

Matthew 15:1-39      The Gospel for the Nations  
1 Kings 17  
Psalm 42

June 7, 2015 (Peter)

In the story of the book of Kings,  
    the raising of the Sidonian widow's son  
    is crucial moment.

There is another Sidonian woman, Jezebel,  
    who is queen of Israel.

She has prompted her husband, King Ahab, to build a temple to Baal.  
    So as the Sidonian princess Jezebel spurs her husband  
        to provoke the LORD to anger against Israel,  
        the LORD sends his prophet, Elijah, to a Sidonian widow.  
    And Elijah raises her son from the dead.

The book of Kings will make the point over and over again –  
    that Israel is going to die.  
Israel will not escape death.

Israel's hope is *not* that a good king will save them,  
    or that strict adherence to the temple rituals will protect them,  
    or that some prophet will help them escape death.

No, Israel is going to die.  
    Israel's *hope* – and *your hope* –  
        is not that you will escape death,  
        but that you serve a God who raises the dead!

But don't expect God to do it in the way that you expect!  
    After all, how did God teach Israel to hope in the resurrection?  
    By raising a Sidonian widow's son!

Our Psalm of response – Psalm 42 –  
    also comes from the northern parts of Israel.  
It speaks of Mt Hermon in the north –  
    the rushing waters and waterfalls of the Jordan River *north* of the Sea of Galilee.

Psalm 42 is a great baptismal Psalm –  
    as it speaks of the waters of the LORD pouring over us,  
        as we pass through the waters of judgment, rising from death into life everlasting!

Sing Psalm 42A  
Read Matthew 15

[glass of water]

Why is there water on the floor?  
You might say, “because someone bumped your hand.”  
But why is there *water* on the floor?  
Because there was water in the cup!

Whatever is in your heart will come out when you get bumped!

I’m amazed at what God has done in the heart of our brother, Rolf Caylor.

He didn’t just get “bumped” last week –  
he got body slammed!  
Four days in the ICU – and then transferred to Hospice,  
where there is so much bitterness and fear.  
But you look at what has come out in his words and deeds,  
and you hear grace, mercy, and love.

And that is what you should expect to see from those who trust in Jesus.

You see that contrast in the people who encounter Jesus in Matthew 15.  
Hypocrisy flows from the hearts of the Pharisees –  
who *want* people to admire and follow them,  
but are, in fact, blind guides of the blind.  
When Jesus “bumps” them, they are offended.

On the other hand, trust and confidence radiate from the Canaanite woman.  
She believes in Jesus – no matter what he says to her!  
When Jesus “body slams” her, she holds fast to him all the more.

I want you to think about this.

Jesus says offensive things to both the Pharisees and the Canaanite woman.  
He calls the Pharisees “blind guides.”  
He calls the Canaanite woman a “dog.”  
Why do they respond so differently?  
Because of what is their hearts.

We saw this in the parable of the seed and the soils in Matthew 13.

The word will only take root – and bear fruit – in good soil.  
Will you be offended by Jesus – and walk away?  
Or will his words cause you to pursue him that much harder?

We start with the bad example – the Pharisees.

## **1. “Eating with Unwashed Hands”: How to Think about “Clean” and “Unclean” (v1-20)**

### **a. Scripture and Tradition: How Do You Know What to Do? (v1-9)**

*Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup> “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.”*

Children, why do you wash your hands before you eat?  
Because your hands have touched all sorts of things –  
and eating with unwashed hands might make you sick!

That's *not* what the Pharisees are talking about.  
They are not concerned about germs (they didn't know about germs back then).  
They are concerned about being "unclean."

Being "unclean" in the OT wasn't about being "dirty."  
It meant that you could not participate in the worship of God.

The Law of Moses was very clear that if you touch something unclean,  
then you also become unclean.  
Leviticus 15 gives a list of examples of unclean things –  
and in verse 11 specifies that if you touch someone who is unclean,  
then you become unclean *unless you rinse your hands in water*.

So, for instance, a dead body is unclean.  
Or if a woman is having her period, she is unclean.  
Or if someone has a skin disease, he is unclean.

And whatever they touch is unclean.  
So, if you go to the market and you happen to bump into an unclean person,  
then you are now unclean (even if you don't know it).

The Pharisees were *very* concerned about this!  
How do you deal with *accidental* contagion?  
This is what the Pharisees mean by the "tradition of the elders."

The Pharisees got fixated on the mechanics of contagion,  
and so developed a simple system:  
since you didn't know whether you had touched anything unclean,  
by washing your hands before each meal,  
you could avoid "accidental contagion."

Notice that Jesus doesn't even bother answering the question.  
He recognizes what is at the *heart* of their question.  
The Pharisees are not *really* concerned with loving and obeying *God*.  
The Pharisees are preoccupied with maintaining the "traditions of the elders."

"Washing hands" isn't really the *point*.  
The *point* is *what is the source of authority* that you pay attention to.

They are not asking, *what does God say?*  
They are asking, what do the traditions of the elders say?

Jesus points this out in his response:

<sup>3</sup> *He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”* <sup>4</sup> *For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’* <sup>5</sup> *But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,”* <sup>[a]</sup> <sup>6</sup> *he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word<sup>[b]</sup> of God.*

The Pharisees would allow people to devote their property to God,  
rather than provide for their parents.

And here’s the kicker:

while the property was “devoted” to God, the owner could still use it.

God said “Honor your father and mother.”

Traditions that help us to honor our parents are a good thing!

But traditions that allow us to evade honoring our parents are *not*.

In other words, Jesus says that the *word of God* trumps the traditions of men.

If you think about it, the Pharisees have a very “Roman Catholic” view of tradition.

They think of tradition as the authoritative interpretation of the Word.

There is nothing in scripture about the Bishop of Rome being the successor of Peter,  
but they claim that the Bishop of Rome has supremacy over the whole Christian church.

In the middle ages, Peter Abelard read the book of Romans  
and said that it sure looked like Paul taught justification by faith alone –  
but since the Pope said that Paul didn’t, therefore Paul didn’t.

Of course, you don’t have to be Roman Catholic to allow tradition to trump the word of God!

It can happen to all of us!

We develop our “shorthand” summaries of biblical teaching –

and then we get so used to saying it that way,

that pretty soon, we forget that the Bible doesn’t really say it that way.

And before you know it, we are trying to force the whole Bible into that way of thinking,  
with the result that we allow the traditions of men to make void the word of God.

Listen to how Jesus says it:

<sup>7</sup> *You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:*

<sup>8</sup> *“This people honors me with their lips,*

*but their heart is far from me;*

<sup>9</sup> *in vain do they worship me,*

*teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”*

If you set aside the word of God in order to follow the commandments of men,  
then you worship God in vain.

Let that sink in for a moment!

If you set aside the word of God in order to follow the commandments of men,  
then you worship God in vain.

It's all good and fine for us to disagree about what exactly does God command.

Paul will say that on debatable matters, let each one be convinced in his own mind.

*But*, you don't get to decide what is a debatable matter!

Jesus decides that.

Let me give you an example:

For a hundred years, Baptists, Methodists, *and Presbyterians*  
agreed that drinking alcoholic beverages was a sin.

If you wanted to be a member of a Presbyterian church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> c.,  
you would normally have to take a pledge to abstain from alcoholic beverages.

Now, let me be clear:

I don't care whether you drink alcohol or not.

I'm not saying that people *have to* drink beer or wine or Scotch.

But if you make it a rule that a person cannot be a Christian

unless they abstain from alcoholic beverages,

that is to make the traditions of the elders

more important than the word of God.

And Jesus says that such people worship God *in vain*.

If you teach as doctrine the commandments of men,

then you are not listening to Jesus – you are not listening to the Word of God.

After all,

*What defiles a person?*

#### **b. The Heart and the Mouth: What Defiles a Person? (v10-20)**

<sup>10</sup> And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand: <sup>11</sup> it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.”

<sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” <sup>13</sup> He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. <sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides.<sup>[c]</sup> And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” <sup>15</sup> But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” <sup>16</sup> And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup> Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled?<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>18</sup> But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

Jesus says that the Pharisees have missed the point of the Law.

They are blind guides.  
They thought that what mattered was keeping outside influences out.  
But Jesus says that the *point* of the Law was *not* about what goes into the mouth!  
The point is what comes *out* of the heart!

Nothing outside of you can force you to think evil thoughts.  
Nothing outside of you can make you commit murder, adultery, sexual immorality.

You cannot say, “He made me steal.”

When you get bumped, what is in your heart will come out.

Why do you think evil thoughts?  
Why do you speak harshly to others?  
Why do you lust?  
Why do you get angry?

Jesus says that these things come out of your heart.

Why does Jesus say all this?

Jesus is speaking to the crowds – he is talking to his disciples – about the Pharisees –  
all of whom are Jewish.

The purity laws were all oriented to distinguish between Jew and Gentile.

And yet Jesus leaves there and goes to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

## **2. And Jesus Went *Where*? The Lost Sheep and the Dogs (v21-28)**

<sup>21</sup> *And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.*

Tyre and Sidon are along the coast of modern Lebanon, north of Israel.

Hiram, king of Tyre, had made a treaty with David  
and had helped Solomon with the building of the temple.

But after a few generations, Tyre turned away from the house of David.

Indeed, the King of Tyre entered a marriage alliance with Ahab, king of Israel,  
by giving him his daughter, Jezebel, as wife.

We read 1 Kings 17 – which reminds us of Jezebel –  
and also of how God showed mercy to another woman of Tyre and Sidon –  
the Sidonian widow.

Even as the Sidonian princess Jezebel destroys the people of Israel,  
God shows mercy to a Sidonian widow, and raises up her son.

Now, more than 800 years later, God again shows mercy to Tyre and Sidon.

Jesus will use language that is shocking – and sounds cruel –  
but on the other hand, this is the *only thing that Jesus does here*.  
Matthew seems to suggest that Jesus came to Tyre and Sidon for this very purpose.

His shocking and seemingly cruel language is more for our benefit than for hers!  
Some commentators have even wondered if Jesus' non-verbal cues  
made it clear that he *meant* the exact opposite of what he said!

Certainly this Canaanite woman took him that way –  
and Matthew wants us to agree with her!

<sup>22</sup> *And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."*

Notice that she addresses him as "Son of David."

She is a Canaanite, but she recognizes that the Son of David is her only hope!  
This is remarkable.

God had condemned the Canaanites.

They were under his wrath and curse.

When God sent Joshua into the land, he told Joshua to exterminate the Canaanites.

If Israel had obeyed God, this woman would not have been alive!

Her family had been dispossessed by Israel four hundred years before.

If you think about the history between these nations,  
a Canaanite woman from Tyre would look at the Son of David  
very much like a Palestinian would look at an Israeli ruler today.

But when her daughter is oppressed by a demon,  
she comes to the Son of David, begging him to help her.

We saw a couple weeks ago that demons typically torment people.

Demons do not cause you to sin –

we should not talk about demons of "fear" or "pride" –

but rather demons that torment and afflict.

But Jesus says nothing:

<sup>23</sup> *But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."* <sup>24</sup> *He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

This is a curious exchange.

Jesus *says* that he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.

And yet Jesus is in the region of Tyre and Sidon – where *very few* Jews lived.

Undoubtedly the disciples were wondering, "What are we doing here?"

If you are looking for lost sheep, you should probably go somewhere where you can find them!

<sup>25</sup> *But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”* <sup>26</sup> *And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.”*

Jesus “bumps” her hard!

Calling someone a dog doesn't sound very nice to us.

In fact, it would have sounded worse to them – because dogs were not beloved pets, but largely scavengers who were useful for pest control.

And if this woman of Tyre and Sidon was familiar with the story of Jezebel, the reference to dogs would be even worse!

As Elijah said of Jezebel (2 Kings 9:36),

“This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite: ‘In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel.’”

It may sound cruel – but we need to remember that our Lord Jesus does not lie.

He calls her a dog – because that's what she is.

And she agrees:

<sup>27</sup> *She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.”*

Yes, Lord, I am a dog.

You can see that what is in her heart is what comes out when Jesus bumps her:

This Canaanite woman has put her faith and trust in the Son of David. She believes the Word of God – not the traditions of men.

And so she accepts what her Lord says about her!

I am a dog!

But if I am a dog – I am *your* dog.

You are my Lord – you are my master –

and even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.

<sup>28</sup> *Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.*

Jesus says, “Okay, you win!”

“I cannot dispute your logic.”

Are you willing to be Jesus' dog?

Are you willing to gather scraps at Jesus' feet?

What will come out of your heart when Jesus bumps you?

And then immediately Jesus starts doing for the Gentiles what he had been doing for the Jews.



Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon for this very purpose –  
so that the Gentiles might receive the “crumbs” from the children’s table.

And that is the focus of the “good news for the nations” in verses 29-39:

### **3. The Good News for the Nations (v29-39)**

#### **a. Jesus Heals the Nations (v29-31)**

*<sup>29</sup> Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. <sup>30</sup> And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, <sup>31</sup> so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.*

Verse 31 refers to how they glorified ‘the God of Israel.’

In other words these are *not* Israelites.

They are Gentiles who glorify the God of Israel because of what Jesus does in their midst

“Crumbs from the table?”

Jesus appears to be doing now for the Gentiles what he had done for the Jews!

And he demonstrates this most clearly in giving them “bread from heaven” as well:

#### **b. Jesus Feeds the Nations (v32-39)**

*<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” <sup>33</sup> And the disciples said to him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?” <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” <sup>35</sup> And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>38</sup> Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. <sup>39</sup> And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.*

Jesus is literally taking the children’s bread and giving it to dogs!

Last time I told you that the feeding of the five thousand was a parable.

Jesus performs this symbolic action – but does not explain it.

Now Jesus feeds the four thousand – and does not explain it.

At the beginning of the next chapter, Jesus will begin to explain it.

The disciples have no bread.

Jesus says, “Do you not yet perceive?”

Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand,  
and how many baskets you gathered?

Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered.”

The disciples' heads must have been spinning.

You just said that we shouldn't give the children's bread to dogs –  
but now you are doing for the dogs *exactly what you did for us!*

Because now the dogs are becoming children.

The Gentiles are about to be brought into the family of Jesus –  
and here in Matthew 15, Jesus gives us a taste of it!

“We do not presume to come to this your Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your Table. But you are the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he is in us. Amen.”