

Lord of Unexpected Grace

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[0 : 01] Well, all right. Good morning to everybody. Hope you're doing well. Everybody in the room and listening online. So good to be with you. As Alan said, my name is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here. Good to be in God's house. Happy Father's Day to you. And we're going to keep going forward today in our series in Mark, which we've been in for several weeks. And today we're going to look at a passage that's both really intriguing and really challenging.

And so interestingly, the sermon that Alan gave last week, you know, we saw a situation where Jesus was challenging some of the common assumptions of the people of his day, talking to them about what makes people really clean or unclean.

And it was something that culturally didn't fit in for them and was offensive in a lot of ways. And you could kind of see that and how people responded. But interestingly, today we're going to read some verses that could possibly be offensive to us sitting here in New Bern, North Carolina in 2023.

And so I actually find this to be honestly, this is one of my favorite parts of studying God's word is that across every time and every culture and every place, when you are kind of wrestling with the real God, what you're going to find is there are some things that are kind of base assumptions you have that when you learn more about who God is are just going to resonate with your heart.

And you're going to say, yes, and amen. Like that's, that's who I knew God would be. That speaks to me. And you're going to read some other stuff where you're going to go, not sure I like that.

[1 : 35] Not sure if I'm on board with that. That, that doesn't, that doesn't sound right to me. Tim Keller, a longtime pastor at Redeemer Church, recently passed away.

He actually spoken to this quite a bit during his ministry, you know, talking about how, you know, what's going to happen if you just start to eliminate anything from the Bible that offends your sensibilities or offends you culturally.

You know, if you're just going to start picking and choosing the things that you want and that God can't ever contradict you. Like, how are you ever going to know that you're actually wrestling with the real God?

Later in his life, he kind of distilled that down and simply said, if your God never disagrees with you, you might just be worshipping an idealized version of yourself.

And I think that's true. And so as we move in these verses today, I hope we'll keep kind of our hearts and minds open because anything God has in scriptures here to build us up.

[2 : 35] And I think these verses are no different. So with that, we're going to dive right into Mark. And out of the gate, we're going to see something that we've seen a couple of times already, which is that Jesus goes places we wouldn't expect him to go.

And so in Mark 7, chapter 24, it says this, So Tyre and Sidon come up quite a bit in Israel's history. They're actually noted in a lot of Old Testament prophecy. And they always kind of come up in the sense of representing pride and wealth and idolatry and treachery towards Israel.

And so they're not real popular places with like the bulk of the Jewish community. There would have been a ton of Gentiles, Greeks, kind of non-Jewish people hanging out there. So again, not a place that they would have been real comfortable going, particularly since there was enough tension there.

Like they would not even want him to have like a meal with a Gentile. And so Jesus has been doing this a lot through the book of Mark, right? If you were thinking maybe he would go to influential places, like he hasn't gone to Jerusalem.

[3 : 47] He hasn't gone to places of like kind of special religious significance to the broader culture. Like he's just kind of hanging out on the fringes, going to some of these places that are full of Gentiles.

And that would have been really surprising to people, both if you thought he was trying to start a movement to, you know, build the kingdom of God. And because, again, just they had some sensibilities of this isn't where good people go.

But honestly, that fact that he's kind of willing to go some places that other people are, you know, going to different cities with kind of different cultures and stuff, that probably doesn't catch our attention as much sitting here in this room in modern day.

As it would have in earlier centuries. I think we just don't feel kind of that Jew-Gentile tension in the same way that they would. So that's maybe not as shocking to us.

However, there is something that happens while he's at the house that immediately catches our attention. And right out of the gate here, we're confronted with this reality.

[4 : 51] Sometimes Jesus says things we might not like. So in Mark 7, verse 25, it says this, So here's the scene, right?

They find a house, and they're trying not to be found, right? Like he's trying not to be found out. They're not looking to do ministry. But by this time, word of what Jesus is doing, the miracles that are happening, the people that are being healed, it's really hard for them to keep anything a secret. And so this woman finds out where they're at. A Gentile woman, a non-Jewish one, finds out where they're at. And she is going here to get help for her daughter. And her cry is desperate and uncomfortable.

You see that actually a little bit better in Matthew's gospel. It gives a few more details about this same incident. In Matthew 15, it says, Jesus' response is, shocking for us.

And I think it's worth setting that for a minute. As we see, again, this plea that she's making, you can see in the verse in Matthew, this isn't just a simple like, you know, I'm going to ask someone.

[6 : 49] This is her coming out. It says she's crying out. I mean, this sounds a lot more like, please, please, please help my daughter. And you can kind of see that in the fact that the disciples want to send her away, like it's uncomfortable for them.

And that makes it all the more shocking that Jesus responds in the way he does. And for us in the room, neither of those responses would be in any way appropriate, at least that we could think of, right?

I mean, calling someone a dog, there's just no way to do that, that it doesn't feel demeaning, that it doesn't feel dismissive, because there's this whole Jew-Gentile dynamic.

It feels racial. And then there's the aspect of saying, you know, this isn't for you. You know, get in your place in line, right? And I think we need to sit with that tension for a moment.

You can't just run past that. Now note, up to this point in the story, there's nothing that's happened in the room that would have been shocking for the disciples or the other people there.

[7 : 54] So number one, in their culture, she had no right to ask, right? She had no right as a Gentile to roll up in a Jewish house and ask for anything. That would have been really unacceptable. She had no right culturally as a woman to ask anything of these men, particularly if one was considered a rabbi.

So she wasn't supposed to be there. The way she's imposing, again, is just awkward for them, right? Like they weren't looking to do ministry, and she just shows up, and she's like, doesn't care if she makes a scene, she needs help, and that's uncomfortable for them.

And for the Jews in the room, they would not have been shocked at the idea that God came first to the lost sheep of Israel. That all fits within the box of how they understand the world.

But here's the thing. Just because it wasn't shocking to the people in the room doesn't make it right. That doesn't mean their response was the right response. And the other thing that's interesting is we've already seen Jesus has no problem tossing over some societal apple carts if he thinks it's what's needed to get you to the Father.

Like Jesus is obviously not afraid to challenge common assumptions or things we hold dear if they're things that are separating them from us. And so that's why it makes it all the more strange to us that he would respond like this.

[9 : 14] And so if we're going to lean into that tension, if we're going to kind of understand what's going on here, I think there's two things that we can do that can kind of help us open this up a little bit. So two things we want to look at is first, we want to look at how the woman approaches Jesus.

And the second thing we want to look at is how she responds to what Jesus just said to her. So let's back up a little bit and look first at how she approaches Jesus.

This woman is obviously willing to impose on God. And if you've had a keen eye, we've actually seen this a couple of times in the book of Mark already.

This idea of people who are willing to break with decorum, who are willing to break the rules to get to God. Earlier we saw a healing where there was this woman with this really embarrassing issue of blood, kind of this bloodletting issue, which would have been both embarrassing but also really societally damaging because if you were openly bleeding, you were considered unclean.

And so that kind of kept her separated from people. And when Jesus is walking by again, because she's unclean, she's not allowed to go touch him, but she's just sitting there thinking, you know, if I could just get a hold of him, like if I could just touch his garment, I'm going to be made whole.

[10:31] And so she just says, whatever the rules are, I don't care. I got to get to Jesus. And she reaches out and she grabs him and immediately she receives what she needs. And Jesus blesses her for that.

We saw another story where there were some guys that had a friend who was handicapped. He was crippled. And they heard that Jesus was in the region healing. So they take him there to get healed.

When they get there, there's so many people, they can't get to the house. But they figure we got to get him to Jesus. And so they come up with this plan to go up on the roof and tear the roof open and lower him down, right? Again, you couldn't do that.

That wasn't just like one of the things they did back then. That was not acceptable to go rip someone's house up. But they said, we're going to be a bit of an imposition here because we have to get our friend to Jesus.

And Jesus doesn't rebuke them for it. He blesses that man and he gets everything that he needs.

So whenever you see this pattern of people who are kind of imposing on God, it's important to stop and ask yourself the question, what is God trying to show me through that?

[11:33] Like, why is God showing me that he's responding to these people who are kind of being bold, right? I think in our day, one of the first things we try to do with something like that is to put it in a really practical box, right?

Like, so maybe this is just like Jesus, like some kind of backhanded assertiveness training, right?

Like he's trying to teach you to be a little more bold and reaching out for what you need, right?

Like, I mean, is this really just the first century version of fortune favors the bold? You know, something like that. Is that what he's going for? You know, the idea that if you are more aggressive and more assertive in reaching out for the things you want in life, then you will tend to create more opportunities for yourself.

Is that what he wants? Is just if you're assertive and reach for it, you'll get it. And we've got some backing to that because it looks like Jesus is responding to a lot of people who just push back, push through any barrier, push through anything.

So maybe he's just saying, break all the rules, go get what you need. The problem with that is for those instances, we've also got several instances of Jesus confronting people who were very assertive, were very pushy, and who really thought that he owed them an answer or response.

[12:51] And he doesn't give them the time of day. He just keeps going about his business. He doesn't give them the answer they want. He doesn't even really respond to them in some cases. So it's not just you can be assertive and God has to act.

Jesus doesn't respond to that in a lot of cases. And so the question is, well, what's God's after? Like showing us that the people who are imposing a lot of times are the ones that are getting the deliverance they seek.

And the beautiful thing about this story with this woman that's different than the other stories is within this story, we actually start to get a clue to what the answer to that question is.

So let's just hold that in our mind for a second, why God wants us to be kind of bold like that. And let's look at how the woman responds to what Jesus says. Now, before we look at her response, I think it's important to just kind of be honest about how we would respond, right?

If anybody in our day, we asked them for something, they responded to us like Jesus did, I don't think we would handle it well. I don't think I would handle it well.

[13:57] Firstly, because I think to get a response like that plays into all our deepest fears about being rejected, about not being accepted, about being denied what we believe we are due.

I mean, you think about it too, like this woman wasn't asking for like a mansion. She has a daughter that is being legitimately afflicted, that has a problem. And if you put yourself in her shoes and you think about that, like, man, I am desperate here.

Like I need help for my daughter and I know it's against the rules, but I need help for her. And so for her perspective, like if you were in that and you reached out and you said, man, I needed help and I took a risk and I broke the rules and I was told to get back in my place, I don't think we'd handle that well.

And I think honestly, we'd probably go away crushed. And I think for a lot of us, myself probably included, the first voice that would speak is, yeah, don't ever try that again. The other thing I think would immediately happen for us is I imagine we would probably be pretty livid at that answer, right?

Somebody calls you a dog and says, it's not your time and your place. How dare you? Do you have any idea who I am? Or maybe something more like, this guy don't even know who he's talking to.

[15:19] He didn't talk to me like that, right? Like that's kind of the first thing that might jump up in our heart. Maybe we start listing our bona fides, right? When you think you're being denied something, you're owed.

One of the things you start thinking is about how much you've earned it, right? I mean, after everything I've done for my family, my country, my church, like all of those things come up, you kind of want to lay that out there.

Or maybe you kind of sink into the thing of where you just feel like you've weighed out this situation fully and there's no way this can be right. Like Jesus, this is wrong.

Like my daughter hasn't done anything. Please, like this is wrong. You have to act. And honestly, I think we would feel justified in, and have good reason to feel justified in saying any of those things. But however we feel about it, one thing is certain, that is not how this woman responds to it. And whether you like her response or not, it shows us something really important about Jesus.

[16:22] And it's simply this. We can't be satisfied in Jesus if we remain offended by him. So Mark chapter 7, 28.

So Jesus says, it's not right for me to take what belongs to the children and give it to dogs. But she answered him, yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat under the table and eat the children's crumbs.

Now Jesus' response in calling her dog contains a little subtlety that's masked by the English translation here a little bit. So all throughout Scripture, most of the time when you see the word dog, it's translating the idea of like a wild dog, right?

Like it's always in a negative connotation. It's something dangerous, something ravenous, you know, that's a problem for your family. You don't want a wild dog around, right?

This word is really unique, and it doesn't really mean that. It's something that's probably more akin to what we would think of as like a household pet, or maybe even puppy, something like that.

[17:28] But make no mistake, that's an important distinction, but it's still not a compliment, right, if you think about it. So if you came to my house, you would find a dog there. His name is Samson, if you're curious.

And when you walked into our house, you would recognize right out of the gate that Samson is not a wild animal, right? Like he has some kind of place in our home, right? First of all, he's got a name. I don't just randomly name animals out there in the world, right? You would also notice that he has toys that belong to him. He has places in the house he's allowed to go.

There are things that are his, places he's allowed to lay down. And so it'd be very obvious that Samson has a place in the family. But you would also immediately notice that Samson has some boundaries that other people in the family don't have.

Like he's not like one of the children. There are places he's not allowed to go. There are things he's not allowed to do. When we go out, he doesn't always come with us, right? And so you would notice that gap.

[18:29] And interestingly, the picture image here, that's never sort of more evident than at mealtime, right? Because, you know, as soon as the food comes out, out he comes, right? You know, he's gonna skivvy up there to try to get as close to that as he can because he knows sometimes we will let him scavenge from under the table whatever gets thrown down.

And if you have a toddler in the house, there's a lot of stuff that gets thrown down, right? So it's kind of the place for him to be. But even in that, he's got boundaries. So if he tries to scavenge off the

table before it's his time, he's gonna be summarily dismissed from the room into another room. And maybe more to the point for this analogy, there's no scenario where if Samson was beside the table and he was trying to scavenge and he was trying to beg, even if he was really hungry, where I would say, you know what, the dog is hungry.

And before my daughters had a chance to eat, I would just take her plate away from her and dump it on the floor and say, there you go, buddy. I would never take my daughter's food and give it to him. And so it's still not something that sits well with us because that's comparing you to like a pet. There's still an othering that feels like it's going on there. But here's the thing. This woman actually takes that image and uses it.

[19 : 50] And what's really interesting about the way she uses it is when we first read her response sitting here, it feels like groveling to us, right? Like it feels like, okay, I mean, I really got to get this.

I guess I'm just going to have to beg and like put my face in the dirt. Oh, I'm just, you know, I'm not even worthy. Like it feels like groveling. But when you see what she does here, what you actually learn is that this woman has recognized something about Jesus that a lot of people around him are missing.

Okay? So when she says, yeah, but even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the table, effectively what she's saying is this. Instead of taking offense, she says, okay, maybe I don't have a place at the table, but Jesus, there is more than enough food on that table for the entire world. And I need mine right now. She does not make the request based on who she is or what she thinks she deserves.

She makes the request based on who she believes he is and what he has showed everyone about what's available in this kingdom. Back to my boy, Tim Keller.

[21 : 06] He actually talked about this in his book, King's Cross, talking about this scenario. He says this, we, meaning kind of we, us, in our current sort of Western cultural context, don't have anything like this kind of assertiveness.

We typically only have an assertion of our rights. We don't know how to contend with somebody unless we're standing up for our rights or standing up for our dignity or in our own goodness saying, this is what I've owed, this is what I've earned.

But this woman is not doing that at all. This is rightless assertiveness, something we know little about. She's not saying, Lord, give me what I deserve on the basis of my goodness.

She's saying, give me what I don't deserve on the basis of your goodness and I need it now. Even if that still doesn't set completely well on our palate, I think it's obvious from this verse that if what we lead into asking the Father with is our own indignance or our pride when Jesus says something that rubs us the wrong way, if your pride is more important than your deliverance, you're probably not gonna see it.

But what this woman shows us is that once any sense of entitlement wanes, like once any sense of what God owes me goes away, the Father starts to replace it with something even better, which is this kind of boldness that's not a confidence in ourselves, but just a trust in Him as a good Father.

[22 : 44] And now we start to get a clue as to what God was doing and all these other impositions. Like why does He respond to some people's boldness and some not people, you know, others He doesn't as much.

And you start to see that the people who were imposing that He moved out to, you know, moved out in blessing towards is because they recognized He is good. Like He can be trusted.

Because those who know what Jesus is actually like know you can impose on Him. Here's what's crazy. Later in the book of Hebrews, it actually tells us to be like that.

It says, you should come boldly before your Father like a child of the King strolling into the throne room asking for something. And think about that.

This woman was told she was not a child and yet she's still asking like a child. She gets something that they're missing. And you can't have that kind of boldness.

[23 : 41] Like it just won't exist if you go in and you doubt His goodness. Like if you don't believe He's a good Father, you can't be bold like that. You also can't be bold like that if you're too concerned with your own goodness.

If you're hung up on what you think you're owed or what you should get. You also can't be bold like that if you're hung up on your own lack of goodness. Like if you're just thinking about God would never like, I am not a candidate for this.

I've done too many bad things. Like you can't be bold and ask a good Father for things if you think He'll never give it to me because I don't deserve it and I'm too dirty for that. But that's not what happens here.

And I think it starts to show us this picture of, man, in your walk with Jesus, when you continue to move with Him, it starts to build this type of confidence that I'll be honest is unlike anything else I know in life because you start to realize God wants you to ask Him for big things like that.

He wants you to impose on Him. He wants you to act like a child. He wants you to believe that He's a good Father. But you can't get there if you're clinging to your own pride and dignity.

[24 : 58] But if you do, like if you take that step and you say, I'm going to trust who I believe Him to be, you find something amazing and that's that Jesus always does the unexpected to save and heal us.

So she answers Him, Yes, Lord. 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 she found the child lying in bed and the demon had gone. The tone of this verse is effectively what Jesus is saying is, What an answer.

Guys, did you hear that? Like, what an answer. You have everything you needed. And so the woman gets what so many around her are missing is that Jesus is good and that there is enough on His Father's table for the whole world.

And so she leans in and gets that. And as she does it, it shows us something else really surprising. So we assume in this when Jesus responds to her, He's speaking to only one heart and He is speaking to her heart.

[26 : 06] But now we find out He's actually speaking to a few other hearts in the room as well. So it's surprising to us that Jesus would respond by saying she was a dog and saying it's not time for that yet.

But what He does next is surprising to everybody else there. So remember, from their point of view, all of this is inappropriate. She has no right to be here. She's broken all the rules of decorum.

She's being a nuisance and making it all about herself. She's not a part of us. And Jesus says, No, she's going to get everything she needs.

And He responds with blessing to a Gentile woman. And so now that fact, which doesn't bother us at all, causes a real problem for everybody else in the room there.

Right? Because as offensive as verse 27 is to us, verse 29 is offensive to them. It's a testament to them that this isn't about the thing you guys think it is about.

[27 : 10] And man, that is really good news, not just for this woman who gets what she needs in the moment, but for everybody sitting in this room as well. Because what we're starting to see now in the book of Mark is this emerging picture of what God is actually revealing.

You know, we start to see these aren't just random stories. Like God is revealing something to the disciples and to the world. And one of the things they're starting to see is like, this Savior is a lot bigger than all of their imaginations had Him to be.

Like He doesn't fit in the box they thought He should fit in. Going back a few verses. So again, remember Jesus just talked to them about, you know, what makes a person clean and unclean and how it's not what you think it is.

And some of the people you think are in God's grace are not, you know, not exactly what you thought it was going to be. Then we see this verse about this woman. And again, it's unexpected and surprising to them that He would respond.

In the next segment of Scripture that comes right after this, there's another healing that Jesus does. And this one looks a lot more like we expect. It's a man who can't speak and he's deaf.

[28 : 22] And again, some friends impose and say, Jesus, you got to do something. And so Jesus here kind of tenderly takes Him aside because He's been a spectacle and Jesus doesn't want Him to be a spectacle anymore. And He does this healing that seems kind of strange.

It's got like a real physical aspect to it. He's like touching Him. He spits at one point and you're kind of going, what's that about? And then you start to realize that the man can't talk and he can't hear. And so Jesus is kind of communicating with him in a physical way that He can just understand that it's going to be okay, like the Father's going to hear you. And that looks more like what we'd expect. He gets what He needed. And so there's another beautiful healing. But the thing that we wouldn't see as clearly as the people at this time would, every one of those things mirrors something in the

book of Isaiah that they would have had ringing in their ears about the Savior that was to come, about how it's too small a thing for Him to be just for Israel, about how He opens the ears of the death and loosens the tongues of the mute.

And so as He's going through, this picture starts to emerge for them that this God that's come is the one who was to come.

[29 : 37] This is the Savior we're waiting for. And as that happens, it really just rings this good news out, which is Jesus is the one who was sent to save us and He is for the whole world.

Not just them, us today. And Jesus will always do the unexpected to heal and save us because His grace is always sufficient. This is not the way we would expect Jesus to respond here.

But if nothing else, at the end of it, we see that it winds up being both the grace that the woman needed and the grace that the other people in the room needed. And even, you know, the things that Jesus does that we may not like, I hope you're starting to see that even those things are done out of His love for us.

It's all born out of His love for us. And not only for us, but the entire world. That love and that grace is not restricted to them.

It is for us right now today. And that's what this verse is ringing out to us. It's exactly what we need and it meets us right where we are.

[30 : 52] As the band comes up today, a couple of ways I'd like you to think about responding here. So if you're in the room and you're not a follower of Jesus, first of all, thank you so much for being here.

That's really courageous. That's a courage a lot of people don't have to walk into an unknown place and, you know, kind of deal with things that are strange to you. So thanks for doing that and checking that out. And I'm just thinking maybe there might be a part of you that wants to come to God, but you're just thinking, man, He'll never accept me.

Like I know what I've done. The people in this room know what I've done. He won't take me. I'm hoping maybe this morning you'll have seen from this, maybe take a chance and impose on Him. Ask for something that maybe you don't deserve from a God who likes to give out of His good pleasure, not what we deserve. Or maybe you're sitting here and, you know, there are things that you find attractive and compelling about Jesus, but the truth is, man, there's just some other things He says.

There's some other stuff in Scripture that, you know, I'm just not on board with. It's just offensive to me. And again, hopefully I'll see that, hope you've seen today that even those things are just signs of you wrestling with the real God, the real God that loves you.

[32 : 09] And again, you don't have to understand everything to understand that in His arms is always going to be love and grace. Maybe you could reach out to Him today. If you're in the room and you're a believer, maybe today has challenged you to consider whether or not the God you are following is the actual God, or some picture of Him you've painted that looks exactly like you.

When I was preparing this sermon, I was kind of thinking back through, so what are some ways in which me and Jesus have bumped heads and some things that He said that's challenged some assumptions that I had?

And I'm just going to share one of them. Maybe it's for somebody in the room, but one of the things that came back to mind that I hadn't thought about in years was, so growing up in kind of the country boy culture that I did, one of the things that was really prominent in the friend groups I was in was this kind of sentiment, right?

So we don't start fights, but we sure enough finish them. And I'll be honest, that was kind of appealing to me because there's a certain nobility in it, right?

Like you're not going around looking for fights, but if somebody comes at me, they're getting right to find out, right? But then I started looking at Jesus.

[33 : 31] And what I saw is a picture of the person who actually turns the other cheek. And I looked at him when he was in the garden and the authorities came to start a fight with him.

And one of his friends, Peter, pulls out a sword. He's going to finish that, right? And Jesus, he says, Peter, man, put it away. They came to start it, and Jesus let them finish it.

As they were finishing it, he looked up to his father and said, Father, please have mercy on them because they don't have any idea what they're doing.

That wasn't how I had been taught to feel, but I said, you know what, Jesus, that's the kind of finisher I want to be. Because make no mistake, he could have finished it. Nobody takes his life from him.

But his love for us compelled him to say, no, have mercy on them. Let's go ahead and stand together. Let's do this Amen.