

Insufficient Grace —By Brenda Billingsy

Heavenly Father, I want to thank You for grace and mercy, and I pray that as we go through this Scripture, that You will just enlighten our minds and cause us to be good stewards of Your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

We are all saved by grace, through faith, and it's not of ourselves. It is a *gift* from God. I had a young lady attend church one day. It was the first time she had come for many, many years, and as she walked into the sanctuary, she thought she found a comfortable place to sit. So she sat down, only to hear, "Excuse me, ma'am, but you're in my seat." She looked up, and the lady was not smiling. So she quietly took her stuff, walked out of the church, and we have never ever seen her after that.

Grace! What happened to grace? We should be stewards of God's grace. There are three stories in the Bible that I think are very important. I call them the crummy stories. Mark 6 starts with the feeding of the 5,000. Now, these 5,000 were Jews on their way to the Passover. It was a celebration of God's compassion, His deliverance, and His grace. This miracle was birthed out of a heart of compassion. Jesus tried to encourage His disciples to feed the people, but all they had were logical excuses. So He broke the bread, fed them, and then gathered 12 baskets of crumbs. Now, 12 was the kingdom number for the Jews. The baskets, however, that they used were called *kophinos*, small baskets. They use those small baskets to avoid having to buy food from the Gentiles on their travels. They were content with limited bindings. We can call them prejudicial baskets.

Then, Mark 8 is the feeding of the 4,000. This time they were in Gentile territory. Once again, Jesus fed them, and they gathered seven baskets of crumbs. God's perfect number is seven. These baskets, however, were different. They were called *spuris*, large baskets, big enough for a man to get in and be let down over the wall. They were content with expanded capacity. We can call them grace baskets.

Jesus had a pattern of feeding, and it looked like this: He would take the bread, He would bless the bread, then He would break the bread and give the bread. So are these the crumbs that are leftover? Well, not really. Crumbs, *klasma*, is not necessarily just scraps, fragments, leftover portions. It could be whole portions that have not been used, in excess of the need. This could be considered crumbs. But anything—whether it looked like this or it looked like that—that comes from the hands of Jesus is

blessed. And He gave it freely. All of the baskets, whether it were the small baskets or the large ones, received the same item—crumbs.

Now, Jesus expanded the feeding to include the Gentiles, and even though it seems that they had less crumbs, it worked out to be more because of the size of the baskets. See, “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20, KJV). And since the Gentiles were considered to be sinners, they needed a whole lot more grace.

And then comes Mark 7, which is inserted between the two feedings to demonstrate to the disciples that God is no respecter of persons when it comes to gracefully filling a need. He ignores cultural, racial, and even gender biases to feed and reach His children. Everyone must be given a fair chance to receive God’s grace. But social prejudice was rampant, even in the church. They did something unique. For example, handwashing. Before consuming the bread, they did a little demonstration. They would pour two drops of water into the palm of their hands, slide it down to the wrist. That was considered handwashing. It was simple. If they had no water, they would simply do the motion, and again, that was considered handwashing. Now, it was not handwashing in the true sense of the word. Instead, they were so concerned about the social and spiritual contamination by being close to Gentiles in the marketplace that this ritual simply showed their disdain and prejudice against the Gentiles. It was not their concern about germs; it was really just their hatred for Gentiles.

Now, the disciples would soon be receiving a command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. How could Jesus change their attitudes without embarrassing them? Well, I’m not sure what He called His technique, but in today’s society that technique is called mirroring. It’s a technique used by counselors and wise parents, in which they act out the behavior of a client or child so that the child can see firsthand how offensive, tactless, graceless their attitude and approach really is. To make this theory come alive, Jesus needed just the right example. So He set out on a 15-mile journey to Tyre and Sidon, with a dual purpose: first, to conduct a one-woman evangelistic meeting. And second, to publicly display and hopefully correct the negative attitude of the disciples, which could hinder them from being grace-filled witnesses.

In Matthew 15:21, we’re introduced to a Canaanite woman. [Editors’ Note: This story is also found in Mark 7:24-30.] Now, she had several strikes against her. She was a Gentile. She was female—no value, no worth in her society. She was classified by

Jews as the “dog” of society. That means she lacked the capacity to appreciate the gift of salvation. Then on top of all of that, she had a daughter, another female. If you were going to give birth, at least you prayed for a male “dog.” Her daughter was also plagued with a demonic affliction, due to the sin, they thought, of her parents. So in summary, this poor woman could not win for trying.

Sometimes when you’ve been despised, rejected, accused, or afflicted, it brings you to a point of desperation. So I envision this woman getting up one morning as usual only to hear the thump of her daughter, banging her head against the wall. Mom could have wept as she walked over, picked up her daughter, held her and rocked her until she went back to sleep. *Who can help me?* Where should she turn? She may have gone to the marketplace just to get some food to cook. And while she was there, she may have overheard some folks talking, and they mentioned that there was this person called Jesus, a healer, and He was close by.

So now she had a dilemma. Should she run back home and get her daughter, or should she try to just get a face-to-face audience with Jesus? She chose the latter. Desperation linked arms with determination, causing her to cry out (found in Matthew 15:21-28, NKJV), “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!” How did she know that name? Did she hear of the feeding of the 4,000, maybe? But Jesus “answered her not a word.” See, Jews would not even look in the direction of Gentiles, much more respond to their cry; that would be an utter embarrassment. But guess who responded? Yes, our dear friends, the disciples. They seemed to have just one favorite response always—to keep Jesus secluded in their little social network. He was supposed to be just *their* Friend, and no one else’s. So, “Send her away.” This was the same response the disciples had when they were frustrated with having to feed the 5,000. “Send them away!” “Send her away, for she cries out after us.”

After us? Since when were they so important? In other words, what they really wanted to say was, “We have no time to waste on a sinful Gentile dog of a woman. She’s not worthy of our attention. Jesus’ response went like this: “I was not sent except for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Ouch! He really told her off. But rather than putting her in her place, this statement may have been an alert notice to the disciples: there are lost sheep even in the house of Israel, the chosen ones. And just like the bigoted Jews would have done, the disciples agreed with what seemed to be nationalistic pride. After all, why should their precious Lord bestow any favor upon a Gentile woman? This typical Jewish rabbi would have done precisely what the disciples proposed: “Send her away!”

But remember, Christ's purpose was to teach the disciples a lesson on compassion and grace by demonstrating to them their ugly attitudes and behaviors. But hers, this woman's test, was a test of faith that *refused* to be rebuffed. Driven by a pressing need, she was not about to take "No" for an answer. She got close enough to bow at His feet and plead, "'Lord, help me.'" To intensify the role-playing, but maybe just with a slight encouraging wink of the eye, Jesus' second response was, "'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.'" As harsh as that may have seemed to the disciples, who actually *thought* it but did not voice it, at least Jesus was now talking to her. He was engaging her in conversation instead of dismissing her, as the rabbis would have done. And this woman was sharp and discerning enough to pick up on one word that Jesus used. It was the word "dog." She quickly joined in the role-playing. "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from the master's table." Maybe crumbs like what He fed the 5,000.

The word "dog" used by Jesus did not refer to a stray dog. Have you ever seen stray dogs on the street? They are ugly looking, unkempt, don't have any food, no place to live. Jesus used a different word, instead. It was the word for a *pet dog*, *kunarium*. Now, I don't know about you, but pet dogs, as far as I see (I don't have one but a friend of mine has one) get treated probably a whole lot better than dogs normally do on the street. A pet dog is well-cared for. They may have their little house. They have little beds. They get fed three times per day. They have personal visits to the vet for checkups and shots. They get manicures, they get haircuts, they even wear winter coats. To be someone's pet is to be loved, protected, provided for—the recipient of grace and blessings from their owner.

Similarly, Jesus will certainly see to it that He reserves crumbs of blessings for His special pets. The women might have thought, *Everyone else may consider me a stray dog, worth nothing but to be kicked around and ignored. But here is someone who wants to treat me like a pet, a different type of Man, calling me by a different name and offering me grace crumbs from His table. I'll take it! I'm coming with my faith basket large enough to hold all the crumbs that He has to throw my way, for I know that a crumb from the Master's hand is always blessed.* This is what I call focused faith.

Jesus smiled. Mission accomplished. And He said to her, "'Oh woman, great is your faith. Let it be to you as you desire.'" It was a victorious day for this Canaanite woman as she ran back home, kicking the dusty trail of her faith in the face of the bewildered disciples. It was a sober day for the disciples as they learned that God's grace is greater than racial, cultural, even gender biases.

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I’m found; was blind, but now I see.”

And we in 2016, are the disciples of today. And the question is, Are we still traveling with small *kophinos*, small baskets, feeding ourselves? Or, have we expanded, grown to the point where we use *spuris*, baskets large enough to hold sufficient crumbs to feed even the Gentiles? Truth be told, many of us know what it feels like to experience insufficient grace in the house of Israel. Can I be honest? Churches today seem to be places of tradition, where we cater only to the Israelites, and there is a dangerous lack of compassion for sinners, the poor, someone who might be pregnant out of wedlock, divorced, gays, females, liars, backstabbers—graceless places where these people are not welcomed.

But can I remind you? When hungry people show up on your doorstep, they couldn’t care less about traditions. All they want is bread! That’s why Jesus encourages us to make our churches places where the crumbs of His body—communion bread—are shared freely, both to Jews and to Gentiles, to black and to white, to male and to female. Where love replaces rules. Where forgiveness is always the first option. Where prejudice in *any* form is disbanded. Where complaining gives way to encouraging. Where Jesus is lifted up, and He can then draw all men unto Himself without our traditions getting in the way and hindering the process.

There was an old beggar who decided one day that the best place he would be able to get some money would be on the doorstep of a church. So he sat on the step where everyone would be able to see him. The people came to church, amazed to see him on the step, and they passed him by, one at a time, going into the church, actually frustrated that a beggar was sitting on their doorstep. They talked to the deacon and asked him to remove the gentleman. But before they could come up with an action plan, the beggar got up and walked straight into the church and sat on the front row. And when he did, everyone else just sort of scooted away from him. They actually were smelling his odor. So the deacon decided it was time for action, and he started walking toward the gentleman. The beggar stood up and began disrobing. He took off some of the clothes he had on. He took off the wig that he had on. He took off the facemask. And everyone gasped, *Oooh!*

When they looked at his face, it was their pastor. He taught them a lesson that day, not just from preaching, but a lesson from how they reacted, their graceless approach to someone in need. And he encouraged them at the end of the sermon that all people are sinners, and they are all saved by grace through faith, and they should make every effort to transform their church into a grace place, where they can function as true stewards of God's grace.

I pray the same for you today, that you would go out and be good stewards of the *wonderful* grace that God has given to you. God bless you.