

August 16, 2026 – Isaiah 56:1, 6-8 & Matthew 15:21-28

There are some things that you simply don't expect. You don't expect to see snow in August. You don't expect to find a shark swimming down a city street. You don't expect the Kansas City Chiefs to lose a football game, nor do you expect the Cleveland Browns to win one. And there are some things that, when you hear them, you have to stop and ask, "Really? Are you sure about that?"

Isaiah gives us one of those moments today. He says something that would have sounded absolutely astonishing to an Israelite. Something that would have seemed almost impossible. He says that one day foreigners will come into the house of the Lord. They will come and they will worship there. They will pray there. They will offer sacrifices there. And God Himself says, *"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."* All nations. Everyone.

That's a remarkable promise. Because from Israel's perspective foreigners were outsiders. They were Gentiles. They were pagans. They didn't belong to the covenant God had made with Israel. They hadn't received circumcision. They hadn't received the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They didn't belong in God's house.

And there was a very real separation between Israel and the nations. The Old Testament Law is filled with regulations concerning cleanness and uncleanness. And the nations surrounding Israel were regarded as unclean. Outside the holy fellowship of God's people.

There were restrictions concerning who could enter the assembly of Israel and who could participate in Israel's worship. The Temple itself was structured around this distinction. There was a courtyard specifically for the Gentiles, because Gentiles couldn't simply walk into the holy places of the Temple and worship God as the Israelites did.

So imagine what it would have sounded like to an Israelite to hear Isaiah say, *"The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord... these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer."* God is promising that the very people who His Word defines as outsiders will one day be brought inside.

And what will bring about this sudden reversal? Not their nationality. Not their ancestry. They're not accepted because they've somehow become biological descendants of Abraham. Isaiah says that the difference is that they *"join themselves to the Lord."* They love His name. They hold fast to His covenant. In other words, the distinction is faith. They have faith in the God of Israel. And so they will be welcomed into His house.

Which leads us directly into our Gospel lesson. Jesus travels into the region of Tyre and Sidon, outside the traditional boundaries of Israel. And there a Canaanite woman comes to Him. Matthew deliberately calls her a Canaanite, even though it's a bit anachronistic during Matthew's time period. Probably because Canaanites were the ancient enemies of Israel. They were pagans. They were foreigners. They were exactly the kind of people Isaiah is talking about.

And this Canaanite woman comes crying out, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."* A Gentile woman calls Jesus "Lord." She calls Him "Son of David." She acknowledges Him as the promised Messiah. She comes to the God of Israel and asks Him for mercy.

And Jesus seems to ignore her. She keeps crying out, and eventually the disciples ask Jesus to send her away. And, at first, it sounds like Jesus agrees with them. *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

But she won't leave. She comes and kneels before Him and begs, *"Lord, help me."* Jesus answers with yet another refusal, *"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."* And even then she won't leave. *"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."*

She doesn't argue with Jesus. She doesn't claim that she deserves His help. She doesn't appeal to her own goodness or worthiness. She simply clings to His mercy.

She knows that she's an outsider. That she has no claim upon Him. But she also knows something else. She knows that Jesus is merciful and that He has what she needs. And so she refuses to let go of Him. And Jesus praises her for it: "*O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.*" And her daughter was healed instantly.

The Canaanite woman is a living fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Here is one of the foreigners that Isaiah promised would come to the Lord. Here is an outsider who has been brought into the presence of Israel's Messiah. Here is someone who has no natural claim upon God's promises, yet who receives God's mercy through faith.

But there's one difference you might note. Isaiah says that the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord will be welcomed into the Temple. But this woman doesn't go to the Temple to find the presence of God. She goes to Jesus. Because Jesus is the true Temple. He is the place where God dwells among His people. He is Immanuel, God with us. To come into Jesus' presence is to come into the presence of God Himself.

And that's where Isaiah's prophecy ultimately points. God promised that foreigners would come into His house. In Christ, that promise is fulfilled in an even greater way. The house of God is no longer confined to one building in Jerusalem. God Himself has come to dwell among us in the person of Jesus Christ. And through Christ, the nations are brought into God's presence.

And that includes us. Because if we're honest, we're not Israelites by nature either. We're foreigners. We're outsiders. We weren't born with a natural claim upon God's covenant promises. And even more seriously, we're unclean sinners.

The problem isn't merely that we come from the wrong nation. The problem is that we have the wrong hearts. We have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed. We have failed to love the Lord our God with our whole heart. We have failed to love our neighbors as ourselves. We have treasured our own desires more than God's Word. We have done what we should not have done, and left undone what we should have done.

If God's presence were reserved for the clean, we would have no business entering it. If God's table were reserved for those who deserved to sit there, we would have to remain outside. If God's house were only for those who were accepted by works of the Law, the doors would be closed to us. But the Lord tells us quite the opposite: "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*"

And Jesus shows us what that looks like. It looks like a Canaanite woman kneeling before Him and saying, "*Lord, help me.*" It looks like sinners coming before Jesus exactly as we did this morning, saying, "Be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being." And Jesus welcomes them.

That's what makes the Lord's Supper such a remarkable gift. We come here as foreigners and sinners, but Christ welcomes us into His presence. We don't come because we're worthy or because we've earned a place at His table. We come because Christ invites us.

And what does He give us here? The very sacrifice that takes away our uncleanness. The Canaanite woman was willing to receive even the crumbs from the children's table. And yet Christ gives us something far greater than crumbs. He gives us His true body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

The holy God whose presence sinful people could not approach now comes to us. The sacrifice that once had to be offered upon the altar in the Temple has been fulfilled once and for all by Christ upon the cross. And now the crucified and risen Lord gives us the fruits of that sacrifice here at His table.

We are outsiders who have been brought inside. We are unclean who have been washed clean. We are sinners who have been forgiven. We are foreigners who have been made members of God's household.

So come to His house. Come as the Canaanite woman came, clinging to His mercy. Come confessing your sins. Come trusting His promise. Come with nothing to offer except faith in the One who has everything to give.

And here, in the presence of Christ, receive what He promises. His body. His blood. His sacrifice. His forgiveness. For the Lord's house is a house for all peoples. And by His grace, that includes you. Amen.