

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
9-27-23

Matthew 15

Leaders From Jerusalem Question Jesus – Verses 1-2

¹ Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ²“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

15:1-2 The Pharisees and teachers of the law came from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish authority, to scrutinize Jesus’ activities. Over the centuries since the Jews’ return from Babylonian captivity, hundreds of religious traditions had been added to God’s laws. The Pharisees and teachers of the law considered them all equally important. Many traditions are not bad in themselves. Certain religious traditions can add richness and meaning to life. But we must not assume that because our traditions have been practiced for years, they should be elevated to a sacred standing. God’s principles never change, and his law doesn’t need additions. Traditions should help us understand God’s laws better, not become laws themselves.

Jesus Answers With A Question – Verse 3

³ Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?”

15:3 Why do you also transgress the commandment of God: When the disciples were accused of sin, Jesus answered with an accusation. Jesus was strong in His reply because these leaders were far too concerned with these ceremonial trivialities. When they declared people unclean because of their tradition, they denied the people access to God.

An Example Of How Their Traditions Dishonored God – Verses 4-6

⁴ For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death. ⁵ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ ⁶ they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

15:5-6 This was the practice of Corban (literally, “offering”; see Mark 7:11). Anyone who made a Corban vow was required to dedicate money to God’s temple that otherwise would have gone to support his parents. Corban had become a religiously acceptable way to neglect parents, circumventing the child’s responsibility to them. Although the action—giving money to God—seemed worthy and no doubt conferred prestige on the giver, many people who took the Corban vow were disregarding God’s command to care for needy parents. These religious leaders were ignoring God’s clear command to honor their parents.

Jesus Condemns Their Hollow Tradition As Hypocrisy – Verses 7-9

⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸““These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”

15:8-9 The prophet Isaiah also criticized hypocrites (Isaiah 29:13), and Jesus applied Isaiah's words to these religious leaders. The Pharisees knew a lot about God, but they didn't know God. When we claim to honor God while our hearts are far from him, our worship means nothing. It is not enough to study about religion or even to study the Bible; it is not enough to act religious. Our actions and our attitudes must be sincere. If they are not, Isaiah's words also describe us.

Jesus Speaks To The Multitude About Religious Externalism – Verses 10-11

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. ¹¹ What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."

15:11 Jesus was referring to the Jewish regulations concerning food and drink. This verse could be paraphrased: "You aren't made unclean by eating nonkosher food! It is what you say and think that makes you unclean!" This statement offended the Pharisees, who were very concerned about what people ate and drank.

Jesus Then Warns His Disciples That Only What Is Of God And Of Truth Will Last And Be Secure – Verses 12-14

¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" ¹³ He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

15:13-14 Jesus told his disciples to leave the Pharisees alone because the Pharisees were blind to God's truth. Anyone who listened to their teaching would risk spiritual blindness as well. Not all religious leaders clearly see God's truth. Make sure that those you listen to and learn from are those with good spiritual eyesight—they teach and follow the principles of Scripture.

The Condition Of The Heart Is What Really Defiles A Person – Verses 15-20

¹⁵ Peter said, "Explain the parable to us." ¹⁶ "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. Them. ¹⁷ "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸ But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."

15:15 Later Peter would be faced with the issue of clean and unclean food. Then he would learn that nothing should be a barrier to proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jews).

15:16-20 We work hard to keep our outward appearance attractive, but what is deep down in our hearts (where others can't see) is more important to God. What are you like inside? When people become Christians, God makes them different on the inside. He will continue the process of change inside them if they only ask. God wants us to have healthy thoughts and motives, not just healthy bodies.

The Faith Of A Canaanite Woman – Verses 21-22

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

15:21-22 Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities, located some 50 miles (80 kilometers) away. Jesus went all this way to meet this one Gentile woman’s need. This shows remarkable and unexpected love from Jesus to this woman of Canaan. This Gentile woman also understood who Jesus was. Many of Jesus’ own countrymen didn’t know who Jesus was, but this woman of Canaan knew.

Jesus’ Response To The Request Of The Gentile Woman – Verses 23-24

²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” ²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

15:23 Puzzled by Jesus’ silence, the disciples asked him to get rid of the woman because she was bothering them with her persistent begging. They showed no compassion for her or sensitivity to her needs. It is possible to become so occupied with spiritual matters that we become oblivious to the needs around us. This may be true especially if we are prejudiced against needy people or if they cause us inconvenience. Instead of being annoyed, be aware of the opportunities that surround you, and make an effort to look for ways to minister to others.

15:24 Jesus’ words do not contradict the truth that God’s message is for all people (Psalm 22:27; Isaiah 56:7; Matthew 28:19; Romans 15:9-12). After all, when Jesus said these words, he was in Gentile territory on a mission to Gentile people. He ministered to Gentiles on many other occasions also. Jesus was simply telling the woman that Jews were to have the first opportunity to accept him as the Messiah because God wanted them to present the message of salvation to the rest of the world (see Genesis 12:3). Jesus was not rejecting the Canaanite woman. He may have wanted to test her faith, or he may have wanted to use the situation as another opportunity to teach that faith is available to all people.

The Gentile Woman’s Persistent Appeal To Jesus – Verses 25-27

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. ²⁶ He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” ²⁷ “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

15:26-28 Dog was a term the Jews commonly applied to Gentiles because the Jews considered these pagan people no more likely than dogs to receive God’s blessing. Jesus was not degrading the woman by using this term; he was reflecting the Jews’ attitude so as to contrast it with his own. The woman did not argue. Instead, using Jesus’ choice of words, she agreed to be considered a dog as long as she could receive God’s blessing for her daughter. Ironically, many Jews would lose God’s blessing and salvation because they rejected Jesus, and many Gentiles would find salvation because they recognized and accepted him.

Jesus Feeds The Four Thousand – Verses 29-31

²⁹ Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. ³⁰ Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. ³¹ The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

15:29-31 A vast crowd was brought to Jesus to be healed, and he healed them all. Jesus is still able to heal people who are suffering physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and we can be the ones who bring suffering people to him. Whom do you know that needs Christ's healing touch? You can bring them to Jesus through prayer or through explaining to them the reason for the hope that you have (1 Peter 3:15). Then let Christ do the healing.

The feeding of the 4,000 – Verses 32-39

³² Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.” ³³ His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?” ³⁴ “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.” ³⁵ He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. ³⁶ Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. ³⁷ They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ³⁸ The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹ After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

15:32-39 This feeding of 4,000 is a separate event from the feeding of the 5,000 (14:13-21), confirmed by Mark 8:19-20. This was the beginning of Jesus' expanded ministry to the Gentiles.

15:33 Jesus had already fed more than 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. Here, in a similar situation, the disciples were again perplexed. How easily we throw up our hands in despair when faced with difficult situations. Like the disciples, we often forget that if God has cared for us in the past, he will do the same now. When facing a difficult situation, remember that God cares for you and trust him to work faithfully again.