

How Membership in God's Kingdom Works

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[0 : 00] One of the frustrating things about having a bank card or medical aid or gym membership is that horrible feeling that they always give you that you're a member but not really.

! There's always this relentless drive to make you a top rated member no matter what membership you've got going on. And of course all those memberships always cost more don't they? And you always start off at the bottom. Bronze, silver, gold, and then you make it to the top. Platinum. And then you get that phone call. Hello sir. Do you want to join our platinum plus? The thing is all these memberships that we have, they can make you feel like you don't belong. Especially if you're not a top rated member.

Medical aid is probably the worst here. No matter what level you're on, you never get what you pay for. If you're lucky you get a bandage and you've always got to pay extra for the PIMS or the scan. I've got a hospital that I can go to on my medical aid. I think it's in Beaufort West somewhere. They make you feel like you don't belong unless you're a top rated member.

[1 : 27] Well you could also get that horrible superior feeling when you do have top rated status and you look down on those poor peasants at the gym who don't have access to, I don't know, the sauna or the massage or whatever it is.

And Christians can be tempted to think that being a member of God's kingdom is a bit like being a member of our gym or medical aid.

You might feel that you need to deserve to be there. To be worthy, you've got to be, you've got to climb this ladder and be top rated. It's no use being at the bronze level, that's not going to cut it. But to get to the top you've got to pay your own way and contribute with your efforts. And unless you have something worth giving, or unless you've got the top rated package, you could feel that you're not a full member of God's kingdom.

The good news is that God's kingdom doesn't work like our gym membership or our medical aid. And today's story has something revolutionary to say to both of those attitudes.

[2 : 39] And we'll see that God's kingdom is precisely set up for those who don't deserve to be there. But once you're in, you get the whole package and more.

And there are no second class members in God's kingdom. And so our first point we're going to look at is membership, God's membership in his kingdom is given to the undeserving.

Membership to the undeserving. And we see that in our first story. So open with me or scroll there to Matthew chapter 15. And we see this in the first story of the Canaanite woman from Tyre.

You know, it's one of the most important but also most perplexing stories in the Gospels. Many feel that Jesus is incredibly, I should say shockingly rude and dismissive.

But in actual fact, he's showing us just how incredibly generous his mercy is to those who don't deserve it. And we see this in who the woman is and in Jesus' replies to her.

[3 : 50] We'll just spend a bit of time looking at this Canaanite woman. So have a look at verse 21 and 22, Matthew 15. Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

And a Canaanite woman from the vicinity came to him crying out, Lord, son of David, have mercy on me. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.

So three little things there that we've got to pick up is that, A, she's a woman. And it's in those days, it was very unusual for women to approach a man and then for the men to start interacting with them.

It just wasn't done. But Matthew tells us something else. She's a Canaanite woman. This is the only time that this word occurs in the New Testament. But we know from the Old Testament who the Canaanites were.

And they and the Jews were not friends. They were actually mortal enemies. Joshua was told as they entered the land to get rid of all the Canaanites because of their idol worship.

[4 : 57] And then also she's from this area of Tyre and Sidon, which is outside the boundaries of Israel. Jesus is busy ministering in the north of Israel in Galilee.

And now he's decided to move off and he's off to the coast area. And that's where Tyre and Sidon are. And so as far as the... Oh, and then she's got a demon-possessed daughter, which no one can get rid of.

And so as far as the Jews were concerned, that puts her into the definitely not kingdom member material. In fact, the last time, there was a story in the Bible about a Canaanite woman from Tyre, a king of Israel and dogs, which come into our story.

That was the story of Jezebel in the Old Testament, who was a queen of Tyre. And how she tempted Israel to Baal worship with its sexualized temple worship and child sacrifice.

You can read about that in 1 Kings 16-18. We could be tempted to agree with the disciples' verdict in verse 23.

[6 : 13] They've had enough of her. They tell Jesus, send her away. She keeps crying out after us. We don't want anything to do with her. She's definitely not going to become a member.

Get rid of her. And this is what makes Jesus' final reply all the more amazing. Have a look at verse 28.

Jesus says to her, Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted.

And her daughter was healed at that moment. Jesus gives her what she's asking for. He doesn't send her away.

Yes, there's an interesting interaction in the middle which we're going to look at. But this shows us that God's membership is open precisely for people who don't belong or who don't deserve it.

[7 : 15] We're just going to pause there for a second and think about ourselves. So if a Canaanite pagan with all her historical baggage is welcomed in and helped by Jesus, then you can know for sure that he will do the same for you.

Matthew gives us the worst possible candidate for membership in God's kingdom. And Jesus welcomes her in, commends her faith, and helps her.

And so friends, as you think about your relationship with Jesus, there's so many people who think that they don't belong. We think of their past, the things that they've done make them unworthy. The irony is that none of us is worthy. None of us belongs. But Jesus goes out of his way. He went to Tyre and Sidon on purpose for this exact reason.

This whole thing has been set up in history past, in the plan of God, to show us that people like that belong, and then for sure people like us belong in his kingdom as well.

[8 : 35] It doesn't matter your past. It doesn't matter your past. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter your cultural baggage, your historical baggage. Jesus is willing and able to overlook everything and accept you into membership of his kingdom.

Paul, sort of reflecting about the grace of God, and of Jesus says this in 1 Timothy chapter 1.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, people who don't belong, people who don't deserve his grace, of whom I, he says, am the worst.

In Romans 5 verse 5, Paul writing again says, while we are still sinners, Christ died for us. So I want you to know today that if you're struggling to feel that God accepts you, that he loves you because of stuff in your life, you need to know you're exactly the person Jesus has in mind, of the people that he wants in his kingdom.

But there's a bit of a lesson for us to learn in how Jesus interacts with the Canaanite lady.

[10 : 06] And so while Jesus does accept us, what he wants, this entry requirement if you want to put it like that, and what's highlighted in the story, what Jesus wants for us is a persistent faith, coupled with deep humility.

And this is what unlocks Jesus' acceptance of the woman into his kingdom. So we're going to look for a few minutes at humility and faith. Humility and faith.

Jesus commends the Canaanite woman for her great faith. Jesus doesn't often say this in the Gospels. In fact, a number of times he speaks about how his disciples have little faith.

The ones who are supposed to know better. In fact, I think the only other person that is commended for their great faith is the centurion that we met in chapter 8, who also needed help with one of his

household.

And Jesus says, Oh, you've also got great faith. Jesus commends her for her great faith. We see her faith in recognizing who Jesus is.

[11:22] As she comes to him, she knows exactly who Jesus is, and this is why she goes to him, because she knows he's the one that can help her. Look at what she calls him in verse 22. Lord, son of David, have mercy on me.

And she calls him Lord throughout this interaction. Lord, son of David, have mercy on me. She knows that Jesus is the Messiah.

There's a whole lot of stuff that comes with that that she knows. Which ironically, the Jewish people were meant to know. And all we've seen, time and again, very often, especially with the Jewish leaders, we saw it last week, they don't think Jesus is the son of David.

In fact, early in the Gospel, they think he's from Satan. Let alone the Messiah. The very one who's supposed to know who he is. And here's this lady from the sticks, who doesn't belong, who's not meant to know, and she knows exactly who Jesus is.

She trusts, she's got faith, she believes in who Jesus is. But it's her belief and trust in the fact that he's the Messiah, he's the king, that's the thing that gets her to be as humble as she does, And it's a shocking humility.

[12:57] In fact, Jesus' answer is shocking. But it's his answers, his shocking answers to her request for help, that shows us what he's really looking for.

Have a look at his first answer in verse 24. She's crying out for help. Well, actually have a look at verse 23. Jesus doesn't even answer her.

How's that? His disciples try and chase her away. They came to him, and urged him, look, send her away, she's making a racket here.

And then he says, this first answer, this first answer, which is perplexing, but he doesn't even tell her. He just tells the disciples, I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. Yeah, I know this is a woman that needs help.

I'm not sure I need to help her. That should be surprising to us. Not the kind of Jesus we meet, or that we know. But look at her response to that.

[14:04] That offhand remark, no response from Jesus, trying to be pushed away by the disciples. She knows he's the Messiah. She's not leaving, until he helps her.

Verse 25, the woman came and knelt before him. Lord, help me, she said. She said. That kneeling, it's the same word we came across when the disciples were in the boat, and Jesus walked on the water, and they realized who he was, and they just threw themselves at his feet in the boat.

Do you remember that? They bowed down in worship towards him. Here she's throwing herself at his feet. You know, in the movies, the sandal and sword epics that we watch, very often we see people bowing, it's sort of expected in those days.

Have you ever seen someone throw themselves at someone else's feet, and beg for help? I don't think so. I was lucky enough to meet the Queen of England, a couple of years ago, and, I mean, the most high, majesty, highest royal person that I've ever met, and, that's about, that's all she got.

I'm not going to bow at her feet. I will never do that. You've never bowed at someone's feet.

[15:39] I don't think. Very much doubt if you have. But it's this coming to Jesus, and kneeling on her face, at his feet, crying out for help, where Jesus actually starts to answer her.

This is the thing that unlocks Jesus' help for her. Well, his first response to her directly is also still a little bit perplexing. Look at his reply.

Doesn't look like he wants to help her. Verse 26, he replied, It's not right to take the children's bread, and toss it to the dogs.

Oh! What is Jesus doing here? Many people, if this was you, if you were the Ken Knight woman, many people would walk away at this point.

I wonder if you would do that. Hang this. Jesus! I'm at his feet, and he still wants to kick me while I'm down. You're a dog. I don't deserve, you don't deserve anything. Well, I'm off to find another Messiah.

[16:58] I mean, how long do you need to go, to get help from Jesus? What Jesus is driving, what Matthew is driving us towards, what Jesus is driving us towards, is we need to realise just how, undeserving we are, to receive God's grace.

Jesus' reply seems strange, even shocking to us. But it does make sense, in the storyline of the Bible itself. The thing is, we don't think about this, but God's promises were exclusive. They were primarily for his people, the Jews, not the Gentiles. At least of all, a Canaanite woman, from the city of Tyre, that was promised destruction, in the Old Testament, that brought pagan worship into Israel.

That's the last person, that God's promises, were intended for. Or so you would think. The thing is, the Canaanite woman knew this, and she's prepared to humble herself, even more, to get Jesus' approval.

Have a look at her answer, in verse 27. Yes, it is Lord. She's agreeing with him. But she says, even the dogs, eat the crumbs, that fall from their master's table.

[18 : 34] Oh! What do you think of the Canaanite woman's response? You might be offended. Many people are.

Jesus, likes her answer. Jesus likes her answer. Jesus likes her answer. That's why he commends her faith.

Jesus answered her, Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted. And we see that her daughter was healed, from that very hour, very moment.

Jesus likes her answer, Jesus likes her answer, because she goes as low as she can. She knows that anyone willing to catch the crumbs of God's blessings, will be fed.

It's that which unlocks Jesus' help for her. And friends, it will do the same for you. And so when you come to Christ, when we trust him, when we receive help from him, we know we need his help, but we ask him for his help.

[19 : 48] We mustn't let our pride, get in the way of receiving help from Jesus. You know, our modern culture, just can't imagine, lowering ourselves before anyone like that.

But so what does she recognize about Jesus? He is a king. A lord. The lord. Not any king. Not any lord. Not any lord. The king. The one appointed by God to rule over the kingdoms of the world. She knows there's this huge back story to who Jesus is. As we've been tracing who Jesus is through the Gospel of Matthew, the absolutely correct response to who he is, is to throw yourself at his feet, and beg for mercy and help.

Have you seen the amount of power that he's got? Walking on water, healing people left, right and center. We've gone through his birth stories. We've gone through his genealogy.

Everything is pointing to that this man is the promised one who's the inheritor of thousands of years of promises, and thousands of prophecies in the Old Testament.

[21 : 05] He's a god. And he deserves our worship and our obedience and laying flat on our face before him if we're going to get his help. It makes total sense that in order to have Jesus in your life, for you to get down on your knees and beg his mercy.

And if you're not willing to do that, you're going to miss out on his grace. The good news is that if you do do that, you can be assured that Jesus will give you not just what you need, not just the crumbs, so to speak, but he actually gives you an overabundance, and so much more.

And that's what the next two stories are all about, the stories of healing and feeding. And so we've looked at what it means to, that membership is not deserved in God's kingdom.

He gives it to those who don't deserve. We've looked at faith and humility and how those two interact. And now we see that full membership is for everyone in God's kingdom.

Full membership is for everyone in God's kingdom. You know, if you read this first story with Jesus and the Canaanite woman, you could be tempted to think, well, and good, Jesus has given me membership.

[22 : 30] But you know, I'm kind of at the crumb level. I'm not at the bronze level even. I'm just at the crumb level. Maybe that's all I can expect. Maybe that's all Jesus wanted to give.

Yeah, you can have some crumbs. But that's not at all how Jesus wants us to think of membership in his kingdom.

And the story of the healing and the feeding of the 4,000 tells us that Jesus is generous to everyone in his kingdom. We don't just get crumbs. But with Jesus, there's a feast of blessings.

And so, just to, won't spend too long now in these stories, but have a look at verse 30. Just look how easy it is for the crowds to get the help they need.

Well, I'll read from verse 29. So, Jesus left there after he's finished helping the lady from the Canaanite from Tyre.

[23 : 34] Jesus left there, verse 29, went along the Sea of Galilee, and he went up on a mountain and sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and lay them at his feet.

And he healed them. No ifs, no buts, no maybes, no you're not in the right membership, you need more.

Oh, you need help. Here we go. Boom. It's almost as if the Canaanite woman has unlocked Jesus' healing. What's happening here is that he's not in Israel.

He's not yet in Israel. He's actually still outside Israel. These are still Gentiles that he's dealing with. We know that from two places in the passage, just to point them out.

When they are healed, the crowds worship or praise the God of Israel. Verse 31. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking, and the blind seeing.

[24 : 38] And they praised the God of Israel. Which you wouldn't say if you were a Jew. You would just praise God. And then at the end of the passage, you'll notice, after Jesus has finished feeding the crowd in verse 39.

After Jesus sent the crowd away, he got into a boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan. Which is on the Israeli side, which is on the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee.

So it's likely that he's not on the Jewish side. So these are still Gentiles that Jesus is dealing with. It's easy and quick for people to get the help they need.

All the help they need. After the healing, there's the feeding of the 4,000. And we'd be like, well, we've had this story already, haven't we? Didn't Jesus, like, feed 5,000 similar things?

What's going on? Has Matthew forgot what happened just a few chapters ago? Well, no, it's making the same point that what Jesus does for his people, he's going to do for those who are not his people.

[25 : 43] Because he's like that. Jesus notices that people are hungry. Unlike the previous feeding story, Jesus now takes the initiative.

He doesn't wait for these disciples to say, hey, everyone's dying of hunger, we need to do something. He's like, whoa, people are hungry, I need to do something. Let me go and help them.

So it's a bit different from the first story. Jesus actually takes the initiative this time.

But again, it's his compassion that drives him. And again, there are abundant leftovers. Let's have a look at verse 32. Jesus calls his disciples to him and said, oh, I have compassion for these people. Remember we looked at the word compassion, where it comes from that deep moving on the inside? Jesus is driven to help these people. Not his people, these people.

They have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry or they may collapse. And as usual, the disciples are like, oh, where are we supposed to get the bread from? You've got a Canaanite woman with great faith.

[26 : 53] You've got the disciples who know exactly who Jesus is. They've seen everything. Oh, hmm. You know, you walked on water just like a few days ago, but what are you going to do with the bread now?

I guess that's like us in some sense. We know that Jesus does stuff and we so quickly forget how powerful and good he is when we're faced with big problems in our life.

He feeds them. And in verse 7, there's this huge collection. Verse 37, they all ate and were satisfied.

That satisfied is an overfeeding satisfaction. It's a satiation. They satiated. They full, prop, full.

They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward, the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. Just two lessons for us to pick up from this.

[28 : 04] This shows us that Gentiles have full acceptance and membership into God's kingdom. So the story is intended to show that Gentiles have full acceptance and membership into God's kingdom.

Not bronze level, not crumb level. On the same level as the Jews. This feeding is a replay of Exodus.

There's water. There's the leader of Israel high up on a mountain. There's a miraculous feeding.

And so what Matthew is pointing towards is that the Gentiles here have a fully constituted as part of God's people.

The Gentiles that Jesus is healing and feeding are fully constituted as part of God's people. Just like Old Testament Israel were at Sinai. It's a sign that God is going to fully accept Gentiles as his people.

All they need is to go to Christ to receive healing and blessing and salvation. No circumcision. No law keeping. Just asking for and receiving the grace of Christ. Christ.

[29 : 21] Now that's going to come further in the New Testament. This is just a teaser kind of thing of what's going to happen. But for us, we need to realize that we must fully accept that God's, we must fully accept God's full acceptance of us into his people.

We, you, need to fully accept that you are fully accepted as part of God's people. Not bronze level. Not crumb level. Full level. Full membership. There are not second class members of God's kingdom. There are no second class members or citizens of God's kingdom.

Paul writing about this. Wanting the church at Ephesus. That was a Greek church. Ephesus is in Greek. Greek.

Greece. And it's a church made up of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. And there was this, hmm, ooh, you Gentile Christians, you're not circumcised.

[30 : 36] Hmm, maybe you need a bit of more Torah in your life to have full membership status.

Paul writes this in Ephesians chapter 2. Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ.

Talking about before the gospel happened. Excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

He goes on to say, verse 19, And consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.

Built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. We do not dare tell ourselves that we're second class citizens in God's kingdom.

Because it makes a mockery of the shed blood of Christ. So take strength and comfort that you've been fully included into God's people if you're a Christian, even if you're not a Jew.

[32 : 05] And secondly and lastly, we need to realize that God doesn't just drip feed us his blessings, but he lavishes them on us. There's an overabundance of blessings that comes with being in God's kingdom.

God doesn't snoop towards us. Yes, the lady was happy for the criminals, but she got a lot. That's quite a criminal to get your daughter that's possessed by a demon that no one can cure.

And just add a word, she's free. There's an interesting word in the text about the leftovers.

It's easy to skip over wherever it was in verse 37. They all ate and were satisfied.

Afterwards, the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The Greek word means that which is over and above what is needed.

[33 : 08] That's why there's seven basketfuls. It's a complete number. After only just a few fish. It means that which is over and above what is needed.

It is to superabound. It means to be in excess. It is superfluous. It is to have abundance. So that when you come to be a member of Christ's kingdom, you don't just get little krimulky leftovers.

You get a superabundance of what you need. Now just to get this into our heads, you're going to help me with this illustration. About God's love being lavished or slathered, overabundantly given to us as Christians.

Because sometimes we don't believe it. Other Christians might have it and you just think, no, but I don't have it because you're struggling. That's okay. So in your right hand, you have a butter knife.

Can I see your butter knife? In your left hand, you've got a toast. Ooh. Perfectly nice fresh bed. Lovely toasted.

[34 : 18] In the middle, you've got some butter. Ooh. You're going to put toast on that. You're going to put butter on the toast. But the butter is expensive.

And you're worried about how expensive it is. Show me a little snoop. Little, how do you snoop that? You dip it on the, you almost, you almost, you almost, you almost touch it on the butter.

Yo. Don't take too much. And then you touch it on the toast. Snoop. Krum or kiss. Nothing.

If you own the cows and you own the butter factory, you're not worried about how much it costs.

Show me how much you would like to put butter on that toast. Here's your right, here's your...

Middle. We are... We're going to... More. Give me more. Put all the butter. Yeah. Generous.

[35 : 31] Lavish. Magnanimous. Copious. Open-handed. Super abundant. You can do that because you have more than enough to put on that bread.

Friends, that's how God is towards us. Because He owns the factory. He owns the world. And His grace is infinite.

And His grace is infinite. Ephesians 1 verse 7 says this, In Him, we have redemption through His blood. The forgiveness of sins. In accordance with the riches.

Not poverty. Not sane hate. Not miserliness. The riches of God's grace that He lavished on us. He's throwing it at you.

He's smearing His riches on you. With all of His wisdom and understanding that you can handle.

[36 : 35] How much love. How much mercy. How much grace. How much forgiveness. How much blessing. Does the infinite creator.

The infinite creator God of the universe have at His disposal. Infinite love. Infinite mercy. Unending grace.

Ever new forgiveness. Blessing on top of blessing. On top of blessing. Never ending. God has more than enough grace.

And mercy and good things that He gives to His people. When you become His member, you get the whole package. Put away your doubt. Put away your fear of not belonging to God's kingdom.

Accept and enjoy the full membership God gives you. As you humbly trust in Jesus. Well, I'm going to close in prayer. Aren't these good things to have from Jesus?

[37 : 36] There's great stories in the Gospels. Aren't we so thankful for them? But that prayer that we prayed earlier for Trinity 6. I'm going to pray for us.

And then we'll continue with communion. Let me pray. Let me pray. God, our Father, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as past man's understanding.

Pour into our hearts such love towards you that we, loving you above all things, may obtain your promises which exceed all that we can desire.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.