

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 4TH-5TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

TRADITIONS & COMMANDMENTS (MATTHEW 15:1-9)

Jesus' ministry has grown to the point where He's now attracting a following from regions all across Israel- including Jerusalem (vs. 1).

- Many of Jesus' previous conflicts had probably been with Pharisees who were local synagogue leaders in various cities He had visited.
- So now His notoriety and reputation had grown to the point where His opponents were now calling in the "big guns".

The goal of this Jerusalem contingency was to find something wrong with Jesus and what He was teaching so they could stop Him.

- The specific charge brought against Jesus was the ceremonial washing of one's hands before eating.
- Apparently His disciples weren't doing it right and "breaking the tradition" (vs. 2).

This wasn't a hygiene issue as much as it was a ritual-cleansing issue established by centuries of tradition.

- The teaching of the elders was mainly oral tradition and it was passed down generationally until it was compiled in a book in 200 AD called the, "Mishnah".
- As the scribes & Pharisees added all kinds of rules and regulations to the law, their traditions were eventually seen as authoritative and began to supersede the law itself.

Elevating human interpretation or tradition to a place of authority alongside Scripture is a plague that has infected every generation. We see this in cult teachings, Catholic teachings, cultural traditions and contemporary trends.

The danger of elevating the thoughts of man to the same status as the teachings of God is that it most often leans towards promoting self-centeredness, fueling self-righteousness, and serving self-interest.

- Not all traditions (or even trends) are bad, however we must make sure that its promoting the authority of God's Word.
- Jesus calls out the hypocrisy of this religious group (vs. 3).

He asks them, "why do you break the commandment for the sake of your tradition?" (vs. 3).

- Referring to the 5th commandment (Ex. 20:12), Jesus rebukes them for breaking it as well as the law that says that anyone who dishonors a parent must be put to death (Ex. 21:17).
- Their violation was centered on a tradition known as korban- it had essentially become a scheme to avoid parental responsibility.

An older child could declare anything "korban" or "committed to the temple", even if it wasn't being given immediately, it could be committed to being given eventually.

- Grown children were devoting to the temple money that was supposed to be used to provide for their aging parents.
- For the sake of their tradition, they were breaking God's commandments (vs. 6).

Jesus exposes this practice as nothing but pure hypocrisy- where someone puts on an outward display that isn't representative of what's truly inside (vs. 7).

- These scribes & Pharisees were actually fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy concerning the hypocrisy of Judah- where people were putting on a show of devotion, but in reality were in rebellion against God & His Word (vs. 8-9). Honoring Traditions vs. Honoring God

BLIND GUIDES & DEFILEMENT (MATTHEW 15:10-14)

After Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes, He now returns to their original questions about hand washing.

- Jesus summons the crowd (vs. 10), as though to invite them into the debate so they could evaluate the spiritual truths He would reveal.
- He tells them that ritual defilement doesn't come from unclean things outside the body entering through the mouth (11a).

Rather, defilement comes from unclean things from within a person's body, exiting through the mouth (vs. 11b).

- The religious leaders believed and were teaching that God evaluated a person on the sole basis of what happens on the outside.
- But Jesus is saying that God evaluates a person from what comes out from the inside!
- God wants us to give Him our hearts, not just our lip service and rule following.

It's not dirty hands that render a person unclean- it's an unclean heart that leads to sinful behavior.

- This kind of pointed teaching clearly aimed at the Pharisees and scribes upset them, and the disciples pointed out to Jesus that His words "offended" them (vs. 12).

- Jesus wasn't worried about offending the Pharisees- they were spiritually lifeless plants that would eventually be uprooted (vs. 13).

Jesus also calls them, "blind guides" (vs. 14).

- They were supposed "spiritual leaders", attempting to guide people to the truth of God.
- And yet, they didn't know the first thing about true, genuine holiness and they didn't care the least bit about truly honoring God with their hearts.
- They were actually leading themselves and followers into eternal danger ("into a pit").
- It's possible to conform to rules without knowing God or allowing Him to transform us.

For the most part, "pharisaism" is gone, but the spirit of this movement lives on.

- Things like judgmentalism, hypocrisy, legalism, and heavy emphasis placed on external behavioral modification void of genuine heart change are all alive in the Church today.
- This is the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matt. 16:6) that Jesus tells us to beware of!
- Rule following void of saving faith is damning.

Worship and devotion to God is more than just outward observance in a certain form or flavor.

- Worship and devotion to God is all about inward faith and spiritual affection with hearts that genuinely and sincerely desire to know God, please God and draw close to Him.
- Authentic worship and faith come about as our hearts honestly listen to and engage God.

A PARABLE EXPLAINED (MATTHEW 15:15-20)

Dietary ("kosher") laws were and still are a big deal to practicing Jews and they include prohibitions against eating pork, shrimp, shellfish and many types of seafood, most insects, scavenger birds, and various other animals.

- The purpose of these dietary restrictions was to make Israel distinct from all other nations.
- Peter was not content until he had an explanation about the saying concerning foods.

The meaning of Jesus' saying about the things that we eat not defiling us may seem obvious to us, but it would've seemed radical and strange to orthodox Jews.

- So Jesus patiently explains that whatever enters the mouth eventually goes through the stomach and comes out in human waste (vs. 17).
- But food never touches the heart- it doesn't matter if we've ceremonially washed.

Jesus then reveals that it's not the mouth of a person or the lack of ritual observance that's the source of the defilement- it's the heart (vs. 18).

- The heart represents the invisible, "inner person" and includes the mind & will.
- The heart, not any external influence, is the source of all evil character, not the physical or spiritual "dirt" on a person's hands (vs. 19).

It is entirely possible for someone to follow all the traditions and external rules and at the same time be filled with all the wickedness Jesus describes in vs. 19.

- Jesus lists seven defiling sins in vs. 19 that all begin in a person's heart.
- What comes out of the mouth begins in the heart, and that's what defiles a person.

Some of them manifest themselves through avenues other than one's mouth ("murder, theft"), but the mouth is one of the most prominent tools for good and for evil (Jas. 3:1-12).

- This is why legalistic groups usually are guilty of things like slander, gossip, verbal abuse, unkindness, and cruelty through words. Those things proceed from the heart!

You can mandate external rules, but you can't mandate kindness, love, and godliness.

- Those things MUST begin in the heart and will naturally manifest someone's life.
- This is why legislation will not save humanity, and this is why religious rules will not make a person truly good, kind, righteous, and in good standing before God.

"How do I know that I actually have true, Biblical faith with God living on the inside changing me to look more like Jesus?" "What comes out of my mouth that started first in my heart?"

"WHAT COMES OUT OF THE MOUTH..." (JAMES 3:8-12)

- If we belong to Jesus and have His nature and spirit influencing us, shouldn't our words, attitudes, and lives look like His?
- Could it be that we have "the leaven of the Pharisees" in that we focus so much attention on external rules, traditions, and titles without allowing the Holy Spirit to truly transform us so that we actually look like Jesus?

Humanity's greatest need is not stricter rules- it's changed hearts. How does that work?

- The perfect law of God reveals true righteousness.
- The Holy Spirit reveals to us OUR sin.
- Jesus forgives us of all of our sin.
- Jesus gives us access to the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit changes us.