

Matthew ch 15

Ch 14 reveals to us how the ministry of J.B., the forerunner of Jesus was brought to a close, and we can see Matt kind of leading up to, or foreshadowing the death of Jesus Himself in that account. In that even as they didn't receive John, neither will they receive Jesus. And even as they put to death the forerunner of the Messiah, "*the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'*" So to, soon they will be crying out, "*We will not have this man to reign over us.*" And Jesus Himself will be sentenced to death and that of the cross, and in so doing will suffer, the just on the behalf of the unjust, the innocent on the behalf of the guilty, as He takes upon Himself the penalty of our sin. The next segment of Matt 14 concerns probably one of the most famous of all of the miracles of Jesus and the only one besides the resurrection that's recorded in all 4 gospels, that being the feeding of the 5,000 men not including women and children. and We saw in that the need to trust in Jesus even when we can't figure out how to make things happen knowing that He has resources of which we know nothing about. We are of limited means, He is of limitless means; the other thing that we emphasized concerning the feeding of the multitudes is that it reveals to us the ability of Jesus to satisfy the deepest hunger of all men. That hunger for reality, for purpose, and for meaning can only be satisfied in Christ.

Its in ch 14 that the famous account of Peter walking on the water is recorded for us, so that we might learn to keep our eyes on the Lord at all times. We're never to get our eyes off Jesus and on to our surrounding circumstances, because that's when we get overwhelmed and begin to sink. and As long as it's smooth sailing we have no problems fixating our eyes on Jesus and moving forward toward Him. But it's when things get a bit boisterous that we have the tendency to get side tracked, and I find that so often it's when we need to be focused on Jesus the most, that we get sidetracked the easiest. It's when we need to be anchored deep and clinging to Jesus the most, that we find it so easy to lose hope and get frustrated and give up (when the storms are blowing in our lives).

The Lord is always so faithful to us, even as He was with Peter when Peter got overwhelmed and lost sight of the Lord in the midst of his circumstances. Peter cried out to Jesus and Jesus was right there to lift him up and reestablish his footing. If you've been going through some rough times lately and have maybe lost sight of the Lord and you feel like all hope is lost and you're going down in the storm, learn from Peter, cry out to Jesus and He'll be right there for you. He could've said sorry Pete, you blew it, you knew I was with you yet you chose to take your eyes off Me and so now you're going to have to suffer the repercussions of that. But He didn't, we serve a Lord of 2nd chances, a Lord of 70 x 7 chances, if you repent of what ever it is that's distracted you from Jesus and cry out to Him. You will find out just as Peter did that He is faithful to you and will be right there for you to reestablish your footing as well, and He will walk with you again, but you have to cry out to Him. Draw near to Him, (the bible says), and He'll draw near to you.

The ch closes off with a common thing that we see in the life of Jesus; people touching Him and being made perfectly well. Why, because Jesus is in the business of healing lives, now last week for times sake I just sort of glazed over it but I want to just briefly draw attention to the fact that as they would touch His garment, They would be made well. Again not because He had some type of a mystical/magical garment on, but because that touch was what they needed in order to aid them in the releasing of their faith. It wasn't the garment that healed them; they were healed because of their faith by the grace of God. But the touching of the garment served as a point of contact to release that faith.

There seems to be a (for lack of a better term) sort of a passive type of a faith. A believing that God can do it, knowing that God can do it, even being fully convinced and assured that God can do it. I know that I've fallen into this category because I know that God can do anything, is there anything too hard for Me, says the Lord. and I answer with a resounding no, God can do anything, there is nothing that's impossible for God. And I am convinced that God can heal me of any sickness or disease that He so chooses, because God can do anything. But there is something to activating that faith so that it's no longer I believe that God *can* heal you, or heal me, to I believe that God will heal you, *now*. That moment when that faith is activated to receive that healing touch from God, and I believe that the touching of His garment created that point of contact, or served as a catalyst by which those people were able to release their faith. They knew that if they could only touch even the hem of His garment, that with out a shadow of a doubt the moment they touched it, they would be healed.

So when they touched the hem of His garment their faith was more or less taken from that passive state of I know that God can, to I know that God is this moment. And so with the releasing of their faith, they were healed. and There were many things in the NT that acted as that point of contact or that catalyst in order to aid man in the releasing of their faith. Even Jesus established these points of contact for people from time to time, you recall when He put mud in the blind mans eyes and told him to go and wash out the mud and when it's all washed out you'll be able to see. and So the man believed that as soon as I wash out this mud I'll be able to see. It was a point of contact, we read in Acts 19:11-12 *"Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them."* We also read in Acts that there was a time when people *"brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them."*

In the OT when the prophet Elisha told Naaman “*Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.*” You see all through scripture we see these various points of contact for the releasing of peoples faith kind of peppered in and through there. God knows the weakness of our beings, there’s not too many super Christians running around, as a matter of fact that aren’t any. But it’s not God’s desire to punish us for our weakness, but rather He desires to increase our faith and build us up in our trust and reliance upon Him and so He establishes these various point of contact to aid us in the releasing of our faith. The anointing with oil, the laying on of the hands of the elders, all of these things are there for our benefit, God doesn’t need olive oil to heal us, or sinful mans hands. But He’s established these things in order to minister to us in our time of need. So the points of contact for the releasing of faith. This morning chapter 15.

Vs1-2

Now the fact that these scribes and Pharisees came all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee to challenge Jesus tells us a couple of things #1 it more than likely indicates that these guys were the representatives of the leaders of the Sanhedrin, which means that they were some serious dudes. #2 it speaks to us of the seriousness of their intent because to get from Jerusalem to Galilee it would’ve taken them no less than 3 days to a week to get there. and It’s quite obvious that they didn’t come all that way to learn of Jesus or seek direction from Him, but they were seeking Him out to find fault with Him so that they might accuse Him. and Notice they didn’t challenge Him concerning the law, why, because He wasn’t doing anything wrong according to the law.

So it’s worth pointing out, and drawing attention to the fact of where their problem lied, (vs 2) with the *tradition* of the elders, which they esteemed in many ways to be equal to the law. They traveled about a week or so to challenge Jesus as to why He didn’t cause His disciples to maintain tradition. and The one that they specifically bring up is the washing of their hands before they ate bread, (which was sort of a generic term for the eating of any meal.)

Don’t be confused here thinking that the disciples were a bunch of dirty slobs never washing before they ate. The issue is not one of sanitation, so as to say that they never washed their hands, the issue is of *ceremonial cleanness*, and that they disregarded the traditional way that they were to wash any uncleanness from their hands prior to eating.

You see according to their tradition there were all kinds of things that could make a person unclean. For example if you touched something that was unclean, you became unclean (that’s a given) and if you touched anything that was touched by something that was unclean, you became unclean. And to them gentiles were unclean, so if a gentile walked a crossed a dusty road, every place his foot landed caused that little area of dirt to become unclean, and any of the dust that he kicked up was unclean.

So say you walked a crossed that road, now you've walked in the unclean dust that the unclean gentile kicked up and so now you've become unclean. Now that's just one example, their traditions were full of nit picky things like that. And so this business of washing became to them a very sincere tradition, and there were certain ways (according to tradition) that you had to wash in order to ensure that you were cleansed from all the impurities, or uncleanness that you may've come in contact with. It was obviously necessary that you had to wash before you ate your food or else when you touched your food it became unclean. and Then when you ate it, you became unclean because now something that was unclean has for all intents and purposes become apart of you. So they had a traditional ceremony for washing, and they would have to hold their hands a certain way in an upright position, and you had to wash your hands underneath running water and there was actually about 3steps to the washing in order to ensure that all the uncleanness was removed. And even though it looked real pious and seemed real spiritual, and was the only way that was supposedly approved by the elders, it held no scriptural support.

So Jesus never made His disciples go through these monotonous routines to ensure their cleanliness, they just dug in. Which at the same time dug in to these scribes and Pharisees. Who spent their whole lives studying these things only to see Jesus more or less spit on them, or belittle them in their opinion. And so this is what they were challenging Jesus with; there's nothing in the bible that says that you have to wash your hands a certain way. But these guys are seriously offended at what they consider Jesus' attitude to be, why, because these were things that they equated their righteousness with. But they picked the wrong day to challenge the Lord, because they were right about one thing, and that's that Jesus was adamantly opposed to their traditions. and He's about to let them have it with both barrels.

Vs3

So He doesn't engage them in seeking to justify His position, nor does He deny the breaking of tradition, He just immediately responds to them by exposing their own hypocrisy. The "you" here is emphatic, and He responds to their question with question, which was a common thing with Jesus. Jesus is blowing wide open the floodgates, He's in affect saying who cares about the *tradition* of the elders, you're transgressing the commandments of God *because* of your traditions. It's because of those traditions that you break the law of God, now who really needs to examine their position?

VS4-6

Notice real quick in vs 4 who it was that Jesus attributed the Scriptures to, He says that it was God who said, or commanded. Many people argue that scripture can't be trusted because it was written by men, but here we see that Jesus attributes the scripture to God, if God can create the heavens and the earth I doubt that He'll have much problem preserving His word.

The Pharisees have a problem with the violating of that which the *elders* have passed down. Here Jesus is stating that God said this in order to show them that what God has said, isn't to be placed on the level of what any man has said. In other words, yeah the elders may've said this, but God said this and you violate the command of God, (which by far supersedes your tradition), by holding your tradition as more important than the word spoken straight from Gods mouth. Then He sights the 5th commandment for case in point, the law of God says that you're to honor your mother and father, and 1 aspect of that means that when they get older and are unable to support themselves, you're to take care of them.

Vs5-6

What Jesus is in reference to here is a practice that was known as “corban” or the practice of devoting ones assets or ones wealth to the temple, or to God. Mark mentions it in Mark ch 7, if a person designated a formal vow for their material wealth as a gift offering for the support of the temple ritual. That released them from their duty of helping others, including their parents because they've dedicated it to a “higher purpose”. It was sort of like willing all of you finances and assets to the temple so that you could refuse to help needy people and still feel justified. Because as long as you were alive you could still do whatever you wanted with your stuff. But if someone needed help, or mom and dad were out on the street and in need and they came to you for help, you could say well I'd love to help you, but all my money and everything I own belongs to God, I've given it all to the temple.

So they completely annulled (or voided out) the 5th commandment with there tradition and released them selves from the responsibility of taking care of their parents, but they justified it because they were really “giving everything” (wink wink) they had to God, which was a by far greater service. (They projected) but the reality is, is that they were disobeying the word and trying to justify it with something that seemed spiritual. And so Jesus is totally busting their self-righteous, hypocritical standards and traditions.

Vs7-9

So Jesus drives the issue back to what? The heart, God is always looking to the heart, He's not interested in outward appearance or lip service, He wants your heart. And He's quoting here from Isaiah 29:13, you see they went through all the right motions (seemingly), they showed up for church every Sunday and Wednesday, went through all the motions, raised their hands in the worship service, followed along in their bibles. They talked all the right talk, but their hearts weren't in to it. Their worship was vain, or empty, you might say they were playing church. God's not into our little games of making sure everybody thinks that we've got our act together by the way that we present ourselves outwardly when all the while what's going on in our hearts is anything but pleasing to Him.

Jesus would later tell these guys, hey, you cleanse the outside of the cup real well, you look real good outwardly, like you've really got it going on, everything looks real nice. Sort of like a white washed tomb, it looks real nice on the outside but inwardly it's full of dead men's bones and it stinks. God does not honor lip service, and God does not play games, if your worship of God is not from your heart, then it's pointless and God does not receive it. If your worship is from an outward motion rather than an inward devotion, you're nothing more than a religious hypocrite and your heart is far from Him and you need to repent and get right with God. Because God hates religion, but He longs for a relationship with you, not a legal one, but a loving one. And that my friends can't stem from anywhere but the heart, the bible is very clear; it's with the heart that we believe Rom 10:10. It's from the heart that we worship, Col 3:16, it's from the heart that we love, Matt 22:37 and it's from the heart that we give to the Lord 2nd Cor 9:7. So Gods not interested in outward motions, He wants an inward devotion; He wants your heart.

We have to be very careful not to become ensnared by tradition; we kind of scoff at this whole issue of the washing of hands, but don't think that we're completely void of tradition ourselves. And you might be surprised at the reactions we would get if we began to break some of those traditions. Altar calls were unheard of in church history until just last century, prior to that they didn't exist, you never see Paul calling people to the front of the crowd to secure their salvation. Why, because it's not necessary for salvation, now Jesus called people publicly no doubt, but we don't see Him in the synagogues calling people to the front. Now Jesus did say that if you confess Me before man I'll confess you before My Father in heaven, but if you deny Me before man then I'll deny you before My Father who is in heaven. And so it's not a bad tradition, and it gives opportunity for people to make that public confession but if someone gives their heart to Christ, their saved whether I lead them to the front or not.

Certain aspects of our worship service are traditional, why do we start our services with a time of praise and worship? It's tradition, that's the way we've always done it right? What would go through some of our minds if some Sunday morning I just stood up here at 10:30 and said, "OK lets open our bibles" and I began to teach. Odds are you'd say in your mind has Jeff flipped his lid or what, what about the praise and worship, what about an opening prayer? And some of you might be seriously offended and not even be able to receive, why, because that's not the way we're supposed to do things, why not, does the bible say that church gatherings are to begin with 25-30 min of worship, and then you're to pray and then begin your study?

Do we see Paul or any of the apostles gathering the people around to share with them and then making everyone bow their heads before they begin to speak? No, but for us it's tradition, so even though we may think that this business of the washing of the hands seems a bit odd, understand that in our own right we're not too far removed from things of this nature. In that we uphold many traditions ourselves, that though their not bad in and of themselves, you won't find any real scriptural support for them, but there would be many that would be offended if we didn't do certain things. Why, do we close our eyes and bow our heads before we pray, does the bible say to do that? No, again it helps us concentrate and not be distracted, but it's not supported biblically, as a matter of fact Jesus often prayed with His eyes open with His head raised toward heaven. So let's be careful that we don't get caught up into this same trap of empty traditions that these guys fell into.

Now I'm not saying that it's not good to worship the Lord before we study His word or anything like that, but we need to be careful to make the distinction between that which is from God, vs that which is from man. Because many times the things that we hold so near and dear to us are in reality the traditions of men, and not the commandments of God.

Vs10

Notice again the emphasis on the need to understand.

Vs11

In other words you don't cleanse yourself spiritually, by washing yourself physically. Moral defilement is spiritual not physical, that's why when Peter said "*There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,*" It's not the physical aspect of creek water or ocean water that cleanses you in baptism, it's a spiritual act that's only being symbolized in the physical. But the cleansing is done by the blood of Christ, not rivers or lakes or whatever. So defilement and cleansing is a matter of the heart, not ritualistic acts in the flesh.

Vs12-14

So the disciples knowing the influential pull of the Pharisees, were obviously a bit disturbed knowing how much these guys were offended at what Jesus said, came to the Lord and said hey you made these guys pretty mad. and Jesus basically said hey, don't give a 2nd thought to what these guys think, their clueless anyway, which was another mind blowing statement to these guys because everybody thought that man if anyone has a chance at getting into heaven it's the Pharisees. These guys are always so meticulously following the law to the letter and telling everyone else what the scriptures meant.

They were the teachers of Israel, and yet here Jesus says that not only are they unreliable expositors of the kingdom, they're not even in the kingdom. They're not only spiritually blind themselves, but they lead others astray as well, so He tells the disciples not to worry about what they think.

Vs15-17

So Jesus says let Me spell this out for you, when you eat something it goes into your stomach, is digested and then it leaves your body, there's nothing spiritual about eating certain foods and not eating other foods, the kingdom isn't about food and drink. Paul said *"food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse."* He said in Col 2:20-23 *"if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."* In other words it all may seem real spiritual, but it's of no value spiritually, it doesn't make you any more spiritual to not eat pork on Fridays, or if you have a bacon and tomato sandwich. Why, because it's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man.

Vs18

There it is again, the issue is the heart, and as we've said before if you want to find out what's in the heart of an individual, listen to the things they say, not when their guard is up and their being so careful to articulate their words so tactfully because they're in public. But when their guard is down and their true colors are shown, it's then that the heart is revealed, we took the time to look at Jesus teaching on the revelation of the heart of man in depth when we studied ch 12 vs 33-37. and So for times sake I'd recommend you getting that tape for this portion of our text, because they're woven very closely together.

Vs19

Jer 17:9 *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked;"*
It's conceived in the heart before it surfaces in the physical, and so God deals with the heart and the intent and purpose of the heart, because the heart is like the springboard for our actions

Vs 20

So Jesus redirects the issue into it's proper perspective, it's not about food, and clean hands physically, it's about it's about what's going on in here, and having a clean heart spiritually.

Vs21

Which would be out of the totally Jewish community into gentile region.

Vs22

Again we're seeing here a picture of intercessory prayer

Vs23

So at 1st Jesus doesn't respond to her, but notice that she doesn't give up just because she doesn't see or get the immediate response that she was hoping for. As a matter of fact she stays so persistent that the disciples finally get so annoyed that they come and say Jesus just get rid of her, and this could be understood to say, Lord just give her what she wants and get rid of her.

Vs 24-25

Again 1 thing that I want you to be noticing is how persistent this lady is in standing in the gap for her child, Jesus states His priority to the nation of Israel 1st, it's not that He's not concerned for the gentiles or else we wouldn't setting here today, but He's to deal 1st with the nation of Israel. But you see she's not about to give up, why, because her daughter needs Jesus and she knows it and so we're going to see that nothing is going to deter her from beseeching the Lord on the behalf of her child. Because she knows that apart from Jesus there's no hope for her daughter. and Parents I hope that you're catching the vision here, pray for your children, and no matter how much the odds seem to stack against you never give up. This lady had nothing going for her, she was a gentile, she was a woman, which means that she would've been held in low esteem in that culture, even the disciples were against her, Jesus she's bugging us just get rid of her. But notice she worshipped Jesus and wouldn't leave Him until He responded to her.

Vs26

Now don't be alarmed, this was something that she would've understood, Jesus is painting a common picture for that day. They didn't have utensils and napkins as we do so they would eat their food and when they were done they would take the bread and wipe their faces and hands and throw it to the little puppies around the dinner table, they were more or less their garbage disposals. and So in reference to the ch of Israel in an allegorical sense, and Himself as the bread and the gentiles as the puppies, He says it's not right to neglect the needs of the children and to put the needs of the dogs 1st. Remember Jesus came to the Jew 1st and Paul said "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*" Now this woman doesn't dispute the Lords priorities, nor does she get offended at her place as a gentile, but she draws from the Lords own example and says:

Vs27

In other words I'm not asking you to neglect your priorities, but even the puppies eat the crumbs of the same bread that nourishes the children.

Vs28

The word woman here again isn't derogatory it's the same word He used for His own mom when He was hanging on the cross and commended her to Johns care.

Lets understand 1 thing before we close, Jesus knew that He was going to respond to her intercession the whole time, Jesus knows all things, but He was cultivating in her and drawing out her faith and the reality of the power of worship. And again Jesus just rebuked the Jewish leaders, and now in contrast He's commending the faith of this gentile woman and so the stage is being set for the turning from the Jews unto the gentiles.

Vs29-39

Next week we'll back track just a bit to show you the contrast between this miracle and the feeding of the 5,000 we studied last week but for now lets pray.