

24. Godly, but not religious

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Whenever God is at work, the devil is right behind our God to cause problems. We should not be afraid of what the devil does, nor himself. However, we should not be ignorant about him either. The devil didn't come as a demon-possessed man, but as religious people which is often hindrances of true salvation.

Some of you remember what I said about religion previously. Religion is made by man and it is a human effort to reach to God with their own righteousness. God rejects religion because of its shortcoming, double standards, and no relationship through Jesus Christ His Son.

Jesus is showing us that it is not about being religious, but knowing God through Him in action. In the Book of James, James teaches us that faith without deed is dead. That is where many religious people stop. I am not talking about doing good thing to others.

A. AGAINST THE TRADITIONALISM

Matt. 15:1-2 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

Up to this point, most of Jesus' ministry has been isolated in the region of Galilee. These scribes and Pharisees are an official delegation from Jerusalem, coming to investigate the work of this man Jesus.

The tradition of the scribes and Pharisees was nothing more than oral interpretation of the law, also known as "Mishinah". They washed their hands ceremonially to remove defilement, not for hygienic purposes.

They didn't care about Jesus' miracles, nor His identity. They only care that He follows their tradition, so that He could be under their control.

Matt. 15:3-6 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, "Honor your father and your mother"; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, "Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God'—then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition."

The scribes and Pharisees cared more about their own tradition than what God commands which is called "Tora". While they were challenging Jesus for His disciples violating their tradition, they were grossly violating the commandments of God.

Our Lord's reply to their charge began with an accusation against them.

'The gift to God' is "Corban." It is nothing more than a legal loop hole they use not to help others and being selfish. But the same time it makes them looking ultra religious.

Tradition deals with ritual, while God's truth deals with reality. Tradition brings empty words to the lips, but truth penetrates the heart and changes the life. Actually, tradition robs a person of the power of the Word of God.

Matt. 15:7-9 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

Jesus was quoting Isa 29:13. The Jewish religious leaders elevated man's tradition to an equal level with God's revealed Word.

Matt. 15:10-11 When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

Jesus declared boldly to the multitudes that sin comes from the heart, not from the eating. It is what comes out of the mouth that defiles us, not what goes in.

Matt 12:34 Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Matt. 15:12-14 Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (NO DUH?) But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

Although the Pharisees had virtually no political power, they were respected and highly influential among the people. Offending them can be social suicide. Of course, Jesus knew that He offended them! And He intended to offend them.

Jesus reminds them one of His earlier parables, "The tares and the wheat." Jesus was indicating that these Pharisees and scribes were not planted by the Father despite of their religiosity.

Matt. 15:15-20 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to us." So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Whatever enters the mouth eventually goes into the stomach and comes out in human waste. Food never touches the heart. But what comes out of the mouth begins in the heart, and these things defile a person. Of course, actions are included with words. Often actions speak louder than words.

From v1 through 20, we find pathetic hypocrisy of the religious leaders. They claimed their holiness, but their holiness was far from God. They even tried to find loopholes in their own laws, so that they don't have to support their own aging parents. But the next incident we find is a stark contrast to what we witnessed from the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus was seeking this gentile woman to set her daughter free from demon possession. This gentile woman was considered as a dog by the Jews

because of her race being a Canaanite. To make a matter worse, she was a woman. Many Pharisees and scribes thanked God that they were not born as women.

B. THE COMPASSION OF JESUS IN THE GENTILE LAND

Matt. 15:21-22 Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

Not only did Jesus teach that no foods were unclean, but He practiced His teaching by going into Gentile territory which is located some 50 miles away. This is the only time Jesus left the country and went the region of Tyre and Sidon. Sidon had been the home of the wicked queen Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31). We might ask, "For what?" Because Jesus had a divine appointment with this woman and to set her daughter from the demons.

But this was a really bad time for His disciples. Because Jesus' popularity was skyrocketing after that feeding miracle. They thought He should stick around longer and do more miracles to be the king of the Jews.

Because of their pagan idol worship in that region, her daughter was exposed to those idol worship that was controlled by demons.

Jesus loves you so much that He came to seek you and to take you to His heaven. You may not know Him as your Savior and Lord, but He knows you so well. He loves you more than you can possibly know. Would you like to know Him? I will give you a chance at the end of this service.

Luke 15:4-5 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

Instead of coming to Jesus with arrogant attitude like the Israelite religious leaders, she came to Him with humility and worshipping Him as God. She came to Him with a persistent request for Jesus to heal her daughter.

Matt. 15:23-28 But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Did Jesus know how she would answer? Yes. Then why did He treat her this harshly? It was for her own benefit. Let's keep in mind that our Lord responded to this woman as He did, not to destroy her faith, but to develop it.

When Jesus called her one of the little dogs, He used little as a term of endearment. This softened the traditional Jewish slur towards gentiles, which called them dogs in the most derogatory sense.

The woman responds with great faith. She admits her low estate, and did not debate the issue when Jesus called her one of the little dogs. She asked Jesus to deal with her on her own low level - and so she received from Jesus. No wonder Jesus said, "O woman, great is your faith!"

Moms and dads, you might have a wayward daughter or son. Don't give up on them. Continuously bring them to Christ. Would He listen to your persistent prayers for them? Yes, a thousand times yes. He is willing to grant your prayer request. If your son or daughter comes their sense, God will speak to their hearts to return to Himself and to you. Don't stop praying for them.

Matt. 15:29-31 Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

We cannot help but marvel at the contrast between these gentiles and the Jewish leaders who knew the Old Testament Scriptures. The gentiles glorified Israel's God, but the Jewish leaders said that Jesus was in league with satan. Our Lord's miracles did not cause the Jewish cities to repent, yet the gentiles believed in Him.

C. FEEDING FOUR THOUSAND

Matt. 15:32-39 Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." Then His disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few little fish." So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala.

This is not the same miracle recorded in the last chapter. The feeding miracle in the last chapter was done for mainly for the Jewish people and they were with Him only one day, but this one is basically for the gentiles and they were with Him for three days.

It was like a De-Javu. By now, the disciples should have this thing down. They should get excited about people gathering up all over, because they could be the part of another great miracle and get to see how Jesus performs other miracle.

But the question of the disciples to Jesus revealed their ignorance once again. They flunked again. But let's not look down on them. How many times do we make same mistakes over and over? They were no different than us. I am sure that you've noticed that the Bible is a repetitive book. It is not because God ran out of things to say, but to remind us from forgetting and to enforce the truth.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) If we call ourselves Christians, we must do what the Lord commands us with willing hearts.

1 John 2:9-11 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

2) The enemies of truth are often religious people who live according to man's traditions.

Satan often uses "religion" to blind the minds of sinners to the simple truths of God's Word.

3) We must beware of any religious system that gives us an excuse to sin and disobey God's Word.

We must also beware of worship that comes from the lips only, and not from the heart.

4) If we major on the inner man, the outer man will be what God wants it to be.

True holiness comes from within.