

Introduction

God is jealous. The Bible says so. But when it says he is jealous, it does not mean he resents not having what rightfully what belongs to someone else. He is the great I Am, the eternally self-existing God, and everything that is belongs to him. God is jealous to require everything for himself that belongs to him. It is only right. It is only right that the one true God seeks his glory. He is worthy of worship. It is only right that when the disciples had their eyes opened to see Jesus who is able to rule over the water that they worshiped him saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God." But whenever God is displaying his glory and especially when he is receiving his due, there is one being in the world who has made it his business to interfere. He is jealous too, but he wants for himself what belongs to God alone. In the midst of an undeniable crescendo of the display of Christ's glory, along come emissaries of the devil to attempt to turn the volume down. This is what unfolds as Matthew 14 concludes and Matthew 15 commences.

[Read Text; Pray]

After Matthew tells of the death of John the Baptist, he relates how Jesus took the public demonstration of his deity to another level. There was the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Later that same night Jesus walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee. And when he got into the boat, the stormy wind became still. Rightly the disciples worshiped Jesus, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God." Now that he and the disciples have crossed over, Matthew tells of yet another instance of divine power which adds to the mass of evidence he is compiling to demonstrate that Jesus is truly, unmistakably, and irrefutably the messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God.

I. The Omnipotent Power of the Son of God

A. When Jesus and the disciples crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. It stands quite in contrast to the desolate area where Jesus had fed the multitudes. For one thing the place was on the west side of the sea opposite from the desolate place. For another it was a wonderfully

fertile area. Jesus has gone from a desolate place to an area of agricultural luxuriance. And people need him just as much in one place as the other.

People in the poorest countries of the world need Jesus. People in the wealthiest countries of the world need Jesus. Poor people in the United States need Jesus, but the wealthy people in the United States need him just as much.

We need him just as much in plenty as in want. Our lives involve all kinds of experiences and conditions. Sometimes it seems we are in a desolate place where there is loneliness and the outward resources are sparse. We may feel more keenly our need of Christ in those circumstances. Other times it seems we are in a place of abundance from an earthly standpoint. At those times we are tempted to get our eyes off the Lord. We may feel as though we can coast along, but the fact is we need him in every circumstance. Material abundance does not equate with spiritual strength and wellness.

B. The people in Gennesaret recognized Jesus. They had heard, perhaps many had been witnesses, of this man's miraculous ability to heal the sick and cast out demons. And so when they recognized Jesus, what did they do? Matthew tells us they sent around to all the region and brought to him all who were sick. I can imagine the scene. The townsfolk are excited. The man they had been hearing so much about from friends in the region, the man who had healed lepers and paralytics and deformities—he was now right there in their town. He was accessible to the people in their region. By all means it was their opportunity for healing! So they sent out the word. He is here! Come! Come quickly! Bring Aunt Martha and tell Uncle James. Tell them Jesus is here! Such excitement!

I went to see Al Piggott before his surgery this week. Following that accident 5 years ago, he has been in constant pain in his knee. But the doctors replaced that knee and brought him relief. He wasn't looking forward to the surgery, but he was looking forward to relief. Don't you know the people of Gennesaret were thrilled—all kinds of ailments relieved and without surgery and without medicine!

So they spread the word and they went to the sick and they brought them to Jesus! They actually believed that Jesus could change the lives of people all around them and so they were shameless to point them to him. These folks are an example to us who possess the glorious hope of Jesus Christ in the gospel. There is a spiritual illness that runs deeper and is more debilitating and lethal than any biological disease of any kind. It is sin. What Jesus was able to do for these who came to him for physical healing, he will do even more for those who will come to him for spiritual healing. And we who know he is here need to get out the word. As the Christmas season approaches, opportunities abound to tell neighbors, friends, co-workers, and family. We need to tell. The healer is here. The savior has come. Come to him in faith and be made whole.

C. Now when folks came to Jesus, it is remarkable what was happening. They implored Jesus that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well. Why do you think people came imploring Jesus to merely touch the fringe of his garment? Do you think they probably had heard about the woman with the 12-year hemorrhage? Remember her? Jesus was on his way to raise a ruler's daughter from the dead. As he passed through the streets of Capernaum, this woman touched the fringe of his garment and was healed. Jesus proceeded and raised the ruler's daughter and Matthew 9:26 says that the report of this went through all that district. Yes, I think they had heard about it.

But what is significant about it? It stresses the most peripheral way in which you could have contact with Jesus. It is touching Jesus on the outermost perimeter. It is just the slightest touch. And just the slightest touch with Jesus, even contact with only the fringe of his garment, brought healing to all the sick who touched it. The point is that Jesus did not have to be the one to touch them, they could touch him even on the fringe and experience his healing power. These details serve to highlight omnipotent power of Christ. He is so powerful that even touching the fringe of his garment resulted in healing not just for the woman in Capernaum but now for the masses in Gennesaret. He fed the multitude; he walked on water; he stilled the wind; and now multitudes of sick are healed by as little as touching the fringe of Jesus's garment. The disciples worshiped Jesus

saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God." And the evidence continues to mount.

But there is something else we need to see here as we think about the fringe. Numbers 15:38 contains this instruction from the Lord to Moses. "Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord to do them. . . . so you shall remember and do all my commandments and be holy to your God."

Think with me. Why is there sickness in the world? The ultimate answer is because there is sin. It is part of the curse. It is because we have broken God's law. To touch the fringe; to touch the tassel is to touch the very thing that was meant to bring the law of God to remembrance. How can it be that law breakers can touch a reminder of the law they have broken and be healed of the consequences of the law? Because the one whose tassel they were touching kept God's law perfectly and completely.

I somehow think that most who touched the fringe of Jesus' garment missed the witness of this event that day, but we should not. Here is the gospel. Touching Jesus on the tassel of his garment is a reminder of God's law. To think of that law calls to mind one thing about ourselves—we are law-breakers. It should call to mind another thing about Jesus—he is the perfect Son of God, the perfect law keeper. And he is the rescuer of law-breakers who turn to him for healing from their inner corruption due to sin. Have you touched the fringe of Jesus' garment? Have you come to the awareness that you are a breaker of God's law? You are guilty. You deserve all the consequences that rebellion against God can bring. Will you repent of your sin and trust the great law-keeper who also died for your lawlessness that you might be healed?

People who are sick and people who hurt know they need a doctor. People who have come to know they have broken God's law need a Savior. Jesus is that Savior. The converted need to send out the word. And the unconverted need to come. Are you wondering how to come this morning?

You come by faith. Admit you are a sinner and turn away from sin. Trust in Jesus to cleanse you from your sin and make you right with God.

II. The Decisive Authority of the Word of God

The powerful and confirming miracles of Matthew 14 attest to the confession of the disciples that TRULY Jesus is the Son of God. Against that backdrop, sinister characters turn up in Gennesaret whose purpose is to discredit him. Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem. These were the big kahunas from corporate headquarters down in Jerusalem. Genessaret was located 70 miles or so north of Jerusalem. Today that does not seem so far, because we can cover that distance in an hour in a car. But at that time this was a multi-day trip even on the back of a donkey.

Already the scribes and Pharisees were seen as the religious cream, but here was the cream of the cream—the best educated and highest ranking scribes and Pharisees from headquarters. And what do they have to say?

Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? Yes! That is what they said. They asked a question. Now understand, these men were not coming to learn. They were coming to accuse. They were like a police officer confronting a driver, Why did you not stop at the red light? Their citation booklets are out and they are already writing.

The charge was “not washing their hands when they eat.” Now you have to know they were not concerned with germs. We all know how important it is to wash our hands. But they did not have the knowledge we have. The reference is to a ceremonial washing prescribed nowhere in the Bible but a tradition of the Jewish ancestors which had been canonized as a matter of righteousness. The disciples of Jesus worship him as the Son of God, and the people of Gennesaret turn out in droves to receive healing, and the scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem turn up to ask why Jesus’ disciples do not follow the traditions of the elders. They have raised their man made traditions above the law of God.

And Jesus calls them on it: “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” He specifically cites the provision made by the traditions. They had created a stipulation by which Jews could

declare their goods as “belonging to God.” The technical word is korban. Anything that was korban was not available help even one’s parents, but if one chose he could un-declare the korban for himself.

Rightly Jesus indicts these people for putting man’s traditions above the law of God. They are the real criminals here because for the sake of their tradition they make void the word of God.

Jesus himself here establishes the authority of the Bible. There is one body of authoritative teaching. It is God’s word. Nothing must be allowed to stand in opposition to it. As it stands, the word of God is the decisive authority. We must not encourage what God’s word discourages. We must not stand in opposition to what it teaches and commands. This is difficult. Not because God’s word is difficult to understand but because the world opposes God’s word. The pressure of the world against the word is being felt keenly in our day. What God’s word calls murder, our society calls a choice. What God’s word calls an abomination, our world calls an orientation. What God’s word calls speaking the truth in love, the world calls hate and phobia. What God’s word teaches about gender roles, the world rejects as inequality.

To stand on the word of God, you will face enmity. You will face resistance. You will be considered old-fashioned and out of touch. You will be ridiculed. Churches are caving one after the other to various winds that blow from culture. But God’s word stands forever. It has never needed a revised edition, and it never will. Sometimes interpretations need to be revised, but never the word. Stand with it and you stand with Christ. But if you make void the word of God with your own ideas, you are standing against God.

III. The Colossal Vanity of the Heartless Worship of God

Jesus reissues a charge against the scribes and Pharisees coming from the prophet Isaiah. They teach as doctrines the commandments of men. They devalue what God has said and exalt what man says. They fear man not God. They worship the ideas of humanity and resist the commands of their creator. They are hypocrites because they act like they care about God. They want to look like they honor God. But this honor is dishonor. It is false; it is fake. Their worship is a sham. They want to look like they

worship God, but they have no heart for him. They engage in acts of worship but their worship is worthless. It is vain, empty, useless. And it evidences itself in a rejection of the word of God. But that rejection stems from a heart that is far from God.

It is a riveting thought that there is worship and then there is worship. It is not the worship of idols that Jesus impugns here. It is the worship of God. We are not talking about pagans or people who have no access to the truth of God. We are talking about people who boldly claim to be worshipers and who engage in acts they identify as worship. But Jesus says it is in vain. It is to no purpose. It is all an empty show.

The matter at the heart of worship is that it is a matter of the heart. You can have right doctrine and yet worship God in vain. This was the case with the church in Ephesus to which Jesus spoke in Revelation. They were right on many counts, "but," said Jesus, "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."

You can attend church every Sunday of your life, serve in a church ministry, do social work, you can even hand out gospel tracts and yet worship God in vain. The question is, "where is your heart?" Do you love God or the applause of men? Do you love God or fear the opinions of men? Do you want to keep God at arms' length, or do you want to be as close as you can possibly be?

It may have been a display of Christ's power that the people of Gennesaret were healed MERELY by the touch of the fringe of his garment, but if you really love him, you want to be far closer to him than the fringe. You want your heart and his to merge together. You want to be in Christ and have Christ in you. You want to remain in him like a branch is in the vine. You have his commands and you want to keep them not teach against them.

Another sign of vain worship is when people suppose themselves to be worshipers but who look to God for what they want but not for what he wants. This is rampant in our day. Soft cultural Christianity is all about what God can do for you. But what about truth? What about the

commands of God? What about standing with his word and embracing the tough truths? What about bowing before a God who is holy, holy, holy?

Conclusion

The third of the Ten Commandments is "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." In this context we are certainly mindful of the sin of using God's name as an expression of disgust or anger. But John MacArthur writes the following:

It has been said that God's name is taken in vain more often inside the church than outside. His name is taken in vain whenever it is mechanically used in repetitious prayers and liturgies, in singing His praise while having no thought of Him, and in praying thoughtlessly and without genuine devotion. His name is taken in vain through empty worship perhaps more than any other way. (448)

I close with a soul-searching question for each of us: are you worshiping in truth or in vain. Are you holding God's name in honor or are you taking it in vain. It is not merely a question of what comes out of your mouth when you are surprised or angry. It also pertains to what is in your heart when you sing songs purported to be of worship. Certainly all of us have some serious consideration to give.

We may have come to Christ by metaphorically touching the fringe of his garment, but let us not linger on the fringe, let us draw nearer, nearer, nearer still. And let us gird our hearts for him.