

Live Your Faith, and Have Faith to Live! – February 21 2021

Matthew 15: 1— 11; 21— 28

Introduction — I tell you — nearly every time Jesus had conversations with Pharisees, they found something to criticize him, or his disciples, about. This— was not just about “washing your hands before dinner,” like your mother or grandmother used to tell you!! It had to do with ritual washings, added on to the Law of Moses, to ensure that you were “spiritually” and ritually pure and untainted by the gentile world around you.

I. Live your faith . . . . 15: 1— 11 how did the Pharisees get this way???

1. In the Old Testament times, the prophets told the people of Israel that they were not keeping the law of God, the Law of Moses, well enough. That is why God allowed the Assyrians to conquer northern Israel in 722 B.C, and why God allowed the Babylonians to conquer the rest of Israel, and Jerusalem, in 587 B.C

2. After the leaders of Israel returned from captivity in Babylon @ 500 B.C, the religious leaders took seriously the warnings of the prophets, and started to require people to obey the law of Moses more strictly. The synagogue movement came out of this— in addition to the temple in Jerusalem, they built a synagogue in every town and village where Jewish people could gather to pray and read scripture. Some Jewish men volunteered to be unpaid teachers — rabbis — and very conservative rabbis became Pharisees. They were almost fanatical about “keeping the law” and were very specific as to how to keep the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law of Moses. All kinds of rules to follow.

3. The Pharisees were very concerned with what they saw as “correct rituals” — their ways of keeping the law of Moses. Very legalistic, detailed methods.

4. This is what upset Jesus!! The Pharisees had bent and twisted the laws of God, to their liking, and lost the real meaning God had told Moses and the people of his day. What Jesus meant in v.4: “God said, ‘honor your mother and father,’ but you say, ‘what I might have given to you, I

gave to a Pharisee project for God, and you get nothing, mom and dad. Sorry.”

5. Jesus called them “hypocrites!!” For avoiding God’s commands with pious excuses!!! Jesus then told his disciples and the crowd— God is concerned with what is in your heart, and what you do because of your real caring, and not with keeping thousands of man– made rules!!

6. Rituals are ok when they give us order and organize our beliefs and actions, but if they become ends in themselves — the rituals can actually push us away from our relationship with God. We can wind up serving a false God, or serving ourselves.

7. Then — Jesus gives us a real, true-life example of what he means . . . . .

II. . . . But have faith to live!!” 15: 21— 28

1. The faith of Canaanite woman was another “parable in real time”. Let’s be clear about what happens here.

2. Jesus and his disciples moved north, north of Galilee into gentile territory— “the region of Tyre and Sidon.” There, a gentile woman came to him— she had heard of the healer and rabbi, Jesus, and hoped that he could help her daughter, who suffered because of a demon.

3. Now, Jesus was in gentile territory— some Jewish people lived there, but the majority of people there were gentiles! Jesus had ministered to gentiles before, and after this— but his disciples were dismissive, uncaring for her— “send her away.” Jesus seemed to have the same attitude — “i was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” he told her.

4. This was sometimes the attitudes of conservative Pharisees. Jesus even, as Pharisees did, called her a dog!!!! a gentile dog!!!

5. Jesus had healed gentiles before. Why was he so mean to this woman?? I think it was two things: — he was letting people see how cruel and uncaring were the rules of the Pharisees . . .

By saying what they said; — and → Jesus was testing her faith. Here is what Jesus found out about her:

(1) She had love. Love for her daughter. William Barclay, in his “Daily Study Bible” series, points out that “she made the misery of her child, her own.” Her love for her child looked like God’s love for his children.

(2) she had faith. Faith that grew from contact with Jesus. She started by addressing him as “son of David.” She soon called him “Lord”

(3) She had a worshipping faith. She began by following Jesus, shouting. She ended up on her knees. She started, shouting her request. She ended, almost in prayer, before Jesus.

(4) She had a persistent faith. Nothing discouraged her from asking Jesus for help for her child. The dismissal of her by the disciples didn’t discourage her. Jesus telling her that he only came to the children of Israel— that didn’t stop her. Even Jesus calling her a gentile dog, that didn’t stop her she would not take “no” for an answer!!

(5) And — she had hopeful faith. She was almost light— hearted in answering Jesus, “yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table.”

6. She had faith in God, that God would work through Jesus — which was exactly what Jesus was talking about concerning the Pharisees! ! !

7. Jesus said: “woman, great is your faith!! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And the Gospel of Matthew tells us that “her daughter was healed that very hour.” (15: 28, niv )

III. We all need faith!!!!

1. Real, deep faith in what God can do in our lives in big, major things. Even in mundane things . . .

Brenda was a young woman who wanted to learn to go rock climbing. Although she was scared

to death, she went with a group and they faced a tremendous cliff of rock. Practically perpendicular. In spite of her fear, she put on the gear and she took a hold of the rope and she started up the face of that rock. Well, she got to a ledge where she could take a breather. As she was hanging on there, whoever was holding the rope up at the top of the cliff made a mistake and snapped the rope against Brenda's left eye and knocked out her contact lens. You know how tiny contact lenses are and how almost impossible to find. Well, here she is on a rock ledge, with who know how many hundreds of feet behind and hundreds of feet above her. Of course, she looked and looked and looked, hoping that she would be able to find that contact lens. Here she was, very far from home. Her sight was now blurry. She was very upset by the fact that she wouldn't be anywhere near a place where she could get a new contact lens. And so, she prayed that the Lord would help her to find it. Well, her last hope was that perhaps when she got to the top of the cliff, one of the girls that was up there on the top might be able to find her contact lens in the corner of her eye. When she got to the top, a friend examined her eye. There was no contact lens to be found. She sat down with the rest of the party, waiting for the rest of them to come up the face of the cliff. She looked out across range after range of mountains, thinking of that bible verse that says, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth." She thought, "Lord, you can see all these mountains. You know every single stone and leaf that's on those mountains and you know exactly where my contact lens is." Finally, the time came when it was time to go down. They walked down the trail to the bottom. Just as they got there, there was a new party of rock climbers coming along. As one of them started up the face of the cliff, she shouted out, "hey, you guys! Anybody lose a contact lens?" Well, that would be startling enough, wouldn't it? She had found the contact lens! But you know why she saw it? An ant was carrying that contact lens so that it was moving slowly across the face of the rock.

What does that tell you about the God of the universe? Is he in charge of the tiniest things? Do ants matter to him? Of course they do. He made them. He designed them. Brenda said that her father is a cartoonist. When she told him this incredible story, he drew a picture of that ant lugging that contact lens (as you see in the comics with a balloon with words in it over his head) with the words: "Lord, I don't know why you want me to carry this thing. I can't eat it and it's awfully heavy. But if this is what you want me to do, I'll carry it for you."

If God is in charge of the ants, don't you think he cares about you and me? I guess Solomon was right. One could learn a valuable lesson from that ant — trust in God. We could probably all say a little more often, “God, I don't know why you want me to carry this load. I see no good in it and it's awfully heavy. Still, if you want me to, I'll carry it for you.”<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, we carry heavy burdens in life. We may not know why. But God has plans for us that we just don't know yet. Have faith — I promise you, that God will be faithful to you, if you trust in him.

Endnotes:

1 (gateway to Jesus website, found Feb. 18, 2021 — by: Josh and Karen Zarandona )