jesus' silence here that he didn't want anything to do with the woman because of who she was. That can't be right. Because we've already seen in this gospel, right, earlier in Matthew, how Jesus engages with people that would have been considered unclean at the start of chapter 8.

[ 10 : 33 ] He is glad, isn't he, to heal a Gentile centurion servant. He wants to go and help him.

A chapter later, chapter 9, a woman with a discharge of blood, something, again, that would have made her ceremonially unclean, touches Jesus. And what does Jesus do?

He commends her faith and sends her away healed. And then just a few verses on from that, he casts out a demon of a man who is unable to speak.

We know from Matthew's own account that Jesus was not only kind of not put off by, but was eager, enthusiastic, excited about helping Gentiles and women and people who were ceremony unclean and people possessed by demons.

Jesus wanted to help them. He loves to help them all. None of it is off limits for Jesus. So when he doesn't say a word in verse 23, well, he's not turning a blind eye to the woman's needs.

[ 11 : 42 ] He is waiting to see how the disciples respond. And they show, don't they, that they've not understood the lesson yet.

Send her away. Send her away, for she is crying out after us. This outsider, push her further away, Jesus.

We don't want to be seen near her. She's an inconvenience for us. She's making our life difficult. She's annoying us. Can't you just send her away? And this, I think, is what makes Jesus' interaction with a woman so brilliant and so clever.

Because he begins the interaction in verse 24, knowing two things, okay? First thing he knows, the woman gets it.

Second thing he knows, the disciples don't. She knows she needs mercy and that Jesus is the Lord and the son of David.

[ 12 : 55 ] The disciples see an outsider they want to push further away. And so, like a great teacher, Jesus with a response, right? He kind of draws the disciples in, doesn't he?

Thinking this is going in the direction they want it to. I've come for the lost sheep of Israel, he says. The disciples surely are probably going, aren't they, at this point?

Oh, finally. He's doing something about her. He's getting rid of her. But the woman, perhaps to the surprise of the disciples, but I don't think to the surprise of Jesus, she doesn't go further away, does she?

What happens? She draws nearer in. She came and knelt before him, saying, Lord, help me. Jesus goes again.

It's not right. It's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. Now, the word dog, as we were saying, is specifically a house dog or even a lap dog as opposed to a wild dog.

[ 13 : 59 ] So, it's not as insulting as we might first assume, but it's not a compliment. Imagine, again, the disciples at this point.

They're thinking, all right, that's got to get her. Surely, that's going to drive her away. Surely, now we're going to get some peace and quiet. But she clings on. She clings on.

In the context of Peter in chapter 14, walking in the wire, I think we could say, she does not take her eyes off Jesus for a second. Even the dogs, she says, eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

What she's saying, I know I don't deserve anything. But in your mercy, just give me a crumb.

And I will go away with everything I need. The disciples are maybe wondering at this point what Jesus is going to say next to try and finally rid them of this nuisance.

[ 15 : 09 ] But then comes Jesus' incredible response. Oh, women. Great.

Great is your faith. Great is your faith. That's an amazing thing to say, for Jesus to say to a woman in any context, I think.

But it's an amazing thing for Jesus to say to this woman with his disciples listening on. Three times so far in this gospel, and we'll see it twice more in the chapters to come, Jesus rebukes his disciples for their little faith.

Little faith is a big problem that the disciples are battling with. What do you think their picture of great faith was?

What is your idea of great faith? Maybe just take a moment to answer that question honestly. What would you say great faith in Jesus looks like?

[ 16 : 31 ] It's only once, right, anywhere in any of the gospels is someone's faith described as great.

It's not the Bible scholars from Jerusalem. It's not the disciples who have followed Jesus the longest. It's not the crowds who run after him without food for days.

It's not the people who run to their towns and tell others about Jesus. The only person whose faith is described as great is the Canaanite woman living in Gentile territory whose daughter is oppressed by a demon.

The outsider of all outsiders. The most unclean person in the gospel. Great is her faith.

Do you think Jesus was surprised? I don't think so. Do you think the disciples were surprised?

[ 17 : 38 ] When Jesus said to this woman, that is what great faith looks like. And by speaking to her in the way that he does, I think knowing how she will respond, Jesus doesn't, he teaches his disciples what they truly need to understand and what we need to understand.

Great faith is not dependent on our knowledge. It's not dependent on where we grew up or what we've done in our past. Great faith is not dependent on our external cleanliness, however you measure it.

Great faith is determined by your posture to and confidence in Jesus. She knew who Jesus was.

Oh Lord, son of David, the promised king of God's people, the Lord of all. She knew who Jesus was. And she knew that her only hope was coming nearer and nearer to him.

She knew that her past did not disqualify her from his mercy. She knew her heritage had no influence on his grace.

[ 18 : 58 ] She knew her performance did not shape his compassion. She knew she deserved nothing from his table. But she knew that all she needed was a crumb.

Just a crumb. And even that would be more than she deserved and all she ever needed. That is great faith.

The unclean made clean not by what they have done, but in how they have come to Jesus. She got it right because she didn't claim any privilege. She did not believe she was due anything. She simply knew she needed mercy.

And Jesus showed her that mercy. Great faith in a gracious savior. She didn't deserve anything.

She did deserve to be driven away. But so do all of us. Have mercy on me is the cry we all need on our own lips.

[ 20 : 07 ] Because that is the cry of faith, isn't it? That confesses, I am a great sinner. And you, O Lord, son of David, are a great savior.

We live in an age, don't we, when people seem to kind of take pride in being offended on behalf of others.

I think that's probably what happens with many people who read this passage and think Jesus is going wrong somewhere. They're offended on behalf of the woman.

How dare he not speak to her initially? How dare he insinuate she's a dog? But the woman of great faith is the one who hears Jesus call her a dog.

And she says, you're right, Jesus. But I'm still coming to you for your mercy. She gets it.

[ 21 : 13 ] Maybe a helpful question we might ask ourselves is, how would you react if you were in her place? Touches, doesn't it, on what we were thinking about this morning.

If we're insulted at the thoughts. We have not understood the depths of our own sin. And we therefore have not understood our need for our Savior's grace.

This woman did. That is why her faith is so great. May our faith be like hers. Let's just move on now more briefly to our second and final point this evening.

Where we see a great feast from a generous Savior. We're going to spend much less time here. Because through the rest of this chapter, I think Jesus continues to teach his disciples that this same lesson.

As the outsiders are being welcomed in. And he shows that, I think, primarily by ministering to the outsiders in exactly the same way he was ministering to the people of Israel just a chapter ago.

[ 22 : 24 ] If you look back there in your Bibles to chapter 14. You'll see, though. You'll remember this from a few weeks ago. But just a reminder, or in case you weren't with us. Verse 13 to 21, what happens?

Jesus feeds a great crowd until they're all satisfied. And then just a few verses later, in 34 to 36. He heals all who come to him.

They brought to him all that were sick. And he made them all well. That's all happening in explicitly Jewish territory.

But then we have this conversation with the Pharisees about the clean and the unclean. And it not being who you are externally that leaves you unclean, but what comes out from the inside.

And that is, as we were hearing this morning, isn't it? That is what is inside is equally dark in all of us.

[ 23 : 24 ] Every single one of us, from the Pharisees to the disciples to the Canaanite women. Everyone is defiled by what comes out of their hearts. And so we see effectively a repeat of Jesus' rescue in chapter 14.

But now in chapter 15, with this subtle shift of focus onto a different crowd. It's Jesus saying, I have come to meet everyone who is unclean clean.

That goes for the people who have grown up amongst God's people. And it goes exactly the same for those who have not grown up amongst God's people. They get the same gracious treatment from the same gracious Savior.

And so we see there in chapter 15, 29 to 31, great crowds again come to Jesus, with the blind, the lame, the mute, the crippled, and many others.

And what happens again? They are all healed. And then they glorified who? Not just God.

[ 24 : 31 ] God. Which I think we can confidently say is what Matthew would have written if this was a Jewish audience. It's how he refers to him everywhere else in the gospel. But no, this audience, they praise the God of Israel.

The only time he's named this way Matthew, which I take it is Matthew's way of saying the God who never used to be their God. He used to be Israel's God, but is now their God too.

The outsiders are being welcomed in and they're receiving Jesus and they are worshiping God. Again, the outsiders, the unclean, the externally impure, that they are reacting to Jesus the right way.

They are getting it. And the disciples are learning. Who is welcome into this kingdom? Who is welcome into this church family?

Answer those who come to Jesus. Not just the middle class who come to Jesus. Not just the spiritually minded who come to Jesus. Not just the ones who grew up in church and come to Jesus.

[ 25 : 43 ] But anyone and everyone anywhere at any time who comes to Jesus. And who praises God because of what he has done and who he is.

They come to Jesus. They glorify God. And they are given a feast. I didn't want my headings to be off-putting for anyone before we even got started.

So I avoided putting these in the service sheet. But hopefully I can now say it without causing too much offense. I think what we see in verse 21 to 29 is food for a dog. What happens in the rest of the chapter is more food for more dogs.

Jesus starts with the example of the Canaanite woman and is now throwing open the doors for every Canaanite to come marching on in. For everyone who once stood against God. For everyone who once lived lives of uncleanness to come in and receive the same treatment.

Gracious, gentle, gracious treatment in the hands of a gracious, gentle, generous Savior. And as we get to the end of Matthew 15, having seen that a crumb is all that the outsider needs.

[ 27 : 01 ] We now see a feast is what they are given. A crumb is all they need. A feast is what they get.

At this time, 4,000 men plus women and children are fed more than they can eat. Again, the account is so similar to the feeding of the 5,000 that some commentators go, Matthew's kind of got his sources mixed up here.

There was just one feeding that Matthew heard from two different sources and he got them a bit muddled. No. The whole reason they sound so similar is because Matthew, right, that's the point he's making.

The gospel goes first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. But to all who come, to all who receive the invitation, they are sown the same mercy and given the same feast by the same king.

And so you read through the two accounts in chapter 14 and 15 and you cannot miss all the similarities. You get a sense of déjà vu. Jesus has been followed by a large crowd for days on end.

[ 28 : 15 ] He wants to feed them. The disciples say they don't have enough food. There's some bread and a few fish, but nowhere near enough. Jesus directs everyone to sit down, gives thanks and hands out the food to everyone.

And the key conclusion, I think, both times, 1420 and 1537, they all ate and were satisfied. They all ate and were satisfied.

Every single one of them gets everything they need. The key similarity also, I think, may be a key different.

12 baskets left over for Israel. A complete feast for 12 tribes of God's people. Seven baskets left over in chapter 15. Seven in the Bible is the number of completeness, wholeness.

A meal for all Israel. A meal for all people. Everyone, everywhere, completely and utterly, can be satisfied by coming to the table of this king.

[ 29 : 24 ] He is the king for everyone, the whole world to come to. And he is the king who will satisfy all who come to him.

That is what Jesus offers. And it is, isn't it, a satisfaction like no other. It's not one that satisfies our desires for the things of this world, as if Jesus will give us everything we ask for.

But it is one that satisfies us far more deeply and far more fully. Putting us in a right relationship with our God.

Knowing him through his son. And of knowing we are loved by him with a love immeasurably greater than our uncleanness. Who will work all things for the good of those who love him.

We started this passage with a woman begging for a crumb. We end it with a vast crowd fully fed. That is what Jesus does for the outsider who comes to him.

[ 30 : 36 ] He brings them in and cares for them and feeds them as if they had always been his. There is no partiality in Jesus. Come to him.

Come to him. And as the gracious and generous savior he is. He will feed you. And satisfy you like nothing else in this world can.

But there is, I think in this passage as well, a challenge. To those of us who are disciples of Jesus. A common kind of theme you see running through this section of Matthew's gospel is, is the disciples just not quite getting it.

What we see in the disciples here, isn't it, is that there's no partiality on Jesus' part. There is still sometimes a lingering partiality in Jesus' followers. Even though there is none in himself.

That is our root. That if it is in us, we want to rip out, don't we? We want to learn the lesson and then put it into practice.

[ 31 : 49 ] When someone walks in those doors, when someone comes and sits next to you on a Sunday, when you see someone through the week and you feel like you don't have anything in common with them and you wonder, how on earth am I going to make a conversation?

When someone, is there maybe a part of you that is thinking, send them away? Send them away.

Wouldn't it be easier? Wouldn't it be simpler? Wouldn't it be more straightforward if it was just people like me? That's what Jesus is teaching his disciples.

Everyone is welcome. Bring everyone in. No matter how unclean the world might perceive them to be.

No matter how far from the usual boundaries they are. Bring them in. Love them. Reach out to them. Care for them.

[ 32 : 52 ] Feed them. Let's take what we have learned in the classroom and impress it upon our lives. That we would be far from the Pharisees and near to Jesus.

That we would love to see people of every tongue, tribe, and nation, of every age, from every background, coming to Jesus and joining with us, next to us, side by side as his people.

So that we all together would glorify the God of Israel. Let us pray that that would be the case amongst us as we close. Father, we thank you and praise you that in our Lord Jesus Christ, we have a gracious Savior who gives us all that we need, even though we deserve nothing.

And we have a generous Savior who provides us with a feast and satisfies our souls.

Father, we pray that you would help us to respond to you with great faith. Lord, that we would come recognizing that we deserve nothing from you.

[ 34 : 19 ] that even a crumb from your table would be more than enough. Lord, may we have a faith like that and may we love one another like we see Jesus do in these verses.

That we would long to join together, reaching out to the outsiders, that they might be drawn in. that we all together would be cleansed by you from the inside out and glorifying the God of Israel.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.