

Jesus Dishing it Out!

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to turn back to the chapter that we... that Louise read for us, Matthew chapter 15. And it's a great passage, quite a challenging passage in many ways.

And I think, you know, and I've said this before from here, that 2,000 years on from Jesus, I think sometimes it's easy for us to tame Him and to almost keep Him at a distance, because sometimes we feel like we read about Him in the Bible.

We can just close the Bible and then we can keep Jesus at a distance and maybe not consider His claims and the reality of Him being God the Son who is continually relevant for us.

But I think also it's easy for us to forget how provocative He was in His ministry. We have this image of, you know, a smiling, benevolent, gentle kind of character in many ways sometimes in our hearts. And John last week when he preached on the chapter before, which was the calming of the storm and the walking on water, well, this week, this is Jesus rocking the boat.

[1 : 13] He's certainly not calming the storm, He's rocking the boat. And I hope that He will rock the boat that you are in at the moment spiritually as I pray that He rocks the boat I'm in also.

And I would encourage you today just to look into your soul and even right now just think about yourself and if you're maybe, if you read perfectly honest, you're bored already.

You're maybe disinterested. You know that you can close the link if not close the Bible and so do and keep Jesus out of your life and the challenges that He brings to our lives, whether we're Christians or not.

I also think it's very possible in the same way to shut Him down because you're afraid that He is the storm that your life desperately needs.

You know, there's a comfort in unbelief, there's an ease in unbelief, there's an ease even in not dealing with issues and problems and difficulties that you might have in your life.

[2 : 28] There's a comfort in just knowing, walking with disaster in your life as it were. But Jesus comes and He ruffles all that in our lives.

And really the point of the passage today is very much to see Jesus as the Savior that we need. You know, Matthew's gospel is all about introducing us to the King and to His kingdom.

And Jesus in this passage is very much speaking into our need for Him and not just the disciples but all people.

So just think for a moment of this passage that was read by Louise. He called the Pharisees, that is the religious leaders of His day, He called them hypocrites.

And we read that they were offended, the disciples said, well, the Pharisees are offended by that.

And that was because they didn't get it and they didn't get Jesus. And then we're told that He called the disciples uneducated or dull or misunderstanding of His truth because they didn't get it either.

[3 : 39] So He's offended the Pharisees and He's called His own disciples dull. And then to turn the top all off, He calls this Canaanite woman a dog. Now, you're going to have to let me explain that later on in the sermon.

But He called this woman a dog, but He exalted her above all of the others because she got it, she absolutely got who Jesus was and what He had come to do.

And so that's what we're going to look at because it is beautifully fused together this passage with one message really that Jesus is wanting to get across. What is it all about?

It's clear that Jesus is taking time out to teach His disciples and the Pharisees if they would listen.

And also, of course, us, is telling us who He is and why He's come and why He's so important.

And it's in the context of, as we've seen through Matthew's Gospel, of the disciples particularly and the people around Jesus believing that they were God's chosen people.

[4 : 51] And the Pharisees believed that, the disciples believed that, and in many ways there was a lot of truth in that. But because of that, they had become proud and they had twisted God's word as the Pharisees, we saw that when we were talking to the kids.

And they lacked understanding about what it meant to be God's people and what it meant to be the nation that introduced the Christ man into the world for the benefit of the world.

And so Jesus here is educating them and something very, very important about His global mission. And about His character and why He had come.

And He's still teaching that and He's still teaching us that. Speaking about who He is, our need for Him, above all, our need for His mercy and for His love.

And that's what He was wanting to teach the Pharisees. They would have nothing to do with it. He wanted to teach the disciples because they were dull of understanding. And He used a great example in the introduction that He brings us to this woman that He meets.

[6 : 01] So there's two things really that I want to speak about from this passage that are really, really important. The importance of our heart before God, and we kind of hinted at that with the address we did to the kids, and also His mercy.

To our heart and His mercy, both hugely significant and important for us to consider. So the world in which we're living in today, change is really the word of the day in many ways, isn't it?

Everyone wants to change the world. And everyone thinks the world needs changed. The institutions need changed. We need to change the past and change our history. We need to change other people and their thinking and their attitudes and what they believe.

We need to change behavior. We need to change statues. We need to become more woke. We need to be more aware of everything that's happening in the world around us.

And you know, who can deny that? I think probably we could get people from all kinds of parts of society here today, and everyone would agree that there's definitely a need for change.

[7 : 13] And many of the cries for change are hugely worthy and significant and important. But Jesus, what Jesus is saying, and Jesus doesn't deny that, but what Jesus is saying here, there is a much more fundamental change needed in our lives.

And that is a change in our hearts, you know? Changing our diet, changing our hygiene, all these outward things are significant and important. But He hones in here, because it's the core of the gospel message, He hones in on our personal responsibility before Him, and to recognize that He sees our hearts.

Our hearts need changed. We need to receive His mercy if we are to know life, eternal life, and relationship with God and fullness of life here.

You see, the Pharisees, the self-righteous Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, who were highly educated, particularly in the Old Testament, in the Bible, they were offended by what Jesus said.

In verses 10, well, Jesus says to them, you know, He exposes their hypocrisy, and He basically says, you're a bunch of hypocrites. Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when He said, the people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

[8 : 37] In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. And He called the people to Him and said to them, hear and understand. It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth that defiles a person.

Then the disciples came and said to Him, do you not know that the Pharisees are offended by what you're saying? And they were offended because Jesus had exposed the way that they were twisting the Bible and adding to the Bible, really to allow them not to change and allow them to live the way they wanted.

And He gives the example of not honouring their mother and father. That was one of God's commands. And basically what they were doing, they were saying, anytime they got money, anytime they got a gift from anyone, or anytime they had money, they dedicated it, they said they dedicated it to God, and because they dedicated it to God, they couldn't give anything to help and support maybe their elderly parents who were needing support.

But the thing about it was that although it was dedicated to God, they could still spend it as long as they were still alive, and it would go to God when they died kind of thing.

So they were using this gift and this twisted argument about honouring God to keep the money, enjoy the money for themselves and not honour their parents, which was hugely serious.

[10:04] And God was saying, you're a bunch of hypocrites for doing that because you're just wanting your wealth and you're wanting your money and you're not wanting to obey God's law, which was to honour your mother and father. It was a bad tradition and it was bad addition to God's law.

And the same was true with the washing of the hands. That's what started this whole event was the Pharisees were complaining that the disciples weren't washing their hands in the proper way. Now again, that was in addition to God's law.

And they were saying that unless you washed ceremonially in the right way, you would be dishonouring God. And again, I guess washing hands is that's a touchy subject today, but not about hygiene, but it's about... it's missing the point if we're talking about hygiene in this story.

It's much more about they were saying themselves being clean before God because they cleaned their hands in a proper way. And the Pharisees hated when Jesus exposed that because it was cheap on their part to minimize the requirements of God.

They didn't need God. All they needed to do was wash their hands and eat the right things and obey the laws that they had themselves added to the Bible and that would make them right with God.

[11:22] They were offended when Jesus called them hypocrites. And I wonder today whether Jesus offends you or does He offend me? You know, when He says, He can't just simply be clean by... or right with me by being right on the outside, by doing things outwardly, by being self-righteous or comparing ourselves to others.

You know, He's very real in exposing what we're like in our hearts. In verse 19 He says, you know, it's not what we take into our bodies that makes us sinful, but rather He says it's out of our heart. It's the evil thoughts, it's the murder and just anger, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander, all of these things which to a greater or lesser degree we recognize and we know and we are guilty of.

He says, what Jesus is trying to say is that you can't come near His holiness and His purity and God's standard of love and perfection for Him or for others because we are sinners on the inside.

We hate, we lust, we covet, we lie, we make others look bad, we judge people, we condemn people, we find fault. Very often our lives are all about what we're like on the surface, how we appear to other people, how we can present ourselves, what good particular cause we can follow to make us as it were justified and right.

[12:56] But we can't hide our heart motives from the living God and He says we're hypocrites, all of us in many ways if we ignore Him and if we don't see our need of Him.

And that scandalizes people still today, absolutely. People are offended by that and I wonder if you're offended by that, would you rather a kind of gentler, sweeter, more beautiful message? Well I hope you'll find that it is a very beautiful message. But the Pharisees were offended and even His own disciples didn't get it. In verses 15 and 16, Jesus speaks to them.

He tells them a parable about the Pharisees and says, look, every plant, my heavenly Father is not planting, we'll be root up. Then let them alone, they are blind guides and if they blind lead the blind both will fall into a pit, then Peter said, explain the parable.

And he said, are you also still without understanding? That's a rather gentle translation. Are you really so stupid is what he's saying.

[13:57] Are you so dull of understanding? They didn't seem to understand that even the religious leaders of the day were blind guides.

They didn't seem to understand that it was more than just following Jesus as a friend or just doing religious things.

They themselves didn't seem to get it. There was so much about Christ and about their need for Christ and about His mercy that they didn't get. Was being a religious enough?

Are they still so dull and so stupid? Was it following the rules even despite the fact that Jesus teaching, being close to Jesus and for whatever reason they didn't do the ceremonial washing themselves, maybe they just thought He was there to break these rules of the religious Pharisees or was to bring in an earthly kingdom.

We know they had lots of different ideas about who Jesus was but they didn't get the depth of the message. They didn't get the depth of who Jesus was. They lacked spiritual discernment.

[15:08] And again that's so easy for us. Is it just following the rules? Is that enough for you? Is it that you think that you're basically good enough? Other people have the problems but not me.

Do we really, and do you really feel that you need God's mercy in the same way as maybe somebody else? Well, let's bring it to a conclusion by looking at this remarkable end to the chapter or the passage that we've read together because it was Jesus Christ needed to get this message across to, particularly to His disciples.

And this last story about the faith of the Canaanite woman is what connects all the stories that we've read together today about the Pharisees and about the disciples.

Jesus was wanting to bring a really important message home to the disciples and to us, I think. Now the Pharisees were not told that the Pharisees followed Jesus to the tire inside and they probably didn't.

They weren't interested really in learning from Jesus but the disciples were. And they were to be the founders of the church. And Jesus needed to get across a very, very important message to them.

[16:23] They needed to understand. They couldn't continue to be dull of hearing and dull of understanding. So He brings them and gives them a dramatic visual and life-changing lesson about His mercy and about what He'd come to do and about His kingdom.

So He takes them to enemy territory, okay? They're inside a Canaanite people, Syrophenician, Gentiles, people who the Jews didn't mix with.

You know, we've learned that already in the stories from Matthew. Steeped in idolatry and enemies to the Jewish God and to the Jewish religion, pagans in many ways, it's that last place that any self-respecting Jew would go and visit.

And they must have been very uncomfortable following Jesus into tire inside him. And yet Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. A first century Jew, particular religious Jew wouldn't go there. I was trying to think of a modern parallel. I can't really think of one. Maybe a well-known preacher taking a group of very young Christians to an atheist convention for three days or something like that, where the last kind of place you would think of going maybe, and that's maybe a really bad example.

[17:47] It's difficult to get a parallel without probably causing undue offense one way or another. But he went there specifically with them to meet a woman of great faith, okay, who puts them to shame and puts the Pharisees to shame.

In verse 22, and behold, Luke, Luke, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David, my daughter severely oppressed by a demon. She is immediately, it strikes us as being radically different from the Pharisees and from the disciples. Lord, she says, O Lord, she gives them this great title of worship, and she's informed, Son of David.

You know, that's got all kinds of Old Testament connotations with it that she knew he was the Messiah. She knew that he was the one who could help her. She absolutely knew her need, and she had nowhere else to turn.

She's completely helpless. Now, there's lots we don't know about this. We don't know how she knew this. We don't know how she knew Jesus was coming to the area. We don't know how they met.

[19:05] There's lots of things we don't know. It may have been that God prepared her in a dream or whatever. We don't know. But she is in great need, and her life is so bound up with her daughters, and her daughters' terrible condition of demon possession, that she sees her own need linked in with her daughter's great need so much.

She says, you know, she doesn't say, have mercy on my daughter. She says, have mercy on me. Now that we don't, again, we don't know the emotion behind that or the history behind that, was there a reason?

Was there something in her background that had caused her daughter to be in this condition? We don't know. But all she knew that she was in desperate need herself, her daughter was in desperate need.

There was a spiritual, deep spiritual darkness and evil in their lives, and she needed to be rescued. She needed to be saved.

And there we go. So far so good. But then Jesus goes to work. Or more to the point, he seems not to go to work.

[20 : 14] He apparently ignores her, but he did not answer her a word. It's very interesting, isn't it? Your first reading of that, you must have thought, this is a really weird passage.

Jesus is not acting like I normally expect him to act. And here he is, he's not saying anything. And really, he's not saying anything because he's giving the disciples time to expose their ignorance and their need for mercy.

Because he's silent and she's begging for mercy and for help. They say, look, send her away. For she's crying out, she's crying out after us. She's a nuisance. Lord, get rid of this woman. What are we doing here anyway among these pagans? Why is she crying out like this?

Send her away. And his silence provokes that response from them. Here's someone in pain.

[21 : 18] Here's someone who's really needy. Get rid of her. There's racist undertones. Even maybe misogynist undertones there. Get rid of this woman. Get rid of her. And he's exposing and so doing in that moment of his own silence, he is exposing their own need to be changed, to be changed in their thinking and to be changed in their understanding.

And he then goes on, I believe, to speak out their thoughts. Again, there's so much we can't see, isn't there? But I wonder whether Jesus was looking at them when he says the next things, I'm only come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Isn't that right, disciples, as it were? You know? Is this what they were thinking? Well, why? There's almost half truths in it, but it's as if this is what they thought that, well, Jesus isn't for Gentiles.

He isn't for you. He isn't for pagans. He's for the lost sheep. He's for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And then it gets worse.

It really gets worse. But she comes to him, Lord, help me. And he answered, it's not right to take the children's bread and to throw it to the little dogs. That is the family pet, as it were. It's not the wild dogs that were sometimes used in a derogatory term.

[22 : 38] But it's the same thing, isn't it? He's thinking the thoughts of the disciples for them. He's saying, you know, the disciples, you think you're the children of God. You think you're the privileged ones.

You're the sons of Abraham. You're the covenant people. It's not right for me to do anything that would even, you know, throwing the scraps to those, to the dogs.

It's not right to do that because that is the Gentiles were often called dogs. And that is really what Jesus is expressing here in exposing their own thinking.

And she gets it. She absolutely gets it. I would love to have been there to see the interaction between them all. But she's not put off in the slightest by what the disciples think of her or by what Jesus is saying.

Somehow she knows who Jesus is. And she seems to know what he's doing here. And she's not in any way offended by what he said.

[23 : 44] Yes, Lord, she sees even the dogs eat the crumbs from their master's table. She knows who he is. There was clearly nothing in the way Jesus said it that put her off.

She has great faith in him. And she trusts in him, even though what he says appears to be offensive, she doesn't take it that way.

And I guess we miss all the kind of facial expressions and everything else that's going on. But she argues, she wrestles, she doesn't give up. She certainly doesn't take offense.

And, you know, people talk about this passage and commentators will talk about it and say, you know, Jesus' silence and then his apparent abuse of this woman was to test her to see how much she was willing, how far she was willing to go to remain dependent or keep asking Jesus for help. And it was a test of her faith and the depth of her faith. Well, that may be the case. But I think it was far more a test of the disciples and an exposure of the heart of the disciples.

[24 : 55] And it was an exposure of her heart, but in a very different way. Jesus was exposing the depth of her understanding and her heart being right with God because she needed him.

And she came to him because he was the only answer. And we can only presume that she had already by this time great faith. And Jesus, of course, praises her.

In a way, he never praises really anyone else in the same way, particularly not of his own culture and nation and tradition. Well, women, great is your faith, be it done to you as you desire.

And her daughter was healed immediately. Didn't even need to go to his daughter. Didn't even need to give words of healing to his daughter. To her daughter. Her daughter is healed.

She gets it. And the disciples' dullness is exposed. They needed to learn that lesson. They needed to learn about the international reach of the gospel that they would be founders of.

[25 : 57] They needed more than anything to learn about God's mercy. So what is, very briefly as we conclude, what is Jesus teaching us? Well, clearly, our need for mercy.

That is at the core of our faith. Lord help me. That doesn't just happen once when you become a Christian. If that's not happening on a daily basis, then we are dull of understanding.

As this relentless prayer, sometimes we may think God is silent like Jesus was. Sometimes it may seem like he's rejecting us. Sometimes we may feel the unworthiness of his exposure of our hearts. Sometimes we might feel the offense of the cross. But I'm saying if you don't see your need of a Savior, you will never seek a Savior. You'll never look for Jesus if you don't think you need Jesus. And if we can't really go on and on in our lives day to day with a closed Bible and with a silence before God and thinking we don't need Him.

[27 : 03] And yet Christ is so, and that's the beauty of the passage, Christ is so willing to forgive us, all he requires is that we see our need, that we accept his diagnosis and we see that on a day to day basis we absolutely need him.

And we need his grace and we need his love and we need his glory. I read a great chapter last night from a book by Joni Erickson Tadda. It's called A Place of Healing.

Joni's been a paraplegic for most of her life following a diving accident. And in the second last chapter she speaks about heaven and she speaks about what God is preparing in the light of what he's given in this life to her.

And if you do get a chance to read it, you should read it. It is the most remarkable and beautiful just outpouring of spiritual imagination based on the promises of Scripture about what God has prepared for those who love Him.

And that mercy is overwhelming for us, not just in the life to come but for every single day. So our need for mercy, remember that. Do think about it.

[28 : 16] We're reminded also that God chooses the unlikeliest of converts. You know, who would have thought this Canaanite woman from Tyre and Sidon was going to be such a great example to all the privileged religious leaders, the disciples and everyone else, it's those who need Him most.

And that's a great lesson for us. Are we reaching people like that in our lives? Do we care for them? Do we write people off saying they'll never come to God in their lives?

Do we make judgments about who we share the gospel with? Do we have a sectarian view of the kingdom? One is that I need for us to be much more believing about this world in which we live, which is very secular, which is very far from God, which is very idolatrous.

I hope we don't just become insular and look inward and think, oh, God's not going to work in our nation. God brings the most unlikely of people to Himself.

So it's important for us not to tell God who He can or won't reach with the gospel.

[29 : 30] And then we need to always be aware of not being dull spiritually like the disciples. Isn't it great that this confession of this Canaanite woman in Matthew's gospel comes before Peter's confession in the next chapter, you know, which is great.

Peter's great confession, you know, you are the Christ. The Canaanite woman got there first because she wasn't as dull as the religious leaders of her day or the modelists of her day or the disciples even who were following Jesus.

And he praises this outcast woman for great faith, bringing healing to her daughter and mercy into her own life. And so our prayer should be surely in the same way, Lord, increase our faith, increase our faith so that we're not dull of hearing.

And I close with a quote that was part of the reflection on the service sheet, although we don't give out the service sheets now, obviously it still gets printed, it still gets published online.

And the quote is from a great Christian leader of this last century who died this week, J.I. Packer, whose book Knowing God has been crucial and fundamental in the lives of many Christians.

[30 : 45] But he says, we must learn to measure ourselves not by our knowledge about God, not by our gifts and responsibilities in the church, but by how we pray and what goes on in our hearts.

Many of us, I suspect, have no idea how impoverished we are at this level. Let us ask the Lord to show us. Amen.

Lord God, we pray that You would show us, that You would teach us about our hearts and also remind us that they are without You extremely impoverished, that we have great need for Your

mercy, that our pride, our self-righteousness, our lust, our impurity, our greed, our anger, violence in our hearts, all of these things separate us from You and help us to see our need for Your mercy and follow You and learn of You and grow to know Your mercy and love which will transform us from the inside out.

And You're also willing to pour out Your mercy and to forgive us because of what You have done in the cross. And we thank You that the message of Matthew and the teaching of Jesus leading up to the cross was all with a view to His crucifixion and His resurrection and to how that exposed His great mercy.

Reminders of that today. In Jesus' name, amen.