

>>>>>> Matthew – Lesson 35 <<<<<<<

1) This passage might be called “the best defense is a good offense.”

Matthew 15:1–6(ESV)

Traditions and Commandments

15 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ²“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.” ³He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ ⁵But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” ⁶he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.

- 2) We aren’t told if there is any greeting, “hi how are you we are here from Jerusalem” – nothing!!
- 3) Just “WHY ARE YOUR DISCIPLES BREAKING TRADITION?”
- 4) We also cannot be sure of any sanctioning from others in Jerusalem.
- 5) However, what we do know are these things:
 - a) Jesus, at this point in his ministry, has amassed quite a following and it is likely that this was more than just curiosity on the part of this group.
 - b) Jerusalem’s leadership was probably interested in what was happening with this renegade preacher/miracle worker up in the Galilee.
 - c) We also know that this question is based squarely in Pharisaic teaching, whether officially sanctioned or not.
 - d) From Jesus’ comment there is a true distinction here between the oral tradition and the written Torah.
 - e) To be clear, this requirement of the ritual handwashing was NOT Torah based.
 - i) The ceremonial washing by the priest before performing their duties was the ritual which Torah required.
 - ii) This was a projection onto the populace of that ritual.
 - iii) The Torah did not say that everyone had to follow this procedure.
- 6) Jesus does not answer their question, instead, he goes on the offensive.
- 7) Basically, “You want to know why we break one of your “elder’s oral traditions” – well to do you one better so to speak, “Why do you break the commandment of God by one of your “elder’s oral traditions”?”
- 8) Jesus is not saying here that all Pharisees use this oral tradition in this unlawful manner.
 - a) This is in actuality a loophole that by its very presence invites abuse.
 - b) He is only saying that because of the oral tradition, God’s law can and is being broken – since his point is made with the “you” pronoun, likely these in this particular group are guilty.
- 9) Jesus then moves this to the next level in verse 7 through 9.

Matthew 15:7–9(ESV)

⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

- ⁸ “ ‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁹ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”

- a) This is an inditement of the entire oral system and in particular the mentality or the Pharisaic attitude toward the oral traditions.
- b) As he states in Mat 23:23 they were neglecting the “**weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.**”

1) Jesus finally answers the question originally put to him by the scribes and Pharisees but not to them directly ...

Matthew 15:10–20(ESV)

What Defiles a Person

¹⁰ And he called the people to him and said to them, “**Hear and understand: ¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.**” ¹² Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” ¹³ He answered, “**Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. ¹⁴ Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.**”

- 2) This previous exchange with the scribes and Pharisees was likely in hearing of all the people that were in that audience.
- 3) So, Jesus turns to the people and calls them to him and explains simply what the truth is about the hand washing.
- 4) This answers the Pharisees and Scribes original question but, not directly to them but is addressed to the people as well.
- 5) In answering the original question to the people rather than to them directly, Jesus was indicting them for the very tradition they were asking about.
- 6) The disciples and, I am sure Jesus as well, knew that the Scribes and Pharisees were offended by his answer.
- 7) His reply to the disciples was in essence don't be concerned about that.
 - a) Jesus explains that they were being rejected as leaders of God's people.
 - i) They claimed to be God's true people, but like a weed growing in a flowerbed, they would be uprooted.
 - ii) In Isaiah, God describes Israel as his “planting” (Isaiah 60:21; 61:3), but these Pharisees did not belong to him and they would be torn out by the roots.
 - iii) Their teaching would be discarded.
 - b) The Pharisees claimed to be leaders of the people but Jesus called them blind guides because they were blind to the true meaning of God's law.

- c) He is saying that anyone who follows them is also blind and they will both fall into a pit.

Looking at what Jesus said to the crowd do you think they understood or not?

- d) Probably understood that external rituals do not determine true defilement and that moral speech and behavior reveal the heart.
- i) Even that may have been a hard thing for them to really grasp because of the Torah laws regarding unclean foods, ritual impurity, and contact with certain objects or persons.
- e) However, they surely did not conclude the implications as would be revealed later in the early church regarding dietary laws being set aside by God.
- 8) Then when we continue in vs. 15, we see the crowd was not alone in their potential misunderstanding.
- ¹⁵ But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” ¹⁶ And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? ¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”
- 9) I may be overstating this but I could almost envision Jesus shaking his head in disbelief at this question.
- a) Peter was one of the disciples that were the subject of the question of the scribes and Pharisees along with his teacher, Jesus.
- b) Did he not realize that by eating with unwashed hands did not defile?
- c) Did he think Jesus would lead him that far astray?
- 10) So, Jesus very clearly and succinctly explains the total truth of the ritual vs. the defilement – what is real and what is only religious righteousness.
- 11) The parallel in Gospel of Mark 7:14–23 ends with an explanatory note, “Thus he declared all foods clean.” (Mark 7:19).
- a) Mark was relating his gospel to the gentile world and he at the point of writing understood the totality of what Jesus was saying so he relayed it to his audience.
- b) However, to restate, the disciples nor the crowd likely concluded at this moment that dietary laws no longer mattered.
- c) That broader implication unfolded later in the early church which we see in Acts 10 and 11.
- 1) So, continuing with the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter ...

Matthew 15:21–28(ESV)

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

- ²¹ And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.
- ²² And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have

mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”²³ But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”²⁴ He answered, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”²⁶ And he answered, **“It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”**²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, **“O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you desire.”** And her daughter was healed instantly.

- 2) Tyre and Sidon were Canaanite cities about 30 miles north of where Jesus was at Gennesaret.
- 3) One commentator noted that Jesus went there to evade the opposition of the Pharisees who had come from Jerusalem that we saw in the last passage.
 - a) BDAG gives us lexemes for the word withdraw of withdraw, retire, and take refuge, so his argument can have some validity.
- 4) Enter the Canaanite woman with the demon possessed daughter.
 - a) Some translations call her a Greek.
 - i) This is true since the area she is from is an area which had been converted to Greek language and culture after the conquest by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE.
 - b) We must not miss the fact that she calls him “O Lord, Son of David” which indicates she knew Jesus’ identity from his reputation if nothing else.
 - i) She actually may have been a Greek proselyte or a “God fearer.”
 - ii) Evidently, she also knew of Jesus’ ability to heal and cast out demons.
 - c) It made no difference to her whether he was a Jew or not, she wanted to get relief for her daughter.
 - d) She wanted this so much she actually becomes a pest to the point the disciples ask Jesus to do something – to send her away.
 - 5) Jesus’ answer to them was that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
 - 6) On the surface, this entire situation is a bit odd
 - a) Jesus had already healed the Centurion’s servant (a gentile and servant of a gentile).
 - b) As we just said, the woman was at a minimum a “God fearer” and perhaps even a proselyte.
 - 7) So, we might ask the question, why did Jesus take this initial attitude? In fact,

Which was the worse statement?

The one Jesus made:

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Or what the disciples said?

“Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”

- a) First, we have to remember that even though this lady was perhaps a believer, to Matthew’s audience, she was still a Canaanite woman and as such a bitter enemy of the Jewish people.
- b) Having said that, Jesus’ initial response was still a little bit hard to understand.

- 8) But when we look at the “rest of the story” we see a lesson in faith for both the woman and for his disciples.
- a) The woman obviously, had the faith needed – her lesson was persistence in that faith.

What about the disciples – what was their lesson?

- b) I think their lesson was that faith is faith – nationality or status as an enemy is irrelevant!
- i) Jesus brought that out clearly in his responses, both verbally and physically – what he did for her.

- 1) Moving on now to the last verses of chapter 15. More healings and the feeding of the 4000.

Matthew 15:29(ESV)

Jesus Heals Many

²⁹ Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there.

- 2) Mark tells us another important detail about where Jesus is:

Mark 7:31 (ESV)

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

- 3) These are the ten gentile cities on the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee.
- a) Let’s call a few things to mind about the first time Jesus was here:
- i) As you recall, this was where the demons were cast out into the herd of pigs.
- ii) After that, Jesus was run off from there almost instantly after having cast out those demons.
- iii) Finally, remember this was where one of the demon possessed men wanted to go with Jesus but he told him no.
- b) Again, from Mark

Mark 5:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ And he did not permit him but said to him, **“Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”**

- 4) Now we are going to see what are probably, the results of all that ... Continuing in verse 30 we read ...

Matthew 15:29–39(ESV)

³⁰ And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, ³¹ so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

- 5) We see the first result is that these folks definitely knew about Jesus and trusted him to be a healer if nothing else.
- a) This is a far cry from demanding that he leave their area immediately as was the case the last time he was here.

- b) In fact, to get the true picture of what is happening, we must take note that the crowds were coming to him bringing with them lame blind and so on...
 - i) Simply put, their primary objective was not the healing that was taking place – that is almost an aside.
 - ii) The real thing that was likely taking place here is teaching.
- c) And the astounding part of all this is that this predominately Greek audience glorified the God of Israel!
- d) So, continuing, we see another astounding thing ...

Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand

³² Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, **“I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”** ³³ And the disciples said to him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?” ³⁴ And Jesus said to them, **“How many loaves do you have?”** They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” ³⁵ And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, ³⁶ he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ³⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. ³⁸ Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹ And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

- 6) The next astounding thing we see is that this crowd had been with Jesus and the disciples for three days.
 - a) Again, in that three days, I think there is little if any doubt that Jesus was teaching for a major portion of that time – healing those that were brought to him but primarily teaching.
- 7) This is truly a different event from the feeding of the five thousand.
 - a) Jesus even refers to both at the same time in the very next chapter of Matthew.
- 8) There is an idea here that is not brought out much but I think it is important.
 - a) As with the feeding of the five thousand, here, these folks are filled – meaning that they all ate all they wanted – no rationing.
 - b) At meals that our Lord serves, be they teachings or food or healings, one can always be assured that there will be enough to go around with plenty left over.

1) So, heading into chapter 16 we see another confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees ...

Matthew 16:1–4(ESV)

The Pharisees and Sadducees Demand Signs

16 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered them, **“When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ ³ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the**

sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed.

- 2) At the beginning of the last chapter, the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem had come to test Jesus and confront him regarding ceremonial washings and defilement.
 - a) He answered them with an accusation of his own – best defense is a good offence.
 - b) But he then explained to the crowd what was truly important – it is not what goes into a person that defiles them it is what comes out of the from their heart.
- 3) For the rest of chapter 15, Jesus basically escapes their view by going into Gentile territories.
- 4) But, now that he has returned, they are back as well.
- 5) However, this time they have new allies – the Sadducees.
 - a) This is indeed a strange pairing since these two groups were really not compatible at all in their views on many things as well as their normal socioeconomic status.
 - b) Nevertheless, here they are testing Jesus.
 - c) One writer points out that testing was valid in the Old Testament to uncover a false prophet, but these leaders were not seeking the truth.
- 6) So, the test, “show us a sign.”
 - a) Again, Jesus deflects by showing that they are seeing the signs that they should see but are not able or willing to understand them.
 - b) Then he calls them as he sees them; “**An evil and adulterous generation**” and tells them simply that no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah.
 - i) We should also note here that in this case he does not explain what that sign means as he did back in Matthew 12:38 ff – he simply leaves them.
- 1) And, speaking of not understanding – Pharisees and Sadducees do not have the corner on that market.

Matthew 16:5–12(ESV)

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

⁵ When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. ⁶ Jesus said to them, “**Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**” ⁷ And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, “We brought no bread.” ⁸ But Jesus, aware of this, said, “**O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread?**” ⁹ **Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?** ¹⁰ **Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?** ¹¹ **How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**” ¹² Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- 2) There are two problems that Jesus highlights in what he says. **What are they?**

Matthew – Teachings, Messiahship, and Ministry of Jesus Christ – NOTES

- a) #1 – they were worried about the fact that they had not remembered to bring bread.
 - i) If they had the faith and trust in what they had seen this thought would never have entered their minds.
 - ii) Jesus sees this as a lack of faith – faith in the fact that they could be fed regardless!
 - (1) Food was not of any consequence to Jesus and should not have been to them.
- b) #2 – they are as oblivious as the Pharisees and Sadducees until Jesus basically slaps them in the back of the head and wakes them up.
 - i) At that point, they get it.

Do we ever have either or both of these problems?