

Matthew Lesson 15

Matthew Chapter 15

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Memory verses for this week: *Phil 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content..*

Introduction: In last week's lesson, we studied the death of John the Baptist and the miracles concerning the feeding of over 5,000 men, women, and children with the five loaves and two fishes. We closed by studying about Peter and how he walked on the water when his eyes were fixed upon Jesus Christ. Four events take place in chapter 15: (1) Jesus confronts the Pharisees, (2) the incident with the Syrophenician woman, (3) multitudes are healed, (4) and, the 4,000 fed.

I. Christ Rebukes the Scribes and Pharisees

Mat 15:1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,

Mat 15:2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

Mat 15:3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

A group of Pharisees and scribes evidently had traveled up from Jerusalem to see this Jesus for themselves. They took interest because his disciples did not observe the traditions of the Jewish rabbis. Judaism of Jesus' day was largely rabbinical Judaism, in many respects similar to the rabbinical Judaism of today.

After the destruction of the Temple and the Babylonian captivity, the rabbinical system developed along with the synagogue system. The rabbis took it upon themselves to become the official interpreters of the Law and developed a complex system of 613 rules a Jew must keep to be considered righteous by God. The primary advocates of this system were the Pharisees whose name originally meant, 'the interpreters.'

(1) One of the rules of rabbinical Judaism was that a righteous Jew must wash his hands before eating.

(2) That requirement was not based so much upon hygienic concerns as it was on ceremonial cleansing related to keeping the Law of Moses. Jesus and His disciples were from the small town of Galilee which was not as infected with such legalism as in Judea and Jerusalem. The arriving Pharisees promptly confronted Jesus because His disciples did not regard their traditions. Of interest is that orthodox Jews to this day still practice this rule.

In modern Israel, even in fast-food restaurants, there are lavatories in the front of the establishment for orthodox Jews to wash their hands before they eat. Jesus questions their observance.

"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"

The problem with religious tradition is that it frequently contradicts and violates God's Word. The prevailing rabbinical Judaism of that day had degenerated into an endless observance of external *do's* and *don'ts*. Unfortunately the observant Jews thought they became righteous before God.

These scribes and Pharisees come out from Jerusalem to oppose Christ. They charge that the disciples of Christ are not washing their hands before they eat. The washing of hands before a meal was a tradition of the Jews. They had many traditions concerning washings of various things. So in reality, what they were being accused of was breaking the 'traditions' of the fathers, not sinning against the Lord. Jesus answers in verse 3 that these were transgressing the commandment of God by their traditions. Unfortunately, many today are guilty of respecting a tradition of a church more than the Word of God. If you have a church ruled by some board (like committees or deacon's boards), you have made the traditions above God's Word. The pastor is placed as the leader of the church.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Heb 13:7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

Mat 15:4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

Mat 15:5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;

Mat 15:6 And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

Jesus calls attention to one of the ten commandments as he answers these accusers. They were guilty of breaking this commandment by keeping the tradition of the elders. They were saying that they had given a gift (something vowed to the Lord) rather than helping their parents. This extra gift was beyond their tithe, and they did it so they could skip helping their parents and have a good conscience towards God. However, God knows the heart, and the reason we give. To give an extra gift and think that exempts us from our duties to our parents is wrong and does not honor God. By doing this, they had made God's commandment of none effect. Their gift was not accepted of the Lord due to the condition of the heart.

Jesus took them to task for their hypocrisy. The Bible clearly commands us to honor our parents. However, the religious politicians had a tradition of taking large sums of money (which could have been used to help their elderly parents) and diverting it to the Temple for political advantage. They justified the neglect of their parents (and their own potential, political gain) by using their funds as gifts to the Temple. It was sheer hypocrisy and Jesus confronted them with it.

These pompous hypocrites were accosting Jesus and His disciples about not practicing ceremonial hand washing. Yet, these were the same people who allowed their elderly parents to be impoverished rather than support them all in the name of their rabbinical tradition. They were absolved from helping their senior parents because they had channeled their funds to the Temple. (They in turn might receive prized contracts or advancement there from.) In so doing, they confounded the commandment by their tradition.

Col 3:23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

Col 3:24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

Col 3:25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

J. Vernon McGee had a great comment concerning what the Pharisees were doing.

Our Lord is saying that honoring father and mother includes supporting them. The way they got around that responsibility was to dedicate their money as a gift to God, and that would relieve them of supporting their parents. This gave a pious way out for a man to break the Mosaic Law.

I still believe the best way to test a Christian is by his pocketbook. The barometer of the Christian today is how he handles his own money and how he handles God's money. The religious rulers of Jesus' day were helping men escape their responsibility.

I am of the opinion that God wants you to pay your honest debts before you give to Him. God wants you to take care of your personal responsibilities. He

wants you to support your family before you give to Him. I once knew a man with a wild idea. This man came to me on payday and wanted to give me half his income while his family went hungry. When I found out, we had quite a little talk, and at first he was offended. Finally, he saw that he was neglecting his own family, which is a tragic thing to do. It is amazing how people try to escape a responsibility in a pious way. .

Mat 15:7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,

Mat 15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

Mat 15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Our Lord then quoted from Isaiah 29:13 about honoring God outwardly, yet having hearts far from God. Their worship was empty and hollow. Their doctrine was the commandments of men. They talked piously about honoring the Lord, but they in reality were far from Him.

It was true in Isaiah's day and it was true then. Jesus called them hypocrites and noted how that Isaiah had prophesied even of them. Anytime human traditions supersede or even become of equal practical importance to the Word of God; hypocrisy, heresy, and apostasy are not far behind.

Jesus cites a prophecy from the book of Isaiah when he says "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me". It is sad that many honor God only with their mouth but not with their heart. God does not want us to be two sided and not continually honor him with our total life. But it takes a real man or woman to continually live for the Lord like we should. We can only do this by the Grace of the Lord. These held their traditions higher than the pure doctrine of God.

Mat 15:10 And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:

Mat 15:11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

Jesus declares to the multitude that it is that which comes out of a man that defiles him. From the heart, we speak. And our words will sure condemn us if we do not bridle our tongue and seek the Lord in our daily walk.

In referring back to the original criticism of the Pharisees about hand washing, Jesus set forth a profound principle. It is not what goes into a man that defiles him spiritually. Rather it is what comes out of his mouth that is defiling. Rabbinical Judaism laid an inordinate emphasis upon externals. Their entire focus was upon that which could be seen. Jesus taught that what is important is spiritual. Moreover, what comes out of the mouth is from the heart and that therefore is a spiritual issue.

Mat 15:12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

Mat 15:13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

Mat 15:14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

The Pharisees were offended by this rebuke. To that, Jesus went on to say, *"Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up."* The implication is clear that the human origin of religious tradition will be uprooted in due season. There are hints of the parable of the wheat and tares. In due season, the truth will prevail, if not before then after Jesus returns.

The anger of the Pharisees is reported to Christ by the disciples. Christ tells them to not worry about the attitude of the Pharisees. They effectively were blind to the truths of God, and it was the blind leading the blind. We should stand on the truth of the bible, not in a mean or vicious way, but we should not back down from the truths it proclaims. Far too many people (and pastors) want to please men more than God. Our desire should be to honor our Heavenly Father with our speech and our lives. And that means loving the things God loves, and hating sin. (not the sinner... but the sin that burdens them down.)

Adam Clarke in his commentary said this about verse 14.

And if the blind lead the blind—This was so self-evident a case that an apter parallel could not be found—if the blind lead the blind, both must fall into the ditch. Alas, for the blind teachers, who not only destroy their own souls, but those also of their flocks! Like priest, like people. If the minister be ignorant, he cannot teach what he does not know; and the people cannot become wise unto salvation under such a ministry—he is ignorant and wicked, and they are profligate. They who even wish such God speed; are partakers of their evil deeds. But shall not the poor deceived people escape? No: both shall fall into the pit of perdition together; for they should have searched the Scriptures, and not trusted to the ignorant sayings of corrupt men, no matter of what sect or party. He who has the Bible in his hand, or within his reach, and can read it, has no excuse.

Mat 15:15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

Mat 15:16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

Mat 15:17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

Mat 15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

Mat 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

Mat 15:20 These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

The source of evil thoughts, murders, immorality, thefts, dishonesty, and blasphemies all originate from the human heart. Jesus touches upon a greater principle of the depravity of fallen, human nature. Later in the New Testament, it is called the flesh. Sin of whatever type originates from within the human heart. See Jeremiah 17:9 and Romans 3:10-23.

Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

Rom 3:11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Rom 3:12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Rom 3:13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

Rom 3:14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

Rom 3:15 Their feet are swift to shed blood:

Rom 3:16 Destruction and misery are in their ways:

Rom 3:17 And the way of peace have they not known:

Rom 3:18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Rom 3:19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Rom 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified

in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Rom 3:21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

Rom 3:22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Therefore, the real problem is the heart of man. That is a *spiritual* issue. External rites and rituals do nothing to change the heart. The rabbinical tradition of washing hands before eating may have hygienic value, but it does nothing to cleanse a man's heart. Defilement comes not from what goes into the mouth but from what comes out. The real need is for the heart to be cleansed. That comes only by a new birth spiritually. Then and only then, as we live in the new nature (walk in the spirit), is there complete transformation.

Sinless perfection is not the results of this transformation. Becoming a child of God is what is being spoken of. Many modern theologians would disagree.

Peter desires to have this 'parable' explained. The master at first rebukes Peter for his lack of spiritual perception, as this teaching was straight and simple. But he does go into a greater detail about it, and explains how that it is not the things we eat that defile us, but the evil thoughts that proceed out of our heart. God help us to keep our thoughts and minds pure.

Phil 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Phil 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

II. A Canaanite Girl is Healed

Mat 15:21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

Mat 15:22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

Mat 15:23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

This woman comes to Jesus and make her request known. She wants God to show mercy on her daughter. We see that Jesus at first does not answer her a word. This must have been very hard on the woman, since her desire was pure and she had come to the only one who could truly heal her. Sometimes when we pray, and don't receive an answer quickly, it is very unsettling. But God always answers in time.

Mat 15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Mat 15:25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

Mat 15:26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs.

Mat 15:27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

Notice that this woman Canaan addressed Him as the Son of David. This gentile woman had no doubt heard of His fame and that He was the Messiah. The religious officials utterly refused that notion so she couldn't have received such knowledge from them. As a gentile she had no right to address Him as the Son of David. That was a term of Jewish domain. The Lord did not answer or acknowledge the woman.

Jesus knew His initial ministry was to offer Himself as King to Israel. He fully realized that His initial ministry was to the Jew first. He came initially preaching repentance to Israel. This Lebanese woman was a gentile. In desperation she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

Jesus, testing her, said, *"It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs."*

Again, she addressed Him as Lord.

Rom 10:12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

Rom 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Immediately, Jesus responded. *"O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."*

(1) Jesus was not trying to play hard-to-get or to unduly test her. Rather, He was teaching a lesson that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

(2) Notice again that the criterion of the miracle was the faith of this woman. Faith is the same provision that moves God for either Jew or gentile.

(3) Though Jesus did test her to illustrate a point, the greater principle at hand is that faith on our part moves God to act.

Jesus declares that He has been sent to the nation of Israel only. But she tries even harder, and in verse 25 says

“Lord help me.” Jesus declares that it is not right to take what rightfully belonged to the Jews and to give it to the Gentiles. (Gentiles were looked down on so negatively that they were referred to as dogs in this day.) But the woman takes her place and begs for just a few crumbs that might fall from the master’s table.

Matthew Henry said this about what Christ said to the woman.

Those whom Christ intends most signally to honour, he first humbles and lays low in a sense of their own meanness and unworthiness. We must first see ourselves to be as dogs, less than the least of all God’s mercies, before we are fit to be dignified and privileged with them. 2. Christ delights to exercise great faith with great trials, and sometimes reserves the sharpest for the last, that, being tried, we may come forth like gold. This general rule is applicable to other cases for direction, though here used only for trial. Special ordinances and church-privileges are children’s bread, and must not be prostituted to the grossly ignorant and profane. Common charity must be extended to all, but spiritual dignities are appropriated to the household of faith; and therefore promiscuous admission to them, without distinction, wastes the children’s bread, and is the giving of that which is holy to the dogs, ch. 7:6.

Here is the strength of her faith and resolution, in breaking through all these discouragements. Many a one, thus tried, would either have sunk into silence, or broken out into passion. "Here is cold comfort," might she have said, "for a poor distressed creature; as good for me to have staid at home, as come hither to be taunted at and abused at this rate; not only to have a piteous case slighted, but to be called a dog!" A proud, unhumbed heart would not have borne it. The reputation of the house of Israel was not now so great in the world, but that this slight put upon the Gentiles was capable of being retorted, had the poor woman been so minded. It might have occasioned a reflection upon Christ, and might have been a blemish upon his reputation, as well as a shock to the good opinion, she had entertained of him; for we are apt to judge of persons as we ourselves find them; and think that they are what they are to us. "Is this the Son of David?" (might she have said): "Is this he that has such a reputation for kindness,

tenderness, and compassion?

I am sure I have no reason to give him that character, for I was never treated so roughly in my life; he might have done as much for me as for others; or, if not, he needed not to have set me with the dogs of his flock. I am not a dog, I am a woman, and an honest woman, and a woman in misery; and I am sure it is not meet to call me a dog." No, here is not a word of this. Note, A humble, believing soul, that truly loves Christ, takes every thing in good part that he saith and doeth, and puts the best construction upon it.

Mat 15:28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Jesus is moved by the woman's great faith, and grants her request and heals her daughter. I think we learn here that if we don't get an immediate answer to prayer, to keep on and be very serious about it with God. We are promised if we pray fervently and consistently, God will answer our prayers.

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

III. The Multitudes are Healed

Mat 15:29 And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

Mat 15:30 And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

Mat 15:31 Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

Returning to Jewish country, Jesus healed the sick and crippled of the multitudes who came to Him. Though rejected by official Israel, nevertheless, many of the common people received Him gladly. Once again, there is implicit faith on the part of the many who brought their sick and handicapped to Jesus. As they trusted Him, He met the needs of their lives. They then glorified the God of Israel.

The elite and professional religious leadership of official Israel wanted nothing to do with Him, but the common people heard Him gladly.

Mar 12:37 David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly.

Jesus was always about doing the work of the Father. The multitude bring others who are in need to Christ, and he healed them. The lame were made to walk, the dumb could speak, and the blind were able to see. All of this was done to honor the Heavenly Father.

John 4:34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

IV. The 4,000 Fed

Mat 15:32 Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

Mat 15:33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

Mat 15:34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

Mat 15:35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

Mat 15:36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

Mat 15:37 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

Mat 15:38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

Once Again, Jesus fed thousands of people with the smallest of resources. The concern and compassion of our Lord is evident in that He realized the need of His followers. They evidently had been following Him for three days with little or nothing to eat. What eagerness and spiritual hunger was manifested in these that they would ignore their physical needs to follow Jesus!

The loaves referred to were smaller than what we would consider a loaf of bread today. They were more like what we would call buns. There were four-thousand men plus the women and children present. Once again, Jesus met the needs of those who in simple faith turned to and followed Him. Truly, little is much when God is in it.

Notice that there was order in our Lord's working. He had the throng sit down to be served by the disciples. Of further interest is that even after witnessing Jesus feed the five-thousand a short time earlier (Matthew 14:15-21), the disciples still worried about physical needs. A lesson remains to this day for God's people. Our Lord will provide. In fact, Jesus provided more than enough.

Jesus had compassion on the multitude that continued with him. Never think if you stay faithful to the work of the Lord that He does not notice. God knows who are His, and He takes care for us daily. They had only 7 loaves and a few fishes, but with the blessing of the Lord, Jesus was able to feed the whole group with seven baskets left over. Notice the procedure he used for distributing the food to the multitude.

- a. Christ took the loaves and blessed them.
- b. They gave these to the disciples.
- c. The disciples gave to the multitude.

Mat 15:39 And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

Here is a lesson to us... this is the way the Gospel has been given. Jesus died to set men free, and he gave the command to preach to the church. We are to go out and to reach those who are lost that they might hear and be saved.

After, he sent away the multitude the Lord boarded a ship, and went into the coasts of Magdala. There is some dispute as to exactly where Magdala is. The traditional site is on the western shores of Galilee, about three miles south of Tiberias.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.