

Lesson 14: Chapter 15 “What really defiles!”

Servant’s preparation:

http://www.suscopts.org/pdf/presentations/biblestudy/NT/Matthew/Matthew_15.pdf

Brief introduction:

At the beginning of each lesson in the bible study of St. Matthew, please mention this book overview.

- ✓ Who is St. Matthew? He was one of the twelve disciples; he was a tax-collector before Jesus called him to follow Him.
- ✓ Who did he write his gospel to? The Jews, it is designed to prove that Jesus is the Messianic king of Old Testament (OT) prophecy.
- ✓ What is its theme? Jesus is the King of the Heavenly kingdom, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah.

Remember:

Matthew 14 recounts the miraculous feeding of five thousand people and Jesus walking on water. It also narrates the story of Herod's actions against John the Baptist, including his imprisonment and subsequent murder.

Memory Verse:

15:11 “Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.”

Lesson Opener:

When to confront? When to step away?

Sometimes we are faced with situations where we disagree with those around us, and we do not know when to try hard to fix the argument and when to dismiss it and leave.

What can we learn from Jesus’ responses to the Jewish leaders concerning the hand washing?

Jesus turns away from the leaders, focusing His efforts on freeing the simple people from the fear designed to dominate them. He redirects them to be concerned about what comes out of them, not what goes into them. The disciples were shocked that He made no attempt to resolve the rift, but He explained that they are blind leaders who cannot be led and must be dismissed to go their way.

Similarly, we need to discern when the confrontation is useless and follow Jesus’ strategy.

Christ worked to reconcile and include those who were often excluded, but there is no way to create harmony with those who claim to be in power and are bent on bringing Him down. All He can do is try to open the eyes of these blind followers, so they don’t fall.

Lesson Goal:

The true source of defilement is our heart.

Lesson Body:

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)

The tradition of the elders refers to the body of laws and customs that were added by the Jews [Pharisees] to the Law of Moses over the centuries. The orthodox Jews insisted on washing the hands before eating, not to remove filth, but in the case, they might have touched something ceremonially unclean.

There is no command anywhere in the Old Testament that a person should or must wash their hands before eating. The Jews of the day demanded it as a requirement for a religious person or else a person is punished. People were very careful to follow rules. These traditions were man-made religious rules that overwhelmed the people to the extent that they may have forgotten the real commandments that God gave them.

Jesus accused them of perverting the command of the Law by their traditions. One example of such was that the Pharisees said instead of honoring your parents, you can give donations to the temple [money or gifts were more beneficial for the leaders]. God had made it clear that He wanted His people to respect and take care of their own parents. Neglecting one's parents for the sake of a donation is not acceptable.

Jesus clearly sees this as an excuse to avoid their obligations to their parents and that this interpretation (their "tradition") violated the commandment of honoring the mother and father. Verses 7-9 – Isaiah wrote about these type of people. They lived in his time. But he also prophesized about those who lived during the time of Jesus. Many of the same people still live now. These verses describe people who are very religious. They go to church. They follow the rules. They say religious sounding words like "thank God" or "Amen!" But their hearts are far from God.

He calls them hypocrites because they seem as if they defend the truth, whereas they were breaking it. They appear as if they are zealous about the glory of God, whereas they care more about what they possess. They worship God not out of love, but rather to fulfill personal human goals. Therefore, their teachings became 'commandments for men'.

The Lord called the multitudes to explain to them the issue of unwashed hands. He said so, not to defend His disciples but rather to spiritually build them up.

15:11" Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

Christ explained to the people that a great source of defilement was the heart. The defilement they ought to fear was not from what entered their mouths as food, but from what came out their mouths, which showed the wickedness of their hearts.

It is similar to someone decorating his collapsed house instead of treating its foundation. Similarly, the Jewish leaders paid attention to the washing of hands before eating so they are not defiled, but they paid no attention to what comes out of their hearts, such as defiling words filled with hypocrisy and judgment.

Verse 13-14: Pharisees are blind guides and a weed that will be uprooted – Jesus’ statement about them being a plant that the Father did not plant reminds us of the parable of the weeds and tares. The Pharisees are weeds who will be uprooted and judged at the right time. In addition, they are blind guides. “To be left alone” here does not imply the Lord’s wish to give them up. He only wished to deprive them of the multitudes that showed overwhelming respect to them. Then Jesus explains the parable – The meaning is simple. A person’s heart is more important than what he eats or how. A man looks at the outside, but God looks at the heart. If you want to please God, you must have a clean and transformed heart.



The Canaanite woman’s faith (15:21-28)

Tyre and Sidon were two Gentile cities Jesus was passing nearby.

Though the Canaanite was a Gentile, she expresses significant faith in Jesus, referring to Him as Lord and by His Messianic title, Son of David. In addition, she asks Jesus to have mercy on her, thus acknowledging that she does not deserve His help.

The fact that she went to seek Jesus out shows that she had heard accounts of Him and had faith in Him to help her daughter.

Jesus does not immediately reply to her. Naturally, we would ask, why wait? We must realize that Jesus is omniscient. He knows what He is going to do. From the beginning, He plans to heal this child.

However, it appears that He wants to test this woman’s faith. It is to her benefit (and perhaps the surrounding peoples’ benefit) to persevere in her request before receiving an answer. It is also beneficial to the crowd and the disciples to see her persistence and faith.

The disciples asked Jesus to send the woman away. To them, she was like a pest [being a Gentile]. The woman appeals to Jesus three times; He delayed answering her in order to bring out a great lesson. He tells her that He has only come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel as stated in Ezekial 34.

It would be impossible to evangelize the Gentiles without setting aside the Jewish customs, the law of Moses, and arousing the bitterest prejudice of the Jews. Hence it was the divine plan that the Son should keep the law blameless during His ministry. By the cross, the wall of partition (Eph 2:14)

between Jews and Gentiles was broken down and Jesus told the disciples to preach the gospel to all nations.

Why did the Lord tell her that the bread is not for the dogs? Did He scorn the Gentiles and so-called them dogs? For sure the Lord does not scorn His creation. He was repeating a common Jewish saying about the Gentiles, they called them dogs. Jesus wished to praise those whom the Jews thought were dogs. Thus, He declared they have become of greater faith than the children themselves [The Jewish, the chosen people].

Observe that she agrees and accepts heartily in Christ's declaration: it is not fit that the dogs be fed before the children. What argument does she make in response to Jesus second rebuke?

Her clever reply is that even the house dogs eat the scraps under their master's table. "I'm not a Jew, and therefore I don't get to sit at the table. All I ask for is the crumbs that fall off."

Jesus compliments her on her faith and heals her daughter.

This Canaanite woman became an example or a symbol to the church! She has presented before us the gift of humility in an amazing way!



Jesus Heals Great Multitudes (15:29-31)

The Lord goes up the mountain to stay there. The meek multitudes go after Him, carrying to Him the lame, the blind, the dumb.... etc. They put them before Him, and He heals them. Many were probably from the Gentiles who lived in those areas like the Canaanite woman. Jesus heals everyone without differentiating among them.

Feeding the Four Thousand (15:32-39)

The feeding of the four thousand took place on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee. Because while seeking Him in His solitude, many of them had been for three days without regular food. Even after performing many miracles for them, He still had compassion on them and was concerned about their hunger.

The crowds were commanded to sit on the ground. Jesus blessed the food again, reminding us of the principle of giving thanks before eating.

People ate, were satisfied, and there were leftovers. His miracle was more than sufficient.

There might have been many Gentiles in this group, so Jesus fed the Jews with the 5 loaves and then here He fed the Gentiles with the seven loaves. Both pointing to the Eucharist.

Takeaway and lesson delivery ideas:

Application on Verses 16-20:

If you are very careful, can you disguise what is in your heart by being careful what you say? How long do you think a person can keep up the act?

Following a list of rules or showing up at church every week on Sunday is not in and of itself going to please God. Someone with a corrupted heart may do the same thing. Also, we may try to filter the words we speak and be very careful to only say words which are fitting for a Christian. However, no matter how hard you try to filter your words, sooner or later the “real” you will show through.

The only way to ensure gracious and pure words is to make sure the real you is gracious and pure. And the only way to ensure that is to confess your sins and ask God to transform your heart, because you can’t do it through following of rules. We need to come before the Lord regularly in prayer and ask Him to work in our hearts. Then we need to renew our hearts with the truth of Scripture.

Takeaways from the Canaanite woman’s story:

5 Lessons to learn:

1. *She looked beyond her origin:* Her identity and history had disqualified her from being a partaker of the blessings and privileges that belonged to God’s children. But through faith, she was able to break away all limitations.
2. *She interceded for her child:* It was a condition that was mentally and emotionally draining. “Lord, have mercy on me”. Whatever affected her child affected her too. Her daughter was helpless in her state, but she had a mother who interceded on her behalf for a miracle. Keep interceding in faith for those around you, be compassionate.
3. *She was Resilient:* If she had to wait, she would wait and even when she was ignored, she remained unmoved. In their first and only encounter, Jesus immediately lets her know after she makes her request that it was not right to take what belonged to God’s children and give it to the dogs. But that did not make her leave.
4. *She was a woman of great faith:* This response was enough to throw anyone off balance and bring out all kinds of negative emotions from within. Yet with full faced confidence, this woman answered Jesus saying, – “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” How often do we give up when the answers we want don’t come through?

Never let wrong ideologies, limitations, the past or your history stop you from going after your miracle. Anything is possible to him that believes. God is still in the business of rewriting stories.

5. *She was humble:* Anger would have been the fastest response to the words of Jesus. But No. Her humility became a pathway to her miracle. Is your pride limiting you from stepping into the blessings God has prepared for you today? What does your response look like in moments of distress and times of adversity?