

Part 28: The Unexpected Mercy of the Long Expected Savior

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Last year some Grizzly Christian Fellowship student leaders put on a group excursion into downtown Missoula. While we made our way through campus some of the students invited others to come join us, and there was one student in particular who I had never seen before.

As we made our way downtown I was talking to him a little bit, and he seemed a little put off by some of my questions. When we reached a crosswalk he stopped and asked the student who invited him, “You said this was the Forestry Club right?” And the student replied, “No we are Christian club.” And I’ve never seen someone so terrified before in my life.

Before I knew it he was on his skateboard and I never saw him again. In this instance it was a sincere misunderstanding, but it goes to show what most of us have experienced at some point in our lives: we hate getting caught in something we didn’t expect. For some of us you have experienced this at a restaurant or a job interview, maybe when a dinner with a friend or co-worker turned revealed a hidden agenda you weren’t aware of. Some of you may have even had an experience like that with religion, where what you expected to believe about yourself and sign-upped for seems different than the reality it actually demands from you.

Over the past few weeks in the book of Matthew, Matthew has been sharing a number of stories which are intended to give us a clear picture into who Jesus is. Today as we look at Matthew chapter 15 and 16, we are going to continue to see who Jesus is, but we are also going to see what his mission is. Jesus is showing the religious leaders and the crowds what they should expect regarding himself and his mission.

I have seen few things which have derailed faith more than misunderstanding of who Jesus is. And there have been few things which have derailed discipleship more than misunderstanding what Jesus came to do. It’s Matthews hope today to correct our view of Jesus and our view of both. What we are going to see this morning is this: **Jesus is the savior who goes to unexpected places with long expected hope.**

As we work through the last part of chapter 15 and the first part of chapter 16 here is what we are going to see: Jesus knows our universal needs, Jesus is the savior of all nations, and Jesus’ power is sufficient. To dive in we are going to look at our first point today: **Jesus knows our universal need.**

Now just to refresh, two weeks ago we saw Jesus and his disciples move up north, out of Galilee and into Gentile territory. This transition, especially for the readers of Matthew’s gospel would have been awkward. When the Jews thought of their long promised Messiah, they thought very much in terms of a Nationalistic savior. The narrative they believed regarding God’s Messiah was this: the Messiah would come, and he would judge the nations that stood against Israel, then the Kingdom would be established. It was very much an “us against the world” mentality.

Look at one Old Testament passage which seems to affirm this attitude: **Jeremiah 25:31**. When God would come for the nations, he would bring an indictment of their crimes. So for Matthew to make the

case for a Messiah while recording his kindness to the Gentiles would seem like a contradiction to anyone reading this story.

The Greek word for "Gentile" is *ethnos*. A gentile is any ethnicities or any person who is a non-Jew. And if the Jews were looking for a sign of confidence that Jesus was their Messiah, any gracious interaction with Gentiles would be seen as a cause for concern.

But look at what happened with a Gentile woman last time we interacted with Jesus: **Matthew 15:24-28**. Jesus is turning towards the Gentiles. Now any Jew might look at this text and say, "Well it was seemingly reluctant. I mean the woman did have to ask Jesus three times to heal her daughter." But let's continue in our text today: **Matthew 15:29-31**.

Did you hear the eagerness of Jesus in that passage? In this text we see Jesus continuing to work among the Gentiles, but where it appeared previously Jesus was apprehensive to serve the Gentiles, here we see he is abundantly generous. Look back at the language Matthew uses in verses 30 and 31: they brought with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others and they put them at his feet and he healed them, so that the crowd wondered (was amazed), when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking and the blind seeing and they glorified God.

Even the grammar of this text shows the comprehensiveness of Jesus healing. How did they know these people were healed? They didn't just hear about the lame being healed, it wasn't a slight of hand, they saw it; the lame were walking, the mute were speaking the blind were seeing. The extent and impact of Jesus was a total undoing of what was broken and a restoration to what was good.

Now when it comes to reading your Bible, it's really important to ask yourself questions. This is especially important when you run into actions or themes which seem to be repeated a lot. This passage we just read is one of those passages. In fact look back at **Matthew 14:13-14**. Why such similar stories? Certainly they both go to show how capable Jesus is to heal. But there is something really important going on between these two stories.

What Jesus did for the Jews, he is now doing for the Gentiles. But there is one big difference, the Gentiles begin to worship him as the God of Israel. Their encounter with Jesus lead them to worship and glorify Jesus in the way the Jews did not.

The works of Jesus are showing no distinction in regards to race or ethnicity. Let's continue: **Matthew 15:32**. We've heard this before right? Look back at how Matthew sets up the feeding of the five thousand: **Matthew 14:15-16**. Is this the same story repeated again by Matthew? No. So why the repetition?

Where Matthew 14 showed Jesus' interaction with the Jews, Matthew 15 is showing his interaction with the Gentiles and they are almost identical. The point is that despite the privileged position of the Jews (they had knew the scriptures and promise of God) they had the same problem as the Gentiles. They were human. They grew hungry. At the most fundamental level they too needed Jesus.

On a spiritual level this an extremely important piece of information. Paul speaks about this really clearly in **Romans 3:9-12**. Jew, Greek, American, African, British or Brazilian we all come to God not in a position of power but of poverty. Sin is the great equalizer. The wealthiest Christian in the Western world came to Jesus in the exact same state the poorest witch doctor did in the heart of the Congo.

We have no pride in ourselves, but our pride, or our boast is in the God who has compassion on us. We are all sinful. We are all broken. And Jesus has come to meet the single most universal need of all humanity: our sinful brokenness which separates us from God.

Matthew is going out of his way to write to the Jews saying, "Something new is happening here. Yes, Jesus will judge the nations, but he is also going to extend to them the same compassion he is going to extend to you." Even though the circumstance of this story is a mirror image of what the disciples already experienced in the feeding of the five thousand, look at how they respond: **Matthew 15:33**.

Now I want you to imagine this: imagine you are with some great spiritual figure. And this this man heals a bunch of people who are following him, and they keep following him and get tired, but there is no food around. But then this man looks at these, I don't know, let's say 5,000 men plus women and children, and he takes five loaves and three fish and provides enough food so that everyone in the crowd is full. And yet he still looks around and says, "Is there anyone else who needs food? If there is anyone else who is hungry let him come to me?" And while he is saying that you are already way too busy picking up baskets of leftover food.

Now again, I know this is probably unrealistic, let's say you go on with this man a little while longer, and you run into another situation where Jesus heals many people, and a hungry crowd gathers. And this man says, "Let's feed these people." What would you say at this point?

You see the disciples already saw Jesus see this same need and provide an overly abundant provision. But now they are in the exact same situation and they say, "Gee, that'd be great but where are we gonna get that food at?"

The disciples should have known at this point right? Which means at this point in the story there are two options for them at this point. They are either ignorant: unaware and unbelieving of the power of Jesus Christ. Or they are arrogant: thinking that certainly Jesus would provide food for the Jews, but why would he do that for the Gentiles.

And as silly as it is to read in this text, it's less silly when we consider our own hearts. How often do we experience the provision of God, but then doubt it either in our own lives, or in the lives of others. This story shows not only the needs of the people for bread, but the needs of the disciples for greater faith. The wonderful thing about the gospel is that it corrects both errors. It enlightens the eyes of the dull and humbles the heart of the proud. Look at what happens next: **Matthew 15:34-39**.

Jesus provides for the Gentiles in the same way he provided for the Jews. This is our second point today: **Jesus is the savior of all nations**. Remember the interchange between Jesus and the Canaanite woman? Look back just a few paragraphs in your Bible: **Matthew 15:26-27**. No one eats crumbs at the table of Jesus. There are no dogs in the kingdom of heaven. The Gentiles eat the same bread from the same savior.

This is an important issue to remember as we move forward into the next section. The last section ended with Jesus leaving the Eastern Gentile side of Galilee and sailing back west to the Jewish part of Galilee, and look at what was waiting for him: **Matthew 16:1**.

Now there is more than meets the eye going on in this text. This is the only time in this book where we see the Pharisees and Sadducees coming together to do something. That's because they hated each other. Morally and politically they were at complete odds with one another.

But as my old history teacher used to say, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." And here these two enemies are united by their hatred for Jesus. And they go to test him. That word "test" isn't a neutral word. It implies a sort of entrapment, an expectation for failure. They didn't come with honest questions or concerns, they came to discredit and disprove Jesus.

And they demand a sign from heaven. Let me just walk through what has happened in the last two chapters. Chapter 14: Jesus heals a multitude, Jesus feeds 5,000 men and even more women and children with five loaves and two fish, Jesus walks on the water, Jesus enables Peter to walk on the water, Jesus heals all the sick in Gennesaret. Chapter 15: Jesus heals a demon possessed woman with a word when she is not even present, Jesus heals the lame, blind, crippled, and mute, Jesus feeds four thousand men and more women and children with seven loaves and a few fish. And now these men come up to him and say: Give us a sign from heaven that you are the Messiah.

I attended a special lecture once at the University. The event was a discussion between a Christian professor of biology and a secular philosopher as to whether or not science can prove or disprove God.

There was a very interesting point in the discussion when the biologist asked the philosopher what would have to happen for her to believe in God. She said that she would have to see some supernatural interruption of the physical realm. She gave the example of the moon disappearing from the sky. But she said if that were to happen she may still think she was going insane. And even if her experience was corroborated by others she may attribute it to a group delusion. An even if she got past that, she said, she may even believe it was stolen by aliens before she believed that there was a transcendent supernatural deity such as the God of the Bible.

What this story shows is that we don't need greater signs from the outside. We need new hearts on the inside. Maybe that's you. Maybe you have been the one asking Jesus to provide a sign that he is real and able to save. Or perhaps that Jesus is a reliable source to trust when it comes to our own practice of Christianity. But I want you to look at how Jesus responds to these men: **Matthew 16:2-4**.

Jesus says, you know how to interpret the appearance of the sky but you cannot discern the face of heaven which is right before you. It is with no little irony that the very men whose eyes were created by God to physiologically transmit information from their eye, into their optic nerve, then transmitted and decoded in the occipital cortex resulting in sight are now demanding to see a sign of proof. Jesus made the same eyes they now wish to judge him with.

Jesus says he will give a sign, the sign of Jonah. I'm betting that most of us in here know two things about Jonah: 1. He ran from God, 2. He got eaten by a fish. But the point Jesus is making here shows us how beautiful the Bible is. If all we gather from Jonah is that disobedience causes us to get eaten by a fish, you miss the whole point of Jonah.

Jonah doesn't exist to cause us to fear fish. It exists to make us long for the greater Jonah. Do you remember why Jonah ran from God? Jonah ran from God because God called him to go preach the gospel to the pagan Gentile city of Nineveh. A city which was established on the shoulders of men who oppressed the Jews and hated God.

And Jonah couldn't imagine a world where Nineveh could be forgiven for what they did. He wouldn't preach repentance there because they deserved destruction. So the fish happened, and after three days in the fish he was spat up to finish his job. Reluctantly he goes to Nineveh and gives the most lackluster message of repentance and then leaves the city hastily. Certainly these pagans would not repent. It was a lost cause and their destruction would indeed be just. But look at what happens: **Jonah 3:6-4:3**.

The whole city repents. And Jonah gets mad. Why? Because they didn't deserve it. They deserved death. They deserved to be punished. What Jonah didn't realize is that it was his heart which deserved God's wrath. He was the one who was sinful in this book. As Jonah was pouting outside the city, God caused a plant to grow next to him to provide shade, but then God killed the plant. And look at how the book closes: **Jonah 4:9-11**.

Jonah reluctantly preached a half-hearted message to the Gentiles which brought about a repentance which cost him nothing. Jesus is the greater Jonah. The willing prophet who himself was the message of God to bring about repentance from all people, and it would cost him his life.

How do we know Jesus is God? How do we know he is the Messiah? Because while the Pharisees and Sadducees were too scared to enter into the midst of the unclean nations, Jesus entered into the mess of helpless people and did his Messiah work. Jesus will go to places where your self-righteousness, and cultural spiritualism will not.

Jesus did not come to affirm the preexisting goodness or your heart, the righteousness of your actions, the comfort of your wealth, the uniqueness of your political philosophy, or the privilege of your position. He did not come to teach us morality or spirituality. He did not come as the greatest example of human hope. He came to call the nations to repentance at great cost to himself for he would be the sacrifice for the sins of his people.

He would die not only provide a new sign, but to create new hearts. Where the reluctant prophet Jonah unwillingly spent three days in the belly of a fish in order to proclaim redemption, the greater Jonah spent three days in the grave for the joy set before him, so that he might be Lord not only of the Jews, but of the nations.

So where does Jesus want you to look when you have doubts about his sufficiency? Where does Jesus want you to look when your hard heart refuses to see? Where does he want you to look when your desire for comfort cripples your heart for the lost? He wants you to look at the salvation he accomplished on the cross.

This was indeed the plan all along: **Isaiah 66:18-19, Psalm 67:4-5**. This seemingly unexpected move of mercy was actually the long expected salvation of God. Jesus came to move towards the lost without distinction.

So what does this mean for us? Two take-a-ways. Number one, we should be examples of moving towards those who are different than us in our culture. In modern America it is to be expected that there is no race which is outside the scope of salvation. But often times we do think that there are political parties, ideologies and worldviews which are. In the world of social media we are able to cloister up in like-minded huddles, but the gospel coaxes us out as the aroma of Christ. We should not

see individuals as a collection of opinions that may agree or argue against us. We should see people of all walks of life as image-bearers in need of the same mercy you yourself received.

Where and in what ways can you move towards those who are different than you in Missoula and extend the grace which God once extended you as a stranger and alien? Are you with Jesus serving the lost? Or sidelined waiting to make your complaint against him?

Secondly, continue to pray that God raises up people and funds in our church to continue to support God's work among the nations. We should be moved like Jesus was as the condition of the lost across our globe, and it should move us to take part either in going ourselves, or supporting from afar. Visit map in the fellowship area and make a plan to pray with your roommates or your families for the persecuted and unreached people groups in our world.

We are a product of missions, so it is our joy to contribute to that same end. What does the world need? It needs Jesus, and he has chosen to make his church the means through which this happens.

Jesus alone meets our universal need, Jesus alone meets the needs of the nations, and our last point today is that **Jesus' power is sufficient**.

Let's continue: **Matthew 16:5-12**.

I love this story. I love this story because Matthew wrote this story. And Matthew, who was one of Jesus' disciples, made no attempt to cover up the seeming ignorance of the disciples in the past few passages. At this point the disciples get that there is a big connection between Jesus and bread. They have been left unaware of it twice now.

So when Jesus tells them to beware of the leaven (or yeast) or the Pharisees and Sadducees. The disciples are like, "We get it this time, it's because we forgot bread. He wanted us to bring bread, and now we don't have bread."

And Jesus says, "No! It's not about bread. Don't you see how I can provide bread abundantly." The disciples have witnessed all these wonderful signs and teachings that Jesus has done, and yet they still are wrestling to see and understand him clearly. I imagine this rebuke by Jesus would have been completely humiliating except for one thing: Jesus himself. Jesus taught them.

Jesus' word helps them to make sense of everything. He says, "I have no lack of bread. I am sufficient. Beware of those who are insufficient." The Pharisees and the Sadducees are not Jesus. They are not sufficient. And the disciples got it. It reminds me of a Tim Keller quote which says this: **"And who would ever tell a story in which he is seen as an evil fool on every page, except a man in whom God's grace has reached the center of his heart."**

You see as we've been in this portion of Matthew we've witnessed Jesus saying and doing things so that we might understand him more. In all of this, the religious leaders encountered the same truths and remained unmoved. But the disciples, in small but cataclysmic ways, are beginning to realize who Jesus really is.

And it is changing them. It is changing the way they view Jesus, the way they view the Gentiles, and the way they view the false teachers of their day. Jesus saves us. Jesus models a life given over to the salvation of the lost, and Jesus is sufficient to help us see him and serve others.

You want a barometer for the maturity of your faith: look and examine your heart and movement towards the lost.

All that to say, if we are really following Jesus, our thoughts on him and our actions towards others should be continually reflecting more and more the heart of our savior. The great news is that Jesus is sufficient to bring that change in us. He is sufficient to help us see him and others clearly. And when we do, you can expect to follow him into the unknown places of discipleship and evangelism where your weaknesses will be exposed, but the sufficiency of Christ will see us through.