

The Gospel of Matthew
Week Eighteen
Matthew 14:30-15:28

Day One

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt? 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." 34 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him 36 and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

v. 31 – Jesus caught Peter as he began to sink. Thank God for the times that Jesus has caught all of us when we began to sink. **What was the problem?** The problem was that Peter doubted and had little faith. He had actually walked on the water for a few steps, but then he doubted whether or not he could continue to walk on the water. Faith is not an event, it's a lifestyle. Faith isn't something we are to exercise sometimes, but all the time. Faith isn't just a parachute that we use when we are in trouble; it's the jet engine that powers our flights in and to God's purposes.

Everything that does not come from faith is sin (Romans 4:24).

Peter began enthusiastically, but faltered when it counted most. **Have you ever started something in faith, but then got fearful and backed off? What can you do to walk in faith again? What can you do to insure that you will not falter?**

vs. 32&33 – Peter and Jesus got back into the boat and the winds died down. The men were so moved by what they had witnessed that they worshiped Jesus, confessing that He was the Son of God. As I have said on many other occasions, if Jesus accepted their worship and He was *not* the Son of God, then He was worse than a false prophet. When men tried to sacrifice to Saul and Barnabas, they tore their clothes and prevented the people from doing so (see Acts 14:11-18). Of course, Jesus allowed them to worship because He was worthy of worship. This is another proof that Jesus was the Son of God – not just that they worshiped Him but that He received their worship.

v. 34 – Jesus landed and the people flocked to Him to have their needs met, as was customary in every area where He went. People wanted the miracles; what's more, they *needed* the miracles. The people had faith for healing and brought their sick, just wanting them to touch the hem of Jesus garment. It was more than wanting healing; they *begged* Jesus to allow the sick to touch His cloak.

This healing anointing was also present in Peter's and Paul's ministries. It should still be present in the ministry of the Church.

Day Two

15:1 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!" 3 Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' 5 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' 6 he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

vs. 1&2 – Jesus lived and ministered in Galilee, which today is a two-hour drive from Jerusalem. It would have been a full day's journey back then. This Jerusalem religious crowd was so concerned with what Jesus was and was not doing that they sent emissaries to ask Him about His hand-washing procedures. How ridiculous!

Yet that represents the power of religious tradition in someone's mind and life. You and I are not exempt from such behavior. When someone's religious tradition is violated, it usually evokes anger toward the perpetrators. The Pharisees and their teachers were perturbed that their traditions were being ignored. **Are there any religious traditions that when they are violated, make you angry?** Don't answer too quickly. Ask the Lord to reveal any that may be in your life. When you find any, get rid of them!

v. 3 – Jesus answered a question with another question. The Pharisees were angry that Jesus was breaking the tradition of the elders. Jesus was more concerned that the Pharisees were breaking the commandments of God! **Can you see that their problem was greater than any tradition that Jesus and His followers were offending?** I am sure the Pharisees felt that the traditions of the elders were the equivalent of the will of God, or they would not have been confronting Jesus. Religious people believe that they are representing God and His interests and further believe that they must be God's watchdog or protector to insure that others comply with right behavior.

It may sound like I am against all tradition. I am not. When tradition is made to be sacred, however, then I think we have a problem. When how we dress in or for church becomes a standard to which everyone must attain, then we have a problem. When we cannot move a piece of furniture in the church because it is part of the "altar," then we have a problem. When we must have deacons in the church because we've always had deacons, even if they are ineffectual and useless, then we have a problem.

When we must pray before taking any food for fear that God will be displeased if we don't, then we have a problem. When we give money and feel it will protect us from bad things happening to us, then we have a problem. **Can you think of any other "traditions" that can cause us problems in our lives or churches?**

vs. 4-6 – The Pharisees were violating one of the Ten Commandments when they refused to help their parents in need. The Pharisees would play religious games by dedicating

what they had to the Lord, while maintaining control over whatever they had dedicated. If their parents had a physical need, the Pharisees would then say, “Wow, I’d like to help, but everything I have belongs to God and so I can’t part with it. Sorry!” Once again, this shows the devious nature of the religious mind that can find justification to do anything that fits with their religious thinking..

I am impressed that Jesus had the courage to respond to the Pharisees as He did. Jesus was a Jew and knew Jewish culture, so He could go right to the heart of the problem and use an example to refute the Pharisees that everyone could understand. **How in touch are you with your church culture? Do you have the courage to confront it when needed?**

Day Three

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. 9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' 10 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. 11 What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.' "

vs. 7-9 – Jesus quoted Isaiah like He knew him personally, which of course He did! Here is the quote from Isaiah 29:13:

The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men”

Notice that Isaiah prophesied but it is recorded as “the Lord said.” Jesus both endorsed the accuracy of the prophets and indicated that the prophets of old did speak for God and their words came from God. Jesus quoted Isaiah who quoted God. That is how the prophetic works. Yet Isaiah spoke 700 years before Jesus and accurately described the people in Jesus’ day. **Was Isaiah only addressing the future when he uttered those words?** I don’t think so. **Did Isaiah have any awareness that he was speaking about a people yet to be born?** I think so.

In other words, Isaiah was speaking to the people of his day but his words were true of the people of Jesus’ day, for this was a problem in Israel for centuries – they spoke well but their hearts were hard. Yet Isaiah had to have some sense that he was speaking of a people yet to come or else he was speaking things of which he had no understanding.

This is an interesting discussion of how the Old Testament fits into the New. **How is the Old to be interpreted? Only in light of what the New says about it? Did the OT authors have any understanding of what they were saying and writing about Jesus and His day? Did their words still have relevance for their OT day?** I am in a class about this very topic right now, so it is fresh in my mind as we encounter this passage.

vs. 10&11 – Jesus went public with His discussion that up to this point was with the Pharisees. As was His custom, He turned almost any situation into a teaching and learning experience for the people. The Pharisees were concerned about outer things, like washings and rituals. Jesus told the people that the external is not the problem or what makes people unclean. It is what comes out of a man that renders one unclean. Religion almost always is concerned about externals but God looks at the heart. **Where has your emphasis been of late? Have you focused on heart internal matters or external matters?**

When Jesus said this, He spoke to the heart of what Judaism had become, a system of rules that regulated appearance. Jesus had come to return it to what God had intended all along, but this effort would cost Him His life, which He freely gave.

Day Four

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 a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." 15 Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."

v. 12 – I love the disciples! They were so much like me! They were concerned that Jesus had offended the Pharisees and weren't the slightest bit concerned that the Pharisees had offended Jesus! The disciples still identified with their nation and people at this point and Jesus had just offended their leaders who deserved to be offended. I have always been too concerned with what other people think and not always concerned with what God thinks.

"I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God" (John 5:41-44).

How about you? Who are you more concerned with offending, God or man?

v. 13 – Jesus did not back down from what He said. In fact, He intensified it, insinuating that some if not all of the Pharisees were not leaders that God the Father had appointed. If that was the case, then God would eventually pull up those leaders by the roots. Of course this is exactly what eventually happened when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem along with the Temple.

v. 14 – Jesus ordered His disciples to disengage from the leadership of the Pharisees. He declared that they were blind guides, who would lead their followers into a ditch. Be careful whom you follow! If they sound like they know where they are going, but don't

know where they are going, then they are to be avoided. **Whom are you following?** Of course, ultimately you are following Jesus.

Do the people you are following know how to get to Jesus themselves? Or are they blind guides, groping in the darkness? It isn't enough that they have a successful ministry, drive a big car or live in a mansion. That is no guarantee of their right standing with God; it is an indication that they are good communicators and business people. The mark of a godly leader is that they have been to Jesus and know how to guide you there as well.

v. 15 – The explanation of what Jesus had said to the Pharisees seems so simple and straightforward today, but it was a radical new concept to the disciples. They had been taught repeatedly to maintain the rules of cleanliness, so as not to defile themselves. They were told since childhood to avoid dead bodies, pork, shellfish, women and Gentiles, all of whom could make one ceremonially unclean, unable to participate in the Temple worship. Jesus was now declaring that all those things could not make anyone unclean. It was what someone thought or said that rendered them unclean in God's sight. This was indeed radical and the disciples needed time to process this new concept.

Are you stuck in any old thinking where service to God is concerned? I know many who are. They believe that if they go to “church” on Sunday, they have done their duty to and for God. Some think that they are doing God a favor by going to “church.” First of all, church isn't a building; it isn't the house of God. It isn't a holy place any more than a movie theater is holy. The people of God are the building of God. They are the holy place. So you see, you had better not answer too quickly as to whether or not you are stuck in some old thinking where God is concerned.

Day Five

16 "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked 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 the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.' "

v. 16 – As a teacher, I have repeatedly made assumptions that because I saw something so clearly that it must be that clear to others. Very often it is not. That is why I am making every effort to take questions and “connect” with the people to make sure they understand whenever I speak. While the people I teach may be spiritually dull, the difference between Jesus and me is that I too am often spiritually dull. I can and should be patient with the people because I am just like them at times.

Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This

is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people (Hebrews 5:1-3).

I have seen teachers and leaders treat the people like idiots. I try not to do that because I can be an idiot myself at times.

vs. 17&18 – Jesus patiently explained that what the disciples had been taught made them unclean was only temporary and would be eliminated from their system. Touching someone or eating something had no permanent spiritual effect. Yet the human heart has every ability to render the owner unclean

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

vs. 19&20 – Jesus got specific with the things that could render one unclean, things like sexual immorality, lying, slander, and evil thoughts. Paul went on to expand this list of internal sins that would lead to external actions, which in turn would render one unclean or, as the Catholics say, in a state of sin.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

With what are you more concerned, external or internal things? Some holiness movements have banned women's makeup, jewelry and other externals in a pursuit of holiness. While I understand their rationale, their thinking is faulty, as Jesus pointed out in these verses. It isn't what's on the outside that counts, but what is on the inside that affects the outside. We must learn to deal with heart matters and not appearances only. In other words, we must overcome our dullness and embrace the need for ethical purity and holiness:

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Romans 13:11-14).

Day Six

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 suffering terribly from demon-possession." 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."

v. 21 – It is interesting to me that Jesus took His disciples to the region that He had just mentioned to the crowd in Matthew 11 – Tyre and Sidon. Perhaps He had mentioned those cities, not only to shock his listeners, but to prepare them that the Gentiles in those areas would one day respond to God and be part of the Church. Now He was going to demonstrate the truth of what He said.

I would imagine that Jesus was in some danger in Galilee after offending the Pharisees, so He withdrew to any area where no Jew would find Him. I am sure He was also training the disciples in a region where they would not be interrupted by Pharisaical investigators. There are times when you must withdraw from places that hinder your relationship with God. **Are you in such a time now?**

v. 22 – Yet Jesus could not escape the needs of the people, even in this Gentile region. Someone recognized Him – this time a Canaanite woman – and came begging that He heal her daughter. Notice that she referred to Jesus as “Lord” and “Son of David,” treating Him with more honor than He ever received in Israel. She was saying all the right things, she was asking for what was within Jesus’ power to do, but there was only one problem: She was a Gentile, and a woman no less. Her daughter was afflicted with demon possession, as so many daughters in Israel. This woman was another human being but, according to Jewish law and tradition, she was beyond God’s help. Jesus was about to show that she was not.

v. 23 – Jesus did not answer the woman. I can see now that Jesus was using this, as always, as a teaching time for the disciples. They reacted as any Jewish man would have reacted, not asking Jesus to grant the woman’s request, but to send her away empty-handed. What hardness and cruelty! They knew that Jesus had the power to grant the woman’s request, but they would not say, “Jesus, please heal the woman’s daughter so we can have some peace.” Instead they said, “Jesus, please send the woman away so we can have some peace.”

This sounds a lot like the modern church. They value peace over the clamors of peoples’ needs and send the people away who are not “worthy” of God’s touch or healing presence. **Are you too busy, too?**

v. 24 – Jesus stated the obvious, saying something with which His disciples would have agreed – He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This woman did not fall into that category of humans, so He was under no obligation to help her, or so He said. Yet we know in hindsight that Jesus had every intention of ultimately “helping” the Gentiles. He wasn’t the problem; the Jews were the problem, for they assumed they owned God and that He, like them, had little time or patience for Gentile “dogs.”

Day Seven

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 their dogs." 27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

v. 25 – The woman would not go away. Perhaps she had seen Jesus in action when she had been in Galilee or maybe she had heard of His power to heal. At any rate, she not only said the right things, she did the right things: she came and knelt before Him in reverence and submission. Yet the Jews would still have maintained that she should be sent away. The woman made a simple plea for help. **What would Jesus do?**

v. 26 – Jesus addressed her out of the cruelty of His culture, showing how heartless it had become. He addressed her as the inferior that Judaism had made her to be, and made a demeaning and insulting remark, to see what she would do and what His disciples would do. Many have made a case that healing is the children's bread. I don't think that Jesus was making that connection at all. I think He was saying that the good things of God belonged to God's children, the Jews and not to Gentile dogs. Of course, Jesus did not believe this. He was simply mirroring Jewish thinking at the time.

v. 27 – The woman was undeterred. She still referred to Jesus as Lord and responded in faith. She accepted her lowly position in society's eyes, yet she claimed her right to feed off table scraps if she wasn't a welcomed guest at the main table. I like this woman! She was strong, fearless and desperate to get her daughter some relief. She knelt before God and Israel and did not back down from her request, even when it seemed like her Lord wasn't interested in helping her.

v. 28 – The real Jesus emerged after she said what she did. He proclaimed that she had great faith and granted her request, without her daughter being present. Jesus chose to respond to faith because that is what pleases God, no matter who exercises it. Be careful not to dismiss someone's faith because of their label of their ethnicity or sin. God looks at the heart and upon that bases His decisions according to His good pleasure.

Have you abandoned your faith request because God has delayed His response? Have you judged someone else as unworthy of God's attention and care? Have you withheld God's grace that was within your power to dispense because of some personal prejudice or theological small thinking? If you answered yes to any of those questions, then you have some work to do and that work starts with repentance.