

## Hypocrisy (Matthew 15.1-9)

Matthew continues his mission today in chapter fifteen, writing to reveal for his Jewish audience —his biological brothers & sisters— that Jesus—whom they crucified—truly is the long-awaited Messiah: the Son of God became the Son of Man. The King and His Kingdom have arrived. In order to prove as much, Matthew attested to Jesus' miracles & power, of His mastery & supremacy over disease, distance, over man, the natural realm, as well as the supernatural realm, over satan, demons, and, most importantly, His authority of the Word of God.

We've seen some conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees so far, but in chapter 15, things really start to heat up! False, religious leaders continue their efforts to find fault with Jesus. If they can just show what a law breaker He is, maybe the crowds will give up following Him & return to following them.

1 These aren't just any Pharisees here in chapter 15. There's a reason Matthew mentions where they're from. These are special: from Jerusalem, the apex, the headquarters of the Jewish faith. These are the ivy leaguers—if you will—of Judaism. No one knows the law better than these men; no one had as much access to the ancient scrolls; no one memorized more of the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Prophets, the Torah like these scholars. These are the best of the best: full of knowledge... and, as is often the case, full of themselves. And now, they just can't bite their tongue any longer. They've tolerated as much as they can. Enough is enough. By their standards, Jesus' disciples—this motley crew of ministers—are running amuck with reckless abandon, wreaking havoc throughout the area, spreading their lawlessness & despicable ways. Let's listen in as they rush upon Jesus with their grave concerns:

2 Now, whose tradition were the disciples breaking? The *elders*: supposedly wise, ancient, dead Rabbis of the past. Richard Baxter once said, "Men think God's laws too many and too strict, and yet [they] make more of their own, and are precise [about keeping them]."

What is it that had these religious men all up in arms? Were swindlers selling sacrifices on the front lawn of the synagogue? Was someone murdered? caught in adultery? Maybe someone was barbecuing on the Sabbath? What was their accusation? Had someone lied in court, failed to show compassion to a stranger, betrayed rather than loved their neighbor? Why were these religious leaders so upset? What part of God's law had been broken?

The disciples didn't wash their hands properly before dinner.

They hadn't broken God's law, but they had violated some dead Jewish man's tradition.

Why do we wash our hands? Well, to get the dirt off. If you came in contact with someone or something unclean, the law said, “you better wash your hands before you eat.” Yes, God did command the washing of hands, but He never suggested anything mystically meritorious about it. The Father loves His children so He taught them good hygiene. Nowhere does the OT say that “washing hands is the way to spiritual blessing.”

But in no time Rabbis turned God’s Word-on-washing into something more like “*ceremonial rinsing*”. And that’s when all question poured in: “How clean is clean? How long should one wash? How much water should be used?” For every question, every Rabbi had an answer. Just to give you an idea, listen to the data MacArthur gathered in his commentary:

Water jars were kept ready to be used before every meal. The minimum amount of water to be used was a quarter of a log, enough to fill one and a half eggshells. The water was first poured on both hands, held with the fingers pointing upward; and it must run down the arms as far as the wrist and drop off from the wrist, for the water was now itself unclean, having touched the unclean hands. And if it ran down the fingers again it would render them unclean. The process was repeated with hands held in the downward direction, fingers pointing down. And finally each hand was cleansed by being rubbed with the fist of the other. A strict Jew would do this before every meal and between every course in every meal.

If they took hand washing this far, imagine how much argument there was with the other levitical laws? Point being: Pharisees weren’t calling people to repent—to turn to God for grace. They were all about covering up sin, not exposing it & cleansing it. God’s Word got buried beneath a bunch of rituals they’d made up in order to make it look like they were faithful.

But Jesus wasn’t fooled, not at all. They tried to pin Him on breaking the tradition of the elders. And...

3-4 Nice ol’ Jesus. Always so soft & sweet, encouraging us to do whatever *feels* right; never a stern word. Ha! His response is nothing less than a counter punch! He didn’t deny their accusation; later He’d explain how worthless the ritual was, but for now He wouldn’t even answer such foolishness. He just turned to them & revealed how ridiculous their traditions had become: traditions that were supposed to be for the sake of keeping God’s commands.

They made their point citing *tradition*. Jesus made His point citing the *5th Commandment!* *Hello!* Then, from Exodus 21.17, He declared the penalty for breaking it: “Whoever reviles their parents must surely die.” Included in the fifth commandment is a clear mandate to love,

respect, support, and provide whatever means possible to care for our folks. One of their traditions had it right. It implied that even if it required begging on the street corner, they ought to provide for their folks. But, low & behold, another tradition trumped it:

5-6 Don't forget, these were the most educated Jews on the planet. Without a doubt, they knew the 5th Commandment AND they knew their tradition made a way out of it: *"No need to look out for your folks. Just call it 'korban: given to God,' and you get to keep it all: all your money, your things, your resources... and spend it all satisfying yourself!"* This tradition wasn't meant for serving the Lord or serving anyone's parents. It was an effort to twist God's Word into serving the self. The very shepherds responsible for leading God's sheep were knowingly & willfully endorsing a tradition that made void the clear commandment of God.

7-9 This is the first recorded instance of Jesus calling the Pharisees "hypocrites". They were ignoring God's Word, but created a way to make it *look like* they were keeping it.

Jesus' words here are very interesting. He doesn't say, "you hypocrites are *similar* to the the ones Isaiah had to deal with." No, not similar, but "you ARE those Isaiah prophesied about." Exactly like those in Isaiah's day, the warning was to Jews, from Jerusalem, who held to a form of religion that actually denied God's Word. They thought themselves to be the keepers of God's Word, but actually, Jesus says, what they were keeping was the spirit of rebellion that Isaiah prophesied 700 years before.

We don't typically need God to pull off our traditions. We can just *do* them, like robots: no conviction, repentance or devotion necessary. Spurgeon once said, *"If there weren't Sunday morning services at 11a, I wonder how many of you would be Christians?"* It so easily becomes "just what we do": we go; we socialize; we "network". But none of it requires any real faith or sacrifice? None of it depends upon God. None of it requires a removal of the old, proud, selfish heart, that must be replaced with a forgiven, humble, soft heart. [pause]

Dear friend, "Test yourself to see if you are really of the faith." -2Co13.5

Could it be that your religious rituals have you persuaded that 'everything is fine' when just the opposite is the case? Has your heart been transformed? Have you surrendered to God Almighty, handed over the reigns of your life to His Spirit & Word? Or could it be that you're just going through the Sunday morning motions, just as hypocritical as any good Pharisees from Jerusalem caught up with outward appearances, rather than real matters of the heart?

Let's test ourselves: *How well do you know your neighbors?* [slow] Surely there are some you probably don't know well, and that's probably never really bothered you that much, right? But

what if you were coming home one day from work, and you noticed they'd put a *Hillary* sign in their yard, or maybe one of those "vote for.." or "vote against this next bond." Now how do you feel about that neighbor? Isn't it amazing how, now, all of the sudden, you start taking a little more interest in "What's going on over there?" You start noticing how loud their kids are, how long their grass grows, or how filthy their car is. But not once—not once—has the thought ever entered your mind of where they're going to spend eternity, of whether or not they know the Lord, of how you might pray for them, or reach out to them in Christian love with your Restore family. Who knows? They might just be planning how to reach you with the Gospel?

See, by nature, we tend to care more about the externals than the internals & eternal.

We're really no different today than those scribes & Pharisees were back then. The human heart is broken: it does not function properly, doesn't work right; doesn't love by default. Unless, by grace, you have been infected by the Spirit of Christ, your heart is so broken you don't know even know you're a hypocrite. But oh what grace He has for His beloved when—in His mercy—He reveals just how needy we are for the same salvation as that of our neighbors.

Listen, we can squirm under conviction... or we can confess it, give it to Him, and let Him have it out. He disciplines those He loves, church family. If you feel the weight of such sin today, Praise God! He could have left you alone to keep nourishing it instead.

But before we get too devastated by our darkness, let us be reminded, Beloved, that our guilt is not Matthew's main mission! This isn't mainly about the failures of the P/S, or ours. Matthew means to fix our eyes, not on our sin, but on our Savior. Look at Him in this passage. Notice how different He is from us. He isn't worriedly wondering about, making sure everyone is impressed with His religion. Look at His confidence: zero intimidation, He does not back down. Look at His righteousness: He upholds the absolute brilliance of God's Law, He doesn't try to evade or explain it away. Look at Him honoring His father & mother as He upholds the Word of His heavenly Father, reminding us of the love & sacrifice that are essential to being a real *Family*. Look at Him proclaim the Way: not loopholes, but simple integrity & righteousness. Finally, look at Him come to the defense of His men: they're under attack, but He steps in, handles the enemy's fiery darts & counter strikes with Truth that silences our foe.

Why was Jesus crucified by the very men He made, by the men that Matthew is testifying to? Why? Because He exposed their hypocrisy, how they so naturally rejected the doctrines of God's grace for doctrines of man that prop up self-righteousness.

And what do such men & their false doctrines deserve? Eternal condemnation, hell, loneliness, separation from life. And yet, what is it that He is offering us this morning in exchange for our sin that nailed Him to the tree at Calvary? Grace! Undeserved favor: forgiveness, the washing away of our sin & the power of His Spirit within: eternal life!

You can continue your religious efforts of trying to convince yourself & impress others, or you can lay down your efforts, lay down your agenda, your ambitions, and surrender your life to the One who suffered in your place: Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

Do you need to confess your hypocrisy, confess your need for Him & His forgiveness, now is the time. If you need prayer or counsel... Perhaps you want to surrender your life to the Lord, you want to follow Him & His Word? Whatever your need is, now is the time. If the elders or I can help in anyway, we will be near the front.

Let's stand and worship together as we prepare for communion.

**SONG:** *All I Have Is Christ*

## **COMMUNION**

**SONG:** *Amazing Grace*

**BENEDICTION:** *Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. –1 Thessalonians 3:11-13*