

1. The Traditions of Men (15:1-9)

a. Illustration: Do you remember being a child and forgetting to pray over a meal and getting corrected by your parents? I certainly do. I was raised in a Christian home, and we ate dinner (which is different than supper, mind you) together every evening and we would pray before the meal. My grandmother would tell me that I would get sick if I ate the food before I prayed for it, which to my recollection never actually happened.

b. Exposition: This isn't that far off from what is going on with the disciples and the pharisees. They are being told that they needed to wash their hands before eating or they were breaking the law. The Pharisees have completely missed the point of the tradition and have neglected to obey the law itself. Jesus doesn't dismiss their claims, he counters them. The pharisees point out the dirty hands of the disciples, and Jesus, in turn, points out their dirty hearts. The problem with what the pharisees are doing is far more serious than telling me that I'll have a stomach ache if I eat before praying. They are defrauding their parents of their livelihood. We may not see this as such a big deal, but consider that during Jesus' day there were no banks, no retirement investments, no social security or medicare and no rest homes or assisted living facilities. It was the sole responsibility of the children to take care of their parents in their old age. These pharisees were actively neglecting their parents. They were disobeying the law of Moses that they supposedly were striving to keep: Exodus 20:12 21:17

i. Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

ii. Exodus 21:17 "Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death."

c. In verse 13, Jesus refers back to the parable of the weeds. The weeds are to grow up with the grain, and then they should be separated. These weeds are the pharisees. How does Jesus characterize the weeds here? They do not hear and understand and obey rightly the commands of God, not those who wax eloquently and presume to have authority over others because of their education or status. Jesus is not arguing against obedience to the commands of God, as a matter of fact, he points out the intentional disobedience of the Pharisees. Chrysostom said, "for if he were speaking about the law, why did he earlier make a defense on its behalf and fight for it when he said, 'Why are you transgressing the commandment of God because of your

tradition?' And why does he bring in the prophet [Isaiah] in front of everyone?"¹ This may seem disconcerting for us because we believe that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, however, it seems that right obedience to God's commands is important to Jesus as an evidence of the inner purity, the inner relationship that we have with God through the indwelling Holy Spirit. A right relationship with God does not neglect obeying his commands, but embraces them. The Pharisees are actively choosing to disobey the law of God and choose instead to follow the traditions of men. How often are we guilty of this kind of neglect? We too are meant to obey the commands of God. (1 John 1:6)

i. Matthew 28:18-20 "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." How can we teach others to obey all that Jesus commanded unless we are obeying them ourselves?

d. Application: Christian, what commands of God are you neglecting in your own life? Repent. Choose to follow the way of Jesus, the way of repentance.

i. Matthew 3:8 "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."

2. The Misunderstanding of the Disciples (15:10-20)

a. Exposition: The disciples still don't get it. They have been walking with Jesus for some time now, as Drew walked us through chapter 14 last week, they even worshipped him! They have seen him walk on water, heal the sick, command demons, teach with authority and put up with their shenanigans for a long, long time. They are blind to who he is. They are more concerned with what the Pharisees think than they are about what Jesus actually said! The Pharisees were offended! So Jesus refers back to the parable of the weeds, and calls the pharisees blind guides.

b. Exposition: Why does he call them blind? Because they aren't obeying the commands of God nor are they teaching others how to follow and obey God. Friends, anyone who tells you its okay not obey what God has commanded you to do is wrong. That's why Dietrich Bonhoeffer fought the Germans in the church and in conspiracy and died, because he was not willing to go along with what the Third Reich was teaching: disobedience to God's commands. Words are coming out of the mouths of the Pharisees that sound pious and good, but in actuality are empty and against the very kingdom for whom they claim to be speaking.

c. Application: When you hear someone on the radio or in the pulpit and they can say many good things about God, but don't tell you to follow and obey him. Get as far away as you can.

¹ Simonetti, Manlio, ed. Matthew 14-28. Vol. New Testament IB. Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002, 23.

- i. "The discussion is about what God really wants his people to be like, and how this desire can be fulfilled."² - NT Wright
- 3. The Tenacious Faith of a Gentile (15:21-28)
 - a. Exposition: There is a turn in the passage here as the disciples change location and venue and they end up in Tyre and Sidon. To those of us who aren't Jews, this doesn't seem to matter much, but to the original audience of Matthew it meant a great deal. Jesus was entering into cursed, enemy territory.
 - i. Prophetic Words about Tyre and Sidon: Ezekiel 26-28, Isaiah 23 and Amos 1
 - b. Jesus enters into the region of the Gentiles. Who do you think Jesus expects to encounter there? Gentiles of course! It's as though you were walking into a Kindergarten class. You're going to get playdough or marker or something on your shirt before you leave. Simple logic. So it's a bit surprising when Jesus encounters a Gentile woman and he responds in the way that he does, because he seems to ignore her. She comes after him and disciples screaming and crying out SON OF DAVID! Why did Jesus ignore her? Every single commentary I read agreed with Augustine here.
 - i. "But she was ignored, not that mercy might be denied but that desire might be enkindled; not only that desire might be endindled but, as I said before, that humility might be praised."³ - Augustine
 - c. Her tenacious, humble faith was on full display for all, especially the disciples, to see.
 - d. The Canaanite (strike 1-Gentiles and Jews didn't socialize) woman (strike 2-men and women didn't socialize in public unless they were family) in Tyre and Sidon (BIG strike because Jesus in there) calls Jesus the Son of David. She calls him Lord. She recognizes the King, the Messiah and the disciples haven't yet. It is not until the next passage that Peter calls him the Christ. The disciples worshipped him when he came in from walking on the water, but they still did not recognize him as the King. The Gentiles, the outsiders have a better understanding of who Jesus is than the 12 guys who have been walking around with him for quite a while at this point. They've seen Jesus do and say a lot of things. This woman has only heard about him and comes and calls him the Christ, the one anointed to be the King over Israel. Jesus didn't cast this woman aside and ignore her because she was different than him, because she didn't look like him or because she wasn't from the same socio-economic class, he praised her faith and had compassion on her.
 - e. Application: We should never judge the outsider, who is faithful to Jesus, but we should learn from them. We often look to the seminary graduates for a deep understanding of the Word of God, or to those who seem to have their lives together,

² Wright, N. T. Matthew For Everyone, Part 1. 2nd ed. New Testament For Everyone. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, 197.

³ Simonelli, 27.

but friends nothing replaces an unyielding, obedient faith. Those folks are the people that we should all strive to be and strive to learn from.

4. Feeding the 4,000+ (15:29-39)

- a. Many people are confused by why there are two tellings of Jesus feeding thousands of people in the same fashion. The details are quite similar with a few exceptions. It's on a mountain for one and there are a few less people. But I'd like to draw your attention to who is distributing the bread here. The disciples. The followers of Jesus are feeding the masses. Verse 36, "he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.
- b. Are you giving the bread of life to the masses around you? Are you sharing the gift of Jesus with those who you see daily? The Gospel is at its very core GOOD NEWS that demands to be told. Are you preaching the good new to all those who will hear it?

5. Conclusion: In conclusion, I would call you to respond in a few ways.

Perhaps you are following Jesus and don't quite get it? Perhaps you're like the disciple. You've been going to church and reading the Bible, but you're just not sure about Jesus yet. Someone here would love to talk to you about who Jesus is what it means to follow him. You need to be discipled.

But I suspect most of us are the pharisees. Jesus has compassion on all who come to him and call him Lord, but he has harsh words for those who are not willing to follow him. What commands of God are you neglecting because they are "too hard" "not convenient" "not your gifting" or "not relevant anymore?" Examine your heart, are you willing to obey?

Last, my hope for those of us that are Christians is that we would share the bread of life as the disciples did. Obey the command of God in Matthew 28 and make disciples of all nations. Share the Gospel, don't make it something that internal, but like the Canaanite woman, have a tenacious faith that is full to overflowing and pursue Jesus, not just in your heart but crying out to your neighbors, coworkers, family members that Jesus is the Son of God. That is the right response to understanding who he is. That is obedience.