

## Lesson 23: Review of Matthew 15:1-20: "Jesus Goes Straight For the Heart"

Debating an issue can be productive. However, arguing can wear you out. During the span of Jesus' 3 ½ year ministry on earth He found Himself embroiled in controversy. Mark this: He was not at fault for the controversy, the unbelieving religious leaders were at fault. Their refusal to believe the Scriptures and all they had to say about the Christ (John 5:39,40) caused them to react violently against Jesus! What is worse, these religious leaders jettisoned the Scriptures and rested their confidence and security on the traditions of the elders that went before them. Of course, we know, that to place our confidence and security on the words and traditions of men rather than on God is folly.

In this lesson Jesus went straight for the heart where the issues of life find their wellspring.

Let Scripture Rule: Nourishment and Protection, Matthew 15:1-9 In a business situation have you ever been present when the *big wheels* come down from *headquarters*? Everyone knows that they don't come down unless there is trouble. Here in Matthew 15 the big wheels from Jerusalem came down to Galilee region to confront Jesus. These leaders were important leaders in the Jewish world. In fact, they were important to the Roman occupiers because these Jewish leaders helped keep the people calmed down. However, when it came to religious matters none were more serious about their religious traditions and practices than these leaders. And, these are they who came to Jesus.

They came asking the big question, "Why?" "Why *in the world* do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?" The matter was over hand washing. You know that they had to be looking for *anything at all* just so they could make an accusation of some kind. This issue had to be way down the list of "must do's". But by finding fault in this manner they essentially judging Jesus as an immoral leader!

Nevertheless, Jesus didn't answer their question and He didn't become offended by the implication. Instead, He asked them a "why?" question. "Why *in the world* are **you!** breaking the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" And, in case they were not sure what He was talking about He went on in verses 4-6 to shine the light of the Law of God on their behavior. So, the bottom line, Scripture trumps tradition EVERY TIME!

We have to make sure that we are learning, listening and living by Scripture. When those who teach us teach the Scripture we benefit and we are edified in our faith because God's word is nourishing and protective! The result will spill over into a life of worship in Spirit and in Truth. Let us hold firmly to the Scriptures!

Let Scripture Reveal: The Law and Gospel, Matthew 15:10-20: In verses 8-9 Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 and let it stand directly against the very leaders that came to rebuke Him. Notice that every word Jesus spoke against them in the first section of Matthew 15 He always quoted Scripture. Think of it, the *Word* (Christ Jesus, the Son of God) quoted His Word to rebuke and correct those who were blind to the Truth.

This point is crucial as we come into this section. Jesus was careful to call all those who had gathered around Him to "listen and understand". The crux of the matter, according to Jesus is the heart and that which *issues* from the heart. The religious leaders were concerned about *outward appearances* and the supposed righteousness which resulted from such practices as in 15:2. But Jesus goes to the heart.

Notice He doesn't say that the *heart* of man is *good* and *wonderful*. No! He makes it clear that that which issues from the heart of the natural man is unclean, sinful; it is sin. In this section Jesus applies the *law* of God to bring the truth of man to light. The Truth is that the law stands against every human, and every human is desperately needing God's grace. Every human falls short of the glory of God and is needing someone to stand before God in their place. We could say it like this: We need someone whose performance record is perfect before God. How could you read Jesus' words about the *heart* and have confidence in your performance before God? Those people who trust in their own performance record of right actions and right works and right words, like the Pharisees will be judged and condemned. They are NOT of God!

However Jesus gives the gospel in 15:13. Here is our hope: That we would be a planting of God. Those who are a planting of God have Jesus' performance record of righteous works credited to them through faith. Both His death on the cross and His righteous life are credited to the person who believes through faith!

So, as you listen to Jesus, and as He brings the light of God's law upon your heart, what is your response? Will you agree with Him and then thank Him for taking all the sins of your heart and all your sinful acts upon Himself when He died on the cross? Will you receive His perfect performance record of God's Law as your very own through faith?

Questions for Matthew 15:21-39: "Persevering in the Presence of God"

1. From the notes on page 1, **A)** what impressed and/or helped you? **B)** Explain "A".

Introduction to Matthew 15:21-39: The irony of Matthew 15 is that those you would expect to receive Jesus as Messiah didn't and those you would expect to *miss* Him didn't. We see a Canaanite woman receive Jesus. In fact, her faith is commended by the Lord Jesus. The last time Jesus commended someone's faith was Matthew 8. Then it was a Gentile Roman soldier! Now in Matthew 15 it is a despised Gentile woman who strongly believes. This lesson has as its focus "persevering in the presence of God." That is what true faith does! Do you persevere in the presence of God?

2. Read Matthew 15:21-28. "The Canaanite Woman": **A)** What do you think may be significant about the words "leaving that place, Jesus withdrew..." in 15:21? **B)** Remembering the questions of Lesson 15 and the notes on Lesson 16, what can you recall concerning the historic religious practices of the people in the region of Tyre and Sidon? **C)** What key action words or phrases can you find in verses 22, 25 which describe her attitude toward Jesus? **D)** What key words or phrases of confession do you find in verses 22, 25 which reveal knowledge of Jesus' uniqueness? **E)** What made her faith great? **F)** What does the quality of her perseverance mean to you? How can you apply this to your life?

3. Read Matthew 15:29-31: "The Crowd" **A)** Most likely this "mountain" of verse 29 was in Gentile territory just southeast of the region of Tyre and Sidon. **B)** The crowds came to Him. But, what did they "do" that shows they had a measure of faith in Him? **C)** Look at a map of the region around the Sea of Galilee. How convenient do you think coming to Jesus would be? Consider bringing sick people to that area! What does this cause you to think about their faith? **D)** How do your answers in "C" challenge you regarding your own love of ease and convenience when it comes to meeting with Jesus? **E)** How could you the statement, "bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at His feet" become a strategy for you when it comes to ministering to friends or family?

4. Read Matthew 15:32-39: "The Compassion of Jesus" **A)** How long had the people stayed with Jesus in the wilderness? Why do you think they stayed so long without complaint? **B)** What connection can you make between the crowd staying for three days and Matthew 4:15-16? **C)** The people persevered in staying with Jesus. What did Jesus do for them? **D)** Do you persevere in His presence, or do you often quit too soon? **E)** Would you be willing to spend "extra" time in personal Bible reading and prayer this week? If you did, would you share with the group some of the benefits you enjoyed from the extra time spent with Jesus?