

Sunday, August 16, 2020

The Heart Condition

We've been journeying through the Gospel of Matthew a very selfless autobiography of Matthews account through dealing with Jesus ministry for three years. We have seen that he doesn't use the word I, and that his portrayal of the disciples is not always real glorifying, shall we say. Instead we see them lacking faith, falling short, in spite of their desires to do what was right. We ended last week with them being scared in a boat and Peter starting to sink in the water. We also hear in Matthews gospel a sense of the immediacy to ministry. He actually uses that word immediately multiple times and instantly multiple times; giving that feeling that when Jesus is in ministry, He's not standing around, He's moving, it's always busy. And finally, Matthew definitely makes it very clear the supremacy of Christ. Unlike His disciples Jesus does feed the 5000; Jesus does walk on the water, Jesus does pull Peter up out of the water He makes the storm to stop, and He immediately has the boat in port.

That is where the gospel reading for today picks up. Let's just lay a little bit of ground work when He got in the port of Gennesaret, which is the Southwest shore of the sea of Galilee, just a couple miles south of Capernaum; we read that the Pharisees and Scribes from Jerusalem were there and they confronted Jesus. Now a lot of times we don't understand exactly who these Pharisees and Scribes were. The Pharisees were the teachers of the law. They were the experts in rabbinical law, we would call that the Mishnah today. It's the traditions that the rabbis came up with based on scripture; but they are not traditions bound in scripture itself. So that's where the Scribes would come in. The Scribes were also experts in the law. They were experts in the Torah. They were experts in the supplied books of the Bible. Especially as we look at Exodus and the Ten Commandments and then the following of ceremonial law. It's worth noting they came from Jerusalem. In other words, this is an official inquiry from the temple headquarters. It would be much like being called before Congress today. Here's their question. Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders where they do not wash their hands when they eat? Now just hearing that, you should know who asked the question. It's in dealing with tradition, it was a Pharisees who were asking this question. Jesus comes back with a question. We've talked about this before, in the system called

rabbinical teaching you keep asking questions until you get to the point where no more questions can be asked. The last question would obviously lead you to truth. So, He comes back with a question. Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? We have it again, the washing of hands is a rabbinical tradition; but it's not found in scripture other than looking at Leviticus 22 verse 6. The priests were to wash their hands before the beginning of the holy office. So, Jesus says, why are you breaking the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? Then He continues on and gives the basis for His question. For God commanded; "Honor your father and mother, the fourth commandment from the Ten Commandments. And then it says whoever reviles father or mother must surely die. That's from Leviticus 20 verse 9.

And then He continues on, but... The giant eraser, but you say, notice this isn't God, this is your tradition. You say, and I quote, "If anyone tells his father or mother what she would have gained from me is given to God." The Hebrew term for given to God is Corbin and the gospel of Mark records it is exactly what Jesus said. What he is referring to is a rabbinical tradition that the Pharisees supported that if a child, a grown child on his own working as a family. Mom and dad got to the point where they needed some help, they have gotten past the working age, they can't work the farm anymore, there's no income coming in, and they need food. That if they ask the son for help, he can say to them, "I can't help you, I've taken a vow and I've taken what I would use to help you and I'm giving it to God. I'm giving it to the temple. They based this on Psalm 116 that we had last week; where the Psalmist said, "what shall I render to the Lord for his benefits?" The second thing was, "I will fulfill my vow." And so, the rabbi said if you designate the money to the temple, then you don't have to give it to your parents. But you need to make sure that you fulfill the law, then you fulfill your vow. So, they could keep their money for the time being, and use it. But oh boy, would they be reminded by those Pharisees. Remember you owe that to the temple, so you need to cut that check here sometime. Then Jesus continues and says, "so for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God. In other words, when the commandment says, honor your father and mother, it is show respect for them, it is care for them, it is love them.

Before those Pharisees can try to come back with some sort of an argument, which would pit them against the Scribes because everything Jesus has said is straight out of the Old Testament; He points out to both the Scribes and the Pharisees and He says, 'You hypocrites.' Then He goes to the book of Isaiah. Well did the prophet write of you; "this people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me teaching as doctrines the commandments. The Pharisees didn't answer a word. The Scribes didn't answer a word. He had them painted into a corner and they knew it. The Pharisees had re-written God's word and the Scribes had not challenged it.

After this the disciples say to Jesus, and boy does this sound like today. 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended? Jesus' response to that is, "They are blind guides. If blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit. This brings us to the Sermon title, "The heart condition." I think all of you have probably heard about atherosclerosis, it is the blockage of the arteries or veins in our heart. It comes from cholesterol. You see, they have a blocked heart and it was their tradition that was like the cholesterol. It was blocking the flow of God's word in their heart; it was blocking the working of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus then addresses what they were saying about the washing of hands and eating the food. He says. "It's not what goes in the mouth that makes a person unclean. Rather it's what comes out of the mouth because what comes out of the mouth originates here, the heart. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us the heart is deceitful above all things. What does Jesus say is in the heart and leads to what comes out of our mouths? He says; evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, disregard for God's word. Which everything he had just listed before is a disregard of the Ten Commandments. And at the same time, it's truly a call for Bible study; because unless you know what the scripture says you can be led astray by blind guides. What comes from a heart that doesn't have spiritual blockage, that has been washed and renewed by the Holy Spirit?

That's where the gospel picks up. Jesus leaves and He takes his disciples to Tyre and Sidon which is on the western shoreline of Israel or what is today Lebanon, but at that time also it wasn't Israel. It was Gentile territory. And so, we read that a Canaanite woman comes to Jesus. Now just right there, that word Canaanite, for those of you who have done Old Testament Bible study. It should ring some bells and some alarm should go off. It was in

Deuteronomy 20:7 that God told Joshua and the children of Israel when they went into the promised land which was called Canaan; they want to destroy the Canaanites because they were Idol worshippers and they would leave the children of Israel astray. So, this woman is a descendant of these Idol worshipers that were supposed to not even exist anymore. The Israelites did not do what God said. She comes to Jesus and she says have mercy on me. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. It's a loaded statement she made. She's basically saying don't give me what I deserve. She knew she was a Canaanite, a Gentile. She knew she was a sinner and she said, "oh Lord, Son of David." She knew scripture. She knew the prophecy concerning the Messiah. He'd be from the lineage of David. Her daughter is severely oppressed by a demon. And we read, "He did not answer her a word." Instead it was the disciples who quote; "begged Jesus send her away for she's crying out after us. She's the nuisance, She's a Canaanite." And Jesus' response was; "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." And the woman hears this, and she came and knelt before Jesus. Kneeling, that's showing total submission, it's showing worship, and she says again, "Lord help me." Almost the exact same words of Peter just a day or two before at the sea of Galilee. Now Jesus addresses her directly and says; "it is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs." Can you imagine saying that to someone today? Calling them a dog? Go to a black lives matter rally, or an antifa rally or a make America great again rally and call the people at those places, dogs? You're going to have a fight on your hands. We don't like to be called dogs, but in the First Century, dogs were really considered bad and dirty. Does she take offense? Which everybody today would. No, she recognizes that's what she is, she's a Canaanite and she's a sinner. Instead she says, Yes, Lord but even the dogs eat the crumbs from the Masters' table. There was no blockage in her heart. She knew Jesus is the Lord. She knew He could do this, and she had faith. Because then Jesus says, "woman great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you desire. And here we have Matthew in true form saying, 'and her daughter was healed instantly.

So, what do we learn from this? Let's go to Romans 10:17. Paul writes; "Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God." This woman had heard scripture, she knew that the Messiah was going to be of lineage of David, that he will be Lord and master over everything. And because she had heard that, she knew, she knew what to do. You see it's God's work that is like the statin drugs of today I have to take Lovastatin so that my arteries stay

clear. God's word is our spiritual Lovastatin or Crestor or whatever you might be taking. It's what the psalmist says is, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. It's what opens our hearts to faith and when our heart is filled with the Spirit and he is working faith in our hearts; then what comes out of our heart just totally different. it is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This is what comes out of a heart that has been washed and renewed. It's what we see in King David when he was confronted in his sin. Did he try to make excuses, try to point fingers? Was he offended by the Prophet who came to him? No, his response was, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, renew a right spirit within me."

May we all look to God's Word to know what it says in these trying times. And may that Word clear out our hearts of any spiritual cholesterol and replace it with the fruit of the Spirit.

In our Savior's Name, Amen.