

Notes for Matthew –Chapter 15 (Page 1 of 6)

Introduction – “Misconceptions” about Jesus and Christianity

1. Chapter 15 tells 3 stories:
 - a. A group of Pharisees accuse Jesus of violating Jewish customs. (Verses 1-20)
 - b. The story of a Gentile woman begging Jesus to heal her daughter. (Verses 21-28)
 - c. The story of Jesus feeding 4,000 men, plus women and children. (Verses 29-39).
2. Beware of the danger of pre-conceived notions and church traditions!
 - a. People can focus more on church tradition than on what the Bible teaches.
 - b. A related issue is the danger of “pre-conceived bible interpretations”.
 - i. Jesus is the final authority on the interpretation of Scripture.
 - ii. One of the rules of bible interpretation, including the Old Testament is: What does Jesus himself say on that issue? We get one of those “issue’s” in Chapter 15.
 - c. The second story in this chapter is partially designed to teach the disciples a lesson about the role of the Messiah and the non-Jewish (i.e., “Gentile”) believers.
 - d. The final story (the feeding of the 4,000) is also taught to teach us that Jesus came to help Gentile as well as Jewish believers. The “4,000” story has a lot of “non-Jewish” ideas.
3. One has to remember that Matthew’s Gospel was written primarily to Jewish Christians.
 - a. Jewish Christians had their own preconceived roles about God’s relationship with Jewish people and non-Jewish people.
 - b. Part of Matthew’s “job” is to clear up and change preconceived notions about just what Jesus is, and what He is not.
4. The main application to you and me is about the dangers of misconceptions.
 - a. A big reason for studying the bible is to show what Jesus exactly does expect of us and what was the purpose of both his first coming (past) and second coming (future).
 - b. Religious “tradition” is just as much a danger today as it was in Jesus time.

Verses 1-2: 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!"

1. Let’s start by reviewing some of the events of the previous chapter (14):
 - a. Jesus just feed the 5,000 men, plus women and children in the wilderness.
 - b. The disciples then sailed back across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus walked on the water and met the disciples in the middle of that sea.
 - c. In the last few verses of Chapter 14, Jesus & the disciples landed their boat in Gennesaret. The locals saw Jesus, brought out their lame and sick, and Jesus did some more healing.
2. Now we read of Pharisees and law-teachers coming to Jesus from Jerusalem.
 - a. The Sea of Galilee is in the north-region of Israel and Jerusalem is in the south.
 - b. At this point in Jesus ministry, we’re not sure yet the Jewish leadership fully rejected Jesus or they were still just “checking him out”.
 - c. A “teacher of the law”, often called a scribe in the bible was not necessarily a Pharisee. A modern equivalent of a “teacher of the law” might be a seminary professor.
3. Notice that these Pharisee’s and Law-Teachers ask Jesus, “Why do your disciples’ break the tradition of the elders by not washing before they eat?”
 - a. In Mark’s Gospel, Mark goes on to explain that the washing refers to specific *ceremonial* washing. (Mark 7:3-4). This is not a discussion on sanitary washing.
 - a. Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience, and didn’t see the need to explain further.
 - b. The Pharisee’s and Law teachers didn’t accuse Jesus of this “crime”; they accuse the disciples of not washing in the traditional manner of the Jews.
 - c. Since they knew Jesus was their leader, they were accusing Jesus of violating this tradition by either not teaching it to the disciples or teaching them to ignore that principal.

Notes for Matthew -- Chapter 15 (Page 2 of 6)

Verses 1-2 (cont.)

4. The application to you and me is the danger of church traditions. If a church has a ritual or teaches an action that does not come from the bible directly then it is a church tradition.
 - a. Let's use the example of "The Lenten season", where Catholics and Evangelicals disagree.
 - i. This is a tradition as based in the Roman Catholic Church that have a set of religious services set up around 40 days prior to Easter.
 - ii. The problem is there is no biblical reference to anything special about the 40 days prior to the resurrection.
 - iii. Roman Catholic defenders argue that all of the "symbols" of Ash Wednesday (start of Lent) represent events leading up the Cross.
 - iv. The problem is we can pick any ritual and make it biblical. We can play "pin the tail on the donkey" and say, "Jesus is the donkey and the pins are our sins being placed on Him". ☺ One can pick any ritual and allegorize it to be "Christian".
 - v. When the Reformation happened centuries ago, the motto was "Sola Scriptura" which is Latin for "Scriptures Alone!"
 - vi. The idea was for the church to get back to what the bible taught and not the traditions of the church.
 - b. The key is the bible itself. It is ok to disagree with possible bible interpretation. The danger is getting away from the Scripture in order to emphasize church tradition.
 - c. The word "tradition" in the New Testament, it is never used in a positive reference.

Verses 3-6: 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.

1. The Pharisees ask Jesus why don't the disciples keep the Jewish hand-washing ritual.
 - a. Notice Jesus never answers their question.
 - b. Jesus turns around and takes it to a "higher level" by accusing them of having their traditions nullify the word of God. We'll talk more about that in a minute.
 - c. My application is "you can't put Jesus on trial" in the sense of saying he violated some or any biblical commands. There is no record of Jesus committing any sin whatsoever.
 - i. "God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us" (2nd Corinthians 5:21a, NIV)
 - d. Whenever Jesus is "put on trial", he usually turns it around and puts the accuser himself on trial. That is the situation here.
2. Jesus responds by showing how another of their traditions violates God's law.
 - a. Jesus is quoting "Honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12 or Deut. 5:16)
 - b. "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death" (Exo. 21:17 or Lev. 20:9).
 - c. Next, notice Jesus says in Verse 4 "For God said". He is acknowledging Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, as being written by God, which means it is the Word of God.
3. Let me explain the specific Jewish tradition the Jews used to violate 1 of the 10 commandments.
 - a. If one had money and one wanted to not give it to their parents, they could declare that money "For God's use". It is a pledge to give that money to the (Jewish) "church" and therefore, they were not obligated to help their parents.
 - b. It was a "legal loophole" to get out of not "honoring your mother and father".
 - c. Paul teaches in 1st Timothy Chapter 5 that we are to take care of our parents regardless of whether or not they are believers. The underlying message of that section of 1st Timothy is about how Christians need to be financially responsible for their elder parents.

Notes for Matthew -- Chapter 15 (Page 3 of 6)

Verses 7-9: You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: " `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.' "

1. Notice Jesus calls these Jewish experts "hypocrites". The word "hypocrite" derives from the Greek word for acting. It essentially means that your words do not match your actions.
2. The only people Jesus ever criticized or put-down were the religious leaders.
3. It is a reminder to those of us who teach that bible that God himself holds us more accountable based on what we know and to teach it properly.
4. Verses 8-9 are a quote of Isaiah 29:13.
 - a. Isaiah was preaching that the people of his time were hypocritical in their worship of God. They were going through the rituals, but their hearts were not in it.
 - b. Notice in Verse 7, Jesus says Isaiah "prophesied about you". Jesus is saying that Isaiah wasn't just talking about the people of his time, but Isaiah was predicting the future.
 - c. Much of the Old Testament is designed to point to Jesus. Some of it, as in this Isaiah passage, even points the people and events surrounding Jesus.
 - d. The Pharisee's were sincere in their beliefs. One can be very sincere & be sincerity wrong.
 - e. The modern application is the churchgoer who "goes through the motions" of coming to church, but never applies biblical principles to their lives. They read or hear the Word of God, but it doesn't change their personal lifestyle. That is the idea behind Isaiah's quote.

Verses 10-11: 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'"

1. When Jesus is talking about "clean" it is a reference to our heart. It is not about food.
2. Jesus point is that the Pharisee's were more obsessed with their traditions than their behavior.
 - a. He (God) has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8, NIV)
3. Remember that Matthew's Gospel was primarily written to the Jewish reader. A Jewish person would understand what the word "clean" meant based on the Leviticus food laws.
4. Do I think a Jewish-Christian should still "eat kosher"? It is not a requirement. For a Jewish Christian, I believe God does call on them to keep some of the Old Testament rituals (e.g., Passover) only to remember God's covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. It has nothing to do with their salvation with Jesus. For non-Jewish Christians, this is a "non-issue". The early church decided that non-Jewish Christians didn't have to keep all of the Old Testament laws and customs. (Reference: Acts 15)

Verses 12-14: Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this? ¹³He 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."

1. Well, so much for Jesus trying to save everybody. ☺ Jesus said we are to leave these Pharisee's alone. That means there were people Jesus didn't waste his time trying to convert.
2. Here is a case where Jesus' knowledge of people's heart is greater than ours.
3. This occurred shortly before the holiday of Passover (See John 6:4)
 - a. We don't know who is and isn't saved, but God the Father does.
 - b. This is why God calls on us to pray for all people. (Reference: 1st Timothy 2:4)
 - c. The application to you and I is "don't worry about everyone". We as Christians are each given special abilities. Some are called to serve in a specific church, some to serve a specific family or a specific age group. The point is we are to focus on what God called us to do and not waste our time doing what God does not call us to do.

Notes for Matthew -- Chapter 15 (Page 4 of 6)

Verse 15-18: Peter said, "Explain the parable to us." 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.'

1. I always love when Jesus answers a disciple's question. It makes my job easier. ☺
2. Jesus main point is what comes out of the mouth is far more important than what we eat.

Verses 19-20: 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.' "

1. The "heart" in Jewish thought, represents our innermost being (e.g., "my gut feeling says").
2. Jesus main point is that actions begin with our attitudes. If we do religious acts for "attention-sake", we have the wrong attitude. If we do it *solely* to glorify God, we have the right attitude.
 - a. In Jewish thought, a sin begins with the action, not the thought.
 - b. In Christian thought, the sin begins with the thought prior to the action.
 - i. If we can learn the "control the thought" or give that thought to God we can prevent the action from ever happening.
 - ii. "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (2nd Corinthians 10:5b, NIV)

Verse 21: Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

1. Tyre and Sidon are city-states north of Israel. It is part of modern-day Syria. The point is Jesus is now outside of Israel and away from a predominantly Jewish population.
2. Just why Jesus withdrew is speculation, as the answer is not stated.

Verse 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."

1. Notice Matthew's says, "Canaanite woman". Centuries earlier, when the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses commanded that all the Canaanite's be removed (killed) from the land. (Reference: Deuteronomy 20:17)
2. It helps to read this verse in the perspective of a "condemned Gentile" begging Jesus for help.

Verse 23a: Jesus did not answer a word.

1. Sometimes the hardest things for us to deal with are when God is silent to our prayers. I take the view that God answers all of our prayers. Sometimes the answer is "no" or "wait".
2. Remember that God wants to mature us as believers. God gives us the "no" answer, as He knows best for us. Sometimes he wants to teach a lesson to us.

Vs. 23b: So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

1. This woman is a non-Jew. She probably heard about "Jesus this miracle worker". She probably heard the title "Son of David" refers to the Jews Messiah, but has no idea what it means. All she knows is that her son is in pain and she will do anything to change that.
2. Jesus is trying to teach her and the disciples a specific lesson about the "Son of David" and thus, Jesus does not answer their request to send her away.

Verse 24: He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

1. This verse must be read in context. A non-Jewish woman pleaded to Jesus as "The Son of David", which is a Messianic title. The point is, until Israel-as-a-nation "officially" rejects Jesus he is sent primarily to the Jewish Nation. Individual Gentiles who get saved in the Gospels are a bonus. ☺
2. Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." (Romans 1:16, NIV)

Notes for Matthew -- Chapter 15 (Page 5 of 6)

Verses 25-28: 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.

1. The woman says in effect, "Yes, the food is for those at the table. But even the household dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall off the 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."
2. The most important lesson to learn here is that she changed her perspective from "Son of David" to just plain "Lord". She calls Jesus "Lord" twice in this passage.
3. Jesus is the "Son of David" to the Jews, but primarily he is Lord to us-Gentiles.
4. Notice Jesus answers her prayers once she has her perspective right.
 - a. God often delays answering our prayers for the same reason. He says "no" until we ask in the proper context. (Example: Praying for something not because we're good people, but praying for something because it is God's will to answer that prayer.)

Verses 29-31: Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. ³⁰ Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. ³¹ The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

1. In Mark 7:31, we learn that this is the northeast area of the Sea of Galilee called Decapolis. Decapolis means "10 towns". This is "Gentile Country".
2. We even get a clue that this is Gentile-country in Verse 31 as it says, "they praised the God of Israel." If these were Jews, the verse would have just read "God" as opposed to the God of Israel.
3. The word of Jesus spread around the area. "Quick, that Jesus guy is here, bring out the sick and crippled. Let's see what Jesus will do!" Boy, is that an attitude we can learn from!"
 - a. Visualize people without legs suddenly having legs. Picture people blind, or deaf and/or mute from birth suddenly seeing and hearing and speaking as if they were never born with those deficiencies.

Verse 32: Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

1. This verse could mean that either the locals haven't eaten for three days, or now, after three days, they were really hungry as the food supply is gone.
2. The principal here is that Jesus doesn't heal people and say, "Go on your merry way!" ☺
3. Even after He performed all of these miracles, he still had compassion on this Gentile multitude and was concerned about their hunger. A great lesson to all of us that Jesus cares about our basic needs as well. There were "saved" and "unsaved" among this crowd that ate the food.

Verse 33: His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"

1. In Chapter 14, Jesus just feed the "5,000". Maybe they forgot. Guys have bad memories! ☺
2. I suspect the disciples had some prejudice because the multitudes were Gentiles. They could understand Jesus miraculously feeding a large crowd of Jews, but Gentiles?

Notes for Matthew -- Chapter 15 (Page 6 of 6)

Verses 34-38: "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish." ³⁵ He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. ³⁶ Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. ³⁷ They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ³⁸ The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children.

1. Here is the miracle of Jesus feeding "The 4,000".
2. In the last chapter, I told you to consider the possibility that the feeding of the "5,000" was a "Jewish thing" and that the feeding of the "4,000" had word-pictures for Gentile salvation.
3. Some really bad liberal commentators argue that both the "5,000" and the "4,000" are the same miracle, but the internal evidence says otherwise.

Comparison of the "Feeding of the 4,000 here in Chapter 15 with the "5,000 Feeding" of Chapter 14

1. In the "5,000" miracle, Jesus multiplied five loaves and a two fish. A total of 12 basketfuls were collected of leftovers when everybody was stuffed.
 - a. In this "4,000" miracle, Jesus multiplied seven loaves a "few" fish. A total of 7 basketfuls were collected of leftovers when everybody was stuffed.
2. The original word for "basket" is different in each story.
 - a. A Jewish "basket" is a small basket; say the size of a small breadbasket.
 - b. The word for "basket" in the "4,000 feeding" is a different word.
 - a. This "basket" is more like the size of a small clothes hamper.
 - c. Women commonly carried around baskets for storage and transportation of items.
3. With the "5,000", 12 basketfuls of leftovers were collected. There are 12 Jewish disciples. Many also tie the number "12" with the 12 tribes of Israel. The "5,000" was very "Jewish".
 - a. With the "4,000", the audience was primarily Gentiles. The leftovers were seven large baskets. What does "7" represent to a Jewish reader of Matthew?
 - b. The number "7" represents completeness or wholeness. On the 7th day, God rested from his work (Genesis 2:2). The Sabbath, the day of rest is the 7th day of the Jewish week.
4. One of the promises is that Jesus will be a "light to the Gentiles"
 - a. "Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (Isaiah 49:6, NIV)
 - b. This promise is that Jesus will restore the "preserved ones of Israel", a reference to Jewish believers and that Jesus will be a "light to the Gentiles" referring to Gentile believers.
5. Remember that many Jews think of the Messiah as being for "them-only" and that the Messiah would rule over the Gentiles like a conquered people. Jesus is teaching otherwise through the feeding of the "5,000" (a Jewish crowd) and the "4,000", (primary a Gentile crowd).

Verse 39: After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

1. Magadan is one of the few places in the bible where archeologists have not yet discovered the exact location.
2. The simple point is Jesus finished his ministry to the Decaplois region and it was time to move on elsewhere.
3. I notice that Matthew never misses an opportunity to mention whenever Jesus goes off by himself, or at least desires that opportunity. It is as if Matthew doesn't want us to miss the point of Jesus desire for solitude at times to be with the Father.