



Matthew 15

Matthew 15
Tape #8014
By Chuck Smith

Let us turn to Matthew's gospel chapter fifteen, as we continue our journey through the Bible.

You remember last week in the fourteenth chapter, we had the record of the death of John the Baptist and how that they brought to Jesus the news of his death. And when Jesus heard that, verse thirteen, "He departed from there by ship into a deserted place, and when the people had heard of it, they followed him on foot out of the cities." Jesus began to withdraw from the cities where He normally was preaching; Capernaum, Chorazin, and from this point on, will be more or less resorting to areas outside of the fully Jewish community.

Not only is there the problem that is coming because of Herod, having heard of Jesus and thinking that maybe He was John the Baptist who has come back from the dead, and the threat from Herod, but also He is crossed with the Pharisees and the scribes and they are plotting His death. He has come to die but He does not want anything done prematurely. So He will be ministering now in more obscure places, being with His disciples and spending more time with them and withdrawing pretty much from the public ministry in the cities of the Jews.

And so in chapter fifteen, we find the problem with the scribes and the Pharisees, as it is beginning to develop.

Then came to Jesus the scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem,

[They had traveled from Jerusalem all the way up to the Galilee in order to challenge Him concerning His teaching and concerning His practices.]

And so they were questioning Him, (15:1)

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

Notice the question is, they are transgressing the tradition of the elders. They're not transgressing the law but the tradition of the elders. According to the tradition of the elders, you had to wash your hands in a ceremonial way before eating. It wasn't really hygienic, it wasn't that the disciples didn't wash their hands, but they didn't wash them according to the traditional method that was developed by their traditions. According to their traditional methods, you had to take a cup of water and pour it over your hands while holding your hands upward, rubbing your fingers together, someone would pour the water over, but you had to be careful that the water would drip from the wrist on down and not roll down your arm because the water that was washing your hands would be unclean ceremonially, and thus if it ran down your arms, your arms would be unclean. So you had to let it drip from your wrist on down and then take in your fingers down again washing... and it was just a traditional thing. But the disciples didn't do that. They'd just rinse off their hands and eat. And so they are challenged, "Why don't your disciples follow the tradition of the elders because they don't wash their hands in that traditional way before they eat bread?"

But Jesus answered them and He said, Why do you also transgress [not the tradition] the commandment of God by your traditions? (15:3)

So you see the issue is between the traditions that have been developed and the actual commandments of God. Now it seems that man is always developing traditional religions. It's so easy for us to fall into traditions, but it is so hard to break traditions. Traditions hang on and they are just so difficult to get away from. And so Jesus is challenging them because by their traditions, they were actually transgressing the commandment of God.

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

That was the commandment of God. But they had developed a tradition and,

If they would say to their mother or father, This is a gift, by whatsoever thou mayest be profited by me; (15:5)

The word here “gift” is “a dedicated thing.” This is something that I have dedicated to God. For instance, it was the duty of the child to take care of the parents. That’s why the families that had a lot of children were considered rich. Had a lot of children to take care of you when you get old. And it was... The honoring of the father and the mother was actually the taking care of them as they became old, to provide for them. But a lot of times, the parents would come to the children, destitute and in need, and they’d say, Like to do that for you but we’d dedicated this to God. And so we can’t give it to you because it’s been dedicated to God. They were actually circumventing the commandment of God by the tradition.

Mark’s gospel says that they were saying this is corban, this is a gift for you. In other words, you weren’t to curse your mother and father but you can say, Dad, I’m doing this for your good, take this as a gift. And then you’d tell them off and dishonor him, but it was alright because it was a gift, you’re doing it for his benefit. So it was traditions by which they totally transgress or totally circumvented the commandment of God. And here they are worried because the disciples aren’t following traditions of man, where in reality, they are violating the commandment of God. And so He said,

They honour not his father or his mother, but he shall be free.

[because it’s been a dedicated thing]

And thus have ye made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. (15:6)

You’ve nullified the meaning of the law by tradition.

You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, (15:7)

This people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, and they honour me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. (15:8)

Now Jesus is going to bore right down to the very heart of the whole matter which is the heart. It’s not your actions so much as it is your attitude. He’s going to be saying some things right now that really capsize His whole teaching. These are the things that caused His conflict with the scribes and the Pharisees and the religious leaders. For they were placing all of the emphasis upon the actions of man and Jesus was saying, It isn’t so much the actions but the attitudes of the heart that God is interested in. And you can have the right actions but the wrong attitudes. And thus, the attitude of the heart nullifies the action.

This basically is the teaching of the New Testament. When Paul talks about love, in First Corinthians thirteen, “Though I have the right actions, though I sell everything I have and take the money and bestow it on the poor...” Oh what a glorious, generous, wonderful thing to do! “But if I have not love, it profits me nothing.” If love isn’t the motive, if there is some other motive other than love, then there’s no profit. What’s going on in your heart, that’s what God is interested in. And so Isaiah prophesied of them, “They honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me.”

In vain do they worship me,

[in other words, your worship of God is in vain, all of your traditional washing of your hands, the binding of the prayers, the bobbing and going through the prayers, all of that is in vain if your heart isn’t right before God.]

“In vain do they worship me,”

For they teach for doctrines the commandments of men. (15:9)

It is interesting that this same error has crept into the church to a great extent. There are many churches that are bound in traditionalism. These are the traditions, why do you do that? Well, we’ve always done it. But why do you do it? Well, our fathers did it. And we have a lot of things in church that are just pure tradition, not necessarily biblical, not necessarily scriptural. But if you do them long enough, they become dogma, church dogma. And it is accepted as doctrine in time. If it’s been a practice within the church long enough, it’s becomes a dogma, and then if dogma, then it is equal to inspiration and it becomes an accepted practice and many times, a required practice. The traditions of man. But they make void the commandment of God.

So he called the multitude, (15:10)

He’d been in the discussion with these fellows and He’s just dressed them down, calling them hypocrites and showing them their errors, and then He calls the multitude, Come over here, I want you to hear this, this is important now. This is the essence of My teaching.

It’s not that which goes into the mouth defiles a man; but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles

a man. (15:11)

That's a pretty heavy statement. It's not what goes in your mouth that really defiles you. What goes in your mouth will pass through the body. But it's what comes out of your mouth that defiles.

And the disciples came to him, and they said, Lord, the Pharisees were really offended with that statement. (15:12)

And Jesus in reference to the Pharisees said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. (15:13)

They weren't really planted by the heavenly Father. They will be rooted up.

Let them alone, He said: they are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both of them will fall in the ditch. (15:14)

Peter said, Lord, explain it to us. Declare to us this parable. (15:15)

And Jesus said, (15:16)

Don't you yet understand, that whatever enters into a person's mouth goes into the belly, and passes through the body? (15:17)

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

For out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: (15:19)

And these are the things that defile a man:

Listen to what a person says and they will soon reveal what is in their heart. What does that tell you about the world in which in live? What does that tell you about the people in your workplace? It reveals a lot, it tells you what's going on in their heart because what is going on in their heart is going to come out from their mouth. And you hear them telling their filthy stories, you hear them making their innuendoes, you hear them speaking of their hatred and their anger, and you hear them as they are talking about some gal that they would like to take to bed, and things of this nature, and that's what's in their hearts. That's what defiles them. Out of the heart, the mouth speaks. Out of the abundance of the heart. It's revealed by what a person says, what's going on.

At the time of Noah, God saw that the imaginations of man's heart was only evil continually. Look at the movies today. What does that tell you about the heart of man? Paul the apostle in Romans chapter one, as he speaks of the wrath of God that is going to come against the world that has rejected God, "Refused to glorify God as God but became vain in their imaginations, their foolish hearts darkened." (Romans 1:21) He tells us of their final actions, "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but they have pleasure in those that do them." (Romans 1:29-32)

The whole movie industry is made up with themes that we've just read. Murders, violence, adultery, fornication--these are the themes of the movie industry.

What does Paul mean when he says, "...not only do them but they take pleasure in those that do them?" If you are going to the theatre and watching these stuff portrayed, if you're turning on your television and watching these stuff portrayed, if you get a kick out of seeing these things, then you are of those who are taking pleasure in those that do them. It shows something about your heart. "Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." God's interested in what's going on in your heart. And God, when He makes His changes, makes the changes from within, it's a changed heart. "These are the things," Jesus said, "that defile a man,"

but to eat with unwashed hands that doesn't defile you. (15:20)

You might get some germs, even petting a cat might pick up some worms for your nails or whatever, but that doesn't defile you. It's what comes out of your mouth.

Now Jesus went from there,

[As I pointed out, He's not really going to go around the Jewish cities much anymore. His ministry is pretty much over with them. City of Capernaum and all, we don't read of Him ministering in Capernaum

again. He's pronounced judgment, "Woe unto Capernaum, more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of judgment than for you, because if the works that had been done there that were done in your city, they would have repented and so forth, and would not have been destroyed." So He's turned away now and He is going actually over into Gentile territory. He went from there,]

and He departed to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. (15:21)

Slightly north of the Galilee, over to the coast, cities of Tyre and Sidon there on the sea coast, the Mediterranean sea coast in southern Lebanon.

And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts,

[Marks tells us she was the Syro-Phoenician]

and she cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. (15:22)

"Son of David" is a Messianic title, knowing that the Messiah was to be a descendant of David, referred to as the Son of David. No doubt the reputation of Jesus had spread far and wide. Over the Gentile territory, they had heard of Him. And no doubt the discussions of the possibility of His being the Son of David, the promised Messiah. And so as Jesus comes into the area, this woman, desperate woman, desperate because of the condition of her daughter, grievously vexed by a devil, came to Jesus, crying out to Jesus, for mercy, mercy in the healing of her daughter.

But he answered her not a word.

He ignored her. The silence of God is a difficult thing to handle. When we are praying and it seems like there are no answers, when it seems that heaven is silent, that God does not care, God is not concerned, I call but I hear no answer, I cry but there doesn't seem to be a response, that's always a heavy thing to deal with. And this woman had that experience. Calling unto Jesus, He seemingly was ignoring her. He did not answer her a word.

Then the disciples came on her behalf and they said, Lord, Send her away; for she is crying after us. (15:23)

Their motive wasn't that noble, what they were really saying is, Lord, heal her daughter, take care of her so she'd get out of here, she's bugging us, she's following us and crying after us, Lord. And so their motive wasn't really one of compassion for the daughter or for the woman. It was just thinking about themselves as she was pressuring them.

And Jesus, answering the disciples,

[and no doubt in her hearing]

said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (15:24)

Notice He didn't talk about lost tribes. Lost sheep of the house of Israel. You hear a lot today of ten lost tribes that make up the Anglo Saxon people. How that the ten tribes of the north, when they were scattered, moved westward and began to settle in the Scandinavian area in England, in western Europe, and so the tribe of Dan settled in Denmark, which is Danmark; and the we call them Danish, "ish" is the Hebrew word for "man," so Danish or actually Dan-ish, the tribe of Dan, easily identified, you see. Dan-ish. Swed-ish, I don't know what tribe Swed would be but... English, foolish. Bible doesn't talk about ten lost tribes, it talks about the lost sheep of the house of Israel and Jesus said they're the ones I've been sent to.

God's covenant was with the nation of Israel. And He had promised to send a Redeemer, Saviour, but God's covenant with Abraham was beyond Israel, it was to all of the nations of the earth would be blessed by his seed. But Jesus had to, first of all, fulfill the promises of God to Israel and be rejected by Israel and through that rejection, then the Gospel opened to the whole world. When Jesus, after His crucifixion, commissioned His disciples, it was to go unto all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. While He was here and He sent them forth by two's, it was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Don't go to the cities of the Gentiles.

Now Jesus has gone to the city of the Gentiles. A woman comes desperate, "Have mercy, thou Son of David. My daughter is grievously vexed by a devil." You would think that the words of Jesus would have deterred her. That she would have hung her head and walked away sorrowful, perhaps wishing, wishing that she was a Jewish so she could claim His promise and help. But instead,

She came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. (15:25)

Notice, she first came calling Him Son of David, a title to which she was not privileged to use, and she came only asking. But she is being drawn irresistibly closer to Him, though she probably doesn't understand it. And now she is not asking, she is worshipping. She is now calling Him, Lord. As Lord, she can come. Son of David, no, can't come on that basis. But on the basis of Lord, she can come. Lord, help me.

He answered and said, It isn't fitting or right to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs. (15:26)

The word "dogs" is in the diminutive in the Greek which is "little puppies." Now there were vicious dogs that roamed the countryside. They were mean, they would run in packs, they were wild, they were vicious, people hated them, and a very derogatory term was "dog, you dog." It was about the worst thing you could say to a person. Interesting there are no curse words in Hebrew, so if a Jew wants to curse He has to use English. But about the worst thing they can say is "dog." "You, dog!"

I was in the Haddasa Hospital on Mount Scopus, one of the people on tour had been injured, we took them up to the hospital, and this Jewish doctor came through and he was using some foul language in English, and I turned to Kay with my loud pulpit voice, I said, "I guess it is true they don't have Hebrew curse words and they have to use English to curse." He stopped short and turned and apologized, which I thought was interesting.

But "dog," that's a dirty term. And they would oftentimes, in fact, they usually, rarely just said "Gentile," they would say "Gentile dog." But Jesus didn't use that term, used a diminutive form and it was "little puppy." They did have little puppies, family pets, and interestingly enough, when they ate, you've got to put out of your mind your dining room table and the chairs, and your plates and silverware and so forth, you've got the wrong picture completely. You've got to get down on the floor, and a table there on the floor, but no silverware, you got your hands. And you would eat with your hands. They would have the bread and you'd break off the bread and you'd dip it in the salads or dip it in the soups, but you were always eating with your hands. Well, naturally, eating with your hands gets a little messy, and so they would always save enough bread at the end of the meal, you would take the last piece of bread and with it, you would wipe off your fingers and your hands, wipe the grease off, and all of the food and then you'd toss it to the little puppies that were just there waiting for it. And this is what she was referring to when the little puppies eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table.

Truth, Lord:

[I have no right, I'm not a child, I don't belong to the covenant race of people, I have no right to the children's bread, I am outside of the covenant,]

but the little puppies, they eat the bread that fall from the masters' table. (15:27)

And Jesus said, O woman, great is thy faith:

As we noted this morning, He never said anything like that to any of the disciples. Never once were the disciples commended for their great faith. In fact, they were rebuked many times for their lack of faith. He said, How oft must I bear with you, O ye of little faith? And it seems He was always rebuking them for their little faith, O ye of little faith! Jesus said to Peter, Why did you doubt? But here's a woman, outside of the covenant people and Jesus is saying, "O woman, great is your faith." And then those wonderful words,

be it done unto you even as you will.

Your faith, great is that faith. Now, we know that Jesus knew and does know all things. He knew from the beginning that He was going to heal the daughter. So why then all of this ignoring of her call? Why this apparent rebuff? Because He was seeking to draw out what He knew was in her. This great faith that was in her heart, He knew it was there and He was seeking to draw it out to its fullest expression and also seeking to draw her into a deeper relationship, not just one of looking from the outside in, Son of David, have mercy; but where she would say, Lord. And she would worship. From petition to worship, from Son of David, far off, to the closeness of Lord, help me. And He was drawing her unto Himself because He knew what was in her.

The interesting thing is that she in a sense opened the door to a further ministry among the Gentiles. You remember when Jesus was passing through Samaria, met the woman at the well, and how that He revealed Himself to her as the Messiah, talked to her about water that would be springing up within her that she wouldn't have to come here and draw again, and how that she went into the town and began to tell the people, Come on out and meet a man that's told me everything I've ever done. Isn't this the Messiah and

how that the people came and Jesus ministered to the Samaritans, but this woman opened the door for the other Samaritans to hear the Gospel. So this woman opened the door for the Gentiles.

And when Jesus comes back toward the sea of Galilee;

[Mark's gospel tells us that He came back to the Decapolis, that was those ten Greek cities that were in the upper Galilee region that had a lot of Gentiles living in them. They lived according to the Grecian culture, the cities of the Decapolis, and He came back to these cities of the Decapolis. And thus when we read that He came near to the sea of Galilee, He was there in the cities of the Decapolis,]

He went up into a mountain, and sat down there. (15:29)

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

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. (15:31)

[indicating that they were Gentiles. Glorified the God of Israel, as He was now working among these in the cities in the Decapolis.]

Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and He said, I have compassion on the multitude,

[and isn't that always so? The beautiful compassion of our Lord]

because they continue with me now for three days, and they have nothing to eat: I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. (15:32)

So Jesus said, These people have been with Me for three days, I have compassion on... I'm not going to send them away empty, without some food. They might faint on their way.

And his disciples said unto him, Where should we find so much bread here in the wilderness, to fill so great a multitude? (15:33)

Where are we going to find the food for this great crowd?

And Jesus said unto them, How many loaves have you? They said, Seven, and a few little fish. (15:34)

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

And he took the seven loaves and the fish, and He gave thanks, and broke them, and He gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. (15:36)

Again, we see the method of the Lord in ministry. He gave to His disciples and the disciples to the multitudes. God uses His human instruments in order to reach others. Paul the apostle said, That which I have received from the Lord, I deliver unto you. And that's God's method. He gave to the disciples and the disciples then imparted it to the multitudes.

And they did all eat, and were filled:

[Again, the word there in Greek is "glutted," they were stuffed]

and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. (15:37)

Now in the last experience in chapter fourteen, with the five loaves and two fish, He had fed the 5,000; and they took up twelve baskets. Here He is feeding the 4,000 with seven loaves and a few fish, and they gathered seven baskets. The interesting thing is that the Greek word for "baskets" in chapter fourteen where He was feeding the Jews, was a different Greek word than here. The Greek word for "basket" was this basket the Jews, most of them, carried with a narrow neck in which they often kept food, but they didn't have it in an open basket because actually, dust might blow on it that had come from the ground where a Gentile walked. If a Gentile would walk, every place he stepped the dust would be unclean. So if the dust was picked up in a wind from where a Gentile had walked and would blow on your food, the food would be unclean. This is part of that whole traditional bit that Jesus was talking about earlier. And so they had narrow necks on their baskets to keep them from getting any dust from the Gentiles, or any defilement from the Gentiles. But the Gentiles had these big, open baskets. That's the Greek word that is used here in chapter fifteen, is the basket of the Gentiles which again would indicate that these were actually Gentiles from the area of the Decapolis that are fed in this story, in contrast to the 5,000 who were fed in the fourteenth chapter, of the Jews.

They that did eat were four thousand men, beside the women and children. (15:38)

And he sent away the multitude, and they took a ship, and they came across the sea to Magdala. (15:39)

[which is between Capernaum and Tiberias on the western shore of the sea of Galilee, it's just slightly

north of the middle of the sea of Galilee, going north to south, it is the village from which Mary Magdalene came, the one who was so close to Jesus, the first one that He appeared to after His resurrection, the one from whom He had cast seven demons, Mary of Magdala and Mary Magdalene. So they came on over to Magdala but notice, not to Capernaum. We don't read of His being in Capernaum again. And in the sixteenth chapter, He's going to go with His disciples on up to Caesarea, Philippi way up into the upper Galilee. Again, away from the influence and the area that was controlled by the Jews and out of Herod's reach. And then He will return but He will go on down to the eastside of the Jordan river and spend His ministry down there until He goes up to Jerusalem for the Passover where He is crucified. So, He is staying away from the totally Jewish areas because of the animosity that is rising, but the timing has to be perfect. He has to be crucified during the feast of the Passover in order to fulfill all of the types of the Old Testament. So, next week we'll find Him in Caesarea, Philippi and the important teaching of His disciples while He is there. He is drawing Himself more now just with the disciples, spending quality time with them as He is seeking to prepare them for that time which will be coming very shortly and He will be taken away from them and they will be ministering now through the power of the Holy Spirit, but not with the actual physical presence of Jesus.]

Father, we thank You for Your Word and for the opportunity of just learning more about Your love and Your compassion, Your concern for people's needs, thank You Lord that You're concerned with our need. And Lord, how grateful we are that You have broken down that wall that once existed between the Jews and the other nations, other peoples, and we Lord who were once far away, alienated from the life of God, have been brought near through the blood of Jesus Christ, that we might be partakers and we might receive the benefits that You have promised to Your people. Lord we thank You for that Spirit of adoption in our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. And we are children, and as children we can come to the table and we can eat of the abundance and of the fullness that You have provided for Your children. Lord, we are living in a world that has turned its back upon You, we are surrounded by filthy communication as men are expressing the evil that is in their hearts. Lord, it's a polluted atmosphere in which we live. Put a shield around us, Lord, guard our hearts, guard our minds, keep us Lord from the pollution of the world. May we be spotless, pure, holy, Lord, before Thee. Cleanse us Lord from the defilement of the world, make our hearts clean, make our hearts pure. Wash us Lord in the blood of Jesus that we might be whiter than snow. And we thank You for it, Amen.