

Week 16

Matthew series: Ministry of Jesus:

Matthew 15: Lessons in Faith Part 2

It's impossible to comb through Matthew and understand it fully. Sure, you could say it's just writing. Yet, every time I read it there is a different slant, layer, and deep meaning. I believe it is brilliant writing. I feel that the testing of Jesus in Matthew 4 is partially a template for the whole book. Again, in chapter 14 Jesus is tempted by being weary like he was in the desert temptation. Here in chapter 15 Jesus seems to be tempted with authority just like he was in the desert. It's interesting that Jesus responds the same way too. He uses the Old Testament as his weapon.

I have said before that Matthew is sort of a guide book for new Christians. You have been schooled so far on who Jesus is and what he believes. In these chapters 14-17 Matthew is training you on how to defend your faith. Your faith will be tested. Jesus is said to have endured the testing himself so that he could empathize with us. These chapters show us that. Jesus was tested with being weary. He was tested in faith to help others. In this chapter he tested with authority and knowledge.

Does Jesus respect tradition? Our test in Christianity will land within the realm of tradition most of the time. Will we follow men and their interpretation of the Bible? Will we do Christianity their way or God's way. This is certainly not an easy topic. Church is supposed to be a place of happiness and friendship. It is, except at times people get in the way. There is pride, jealousy, and fear of losing power within religious walls. People build rules that go beyond what the Bible intended. This chapter talks about that. Jesus gives his take on it. The Bible needs to be part of your Christian training. Not so much to know the truth but to defend your truth in Jesus. Do you know your Bible?

Matthew 15:3 "Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Isaiah 29:13 "The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

Traditions. We have many traditions. We hold the door for someone. We put a penny in a well. We throw salt over our shoulders. If it's December I think of Christmas. If it's October I think Halloween or thanksgiving. We all have various things we call traditions. I have hash browns and eggs every Saturday morning. It's tradition. It is also in honor of my grandparents that made breakfast for me. I believe that Jesus did like traditions. He had conflicts with the religious rulers because they were using tradition as a club. It honored their institution and not God. What are your traditions?

Matthew 15:3 **“Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?”**

Deuteronomy 16:10 **“Then celebrate the Festival of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you.”**

Matthew 15 sees Jesus in the mist of his ministry life. He is traveling, teaching, having disputes with the religious rulers, and deep discussions with the faithful. Within all that is the miracles. Who is Jesus? Well, if he is God, then he might know something of the Bible. He might perform acts that are seen as miracles. He may also want to establish his kingdom on earth. Jesus is building something here. I believe Matthew saw that in the life of Jesus. His book is building our faith through knowledge and examples. I also believe Matthew is warning us on the pitfalls of religion.

In some ways this chapter spells it out. When we put religion first. When we put our beliefs first. We tend to put us first. What really happens is that the world around us fades away. We don't see people in need. We don't hear what people are really saying. Look at this chapter. Jesus is on the road. The noise of the religious scrutiny is all around him. He heals people. Jesus teaches. He is interested in the well-being of others by feeding four thousand. Throughout this chapter the religious rulers and disciples are off track. Jesus stays steady and sure in his mission.

Matthew 15:19-20 **“For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”**

Isaiah 29:13 **“The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.”**

Read Matthew 15. Also read Matthew 4 again. Read Nehemiah 6. It is encouraging to see others try and focus in the mist of trouble.

1. There is a reason the Pharisees questioned Jesus about ceremonial washing. Some people think baptism is a New Testament thing. Washing the body to be clean or renewed is not foreign to Jesus. The question was legitimate. It's fascinating that Jesus does not address this issue. Instead, Jesus does the Jesus thing. He poses another question. Matthew 15 is testing our faith. How is that? Really, he is training us on what not to do.

Jesus confronts the religious rulers by asking them a deeper question. All throughout the Gospels Jesus always responds to attacks with another question. This time he is pressing the religious men to examine their devotion to the original law. Do they honor their mother and

father? There are the Ten Commandments. They are famous. If you read further into the Bible, there are many other suggestions or laws of God. A legal system was set up by Moses.

What is forgotten is that the commandments are a lifestyle on how to treat people and God well. Obviously, people like making laws. God likes making a lifestyle. Honor your mother. Honor your God. Honor your neighbor. This section of Matthew 15 is sad. Matthew 15:19-20 tells his disciples plainly what we do with our mouths and hearts. Laws try and make us look good, but our hearts are not that good. I can wash my hands clean, but can I have a clean mind and heart? To be a Christian is to work on the inside rather than the outside.

Matthew 15:9 **“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”**

Exodus 30:21 **“They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die: it shall be a perpetual ordinance for them, for him and for his descendants throughout their generations.”**

2. I love friendly banter. What I mean is a comical conversation with true meaning. Jesus believes in his mission. He wants to stay focused. I suspect it comes across as arrogant or cold. God is on point to get his kingdom started. He has the look. Along comes a woman from Canaan. If you knew these people then you would know their superstitions. They sought out the spiritual. Yet, this woman is smart and witty. Jesus is too.

These two engage in a battle of wittiness. She asks for help from Jesus because she had heard he was spiritually powerful. Jesus is on mission. He is here to train these twelve Jewish men to build the kingdom. Jesus has no time for religious nuts. Verse 26 I quoted below is a harsh statement in my mind. She begs for help, but he ignores her. We pass beggars all the time don't we. They become annoying. This woman does not stop. Jesus tries to use the bread of life statement. She does not give up.

I feel Jesus is prodding her to respond. I bet she had sought help from idol images, priests, and who knows what. Jesus calling her a dog is tempting her to flee away. Yet, she responded with a very witty answer. Even the dogs eat the crumbs from the bread. Jesus was impressed so he healed her. I will point out two thoughts here. One is that the disciples don't listen. They want her gone. I get it. Religious nuts can be annoying. Secondly, Jesus patiently allows this woman to make a choice. How bad does she want God's help? Jesus drove her to be willing even to the point of eating the crumbs of God. That is desire. Are we willing to take the time to listen to people and push their faith forward?

Matthew 15:26 **“He replied, “It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.”**

Jerimiah 15:16 **“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, LORD God Almighty.”**

3. What does God see? I know a song called “what if God was one of us” by Joan Osbourne. What if? This chapter answers that. Jesus is on mission to do his fathers will. He is focused and unwavering. The religious men see the law. The disciples see hungry people that they can't help.

Jesus sees a chance to teach, feed, and cure. Jesus sees the essence of the law. Honor those around you. Jesus sees faith stumbling and growing. Those are the things God sees.

Matthew is using his book to grow our faith. That word is sprinkled throughout this book. Jesus mentions “your faith has healed you”; “ye of little faith.” The point is not to bash our faith. The point is not to be tested. The point is to move us to look beyond ourselves. He asked the Pharisees to look beyond their laws. He asked the disciples to look beyond what they see. I feel Matthew is training us to see what God sees.

Matthew 15:31 “so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.”

1 Samuel 16:7 “But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

4. Sometimes we praise a writer for how they construct their story. Oh, that was smart or clever of Steven King or Ernest Hemmingway. Do we give Matthew enough credit? It’s easy to overlook his message. We are reading the story of Jesus. The problem is that it’s not a story. This is not a time line. This book is a snapshot of the whole 33 years of Jesus life. There are gaps and holes. Things we never get to see or hear about. What was Jesus like at home, in school, or at work?

That is why I say this is not a story. A story has a beginning and a conclusion. Sure, Jesus was born and died. Yet this is open ended. We are told he was born. Jesus dies but is raised to life. Eternity means the story never ends. I think Matthew is giving us a message more than a story. Just look at chapter 15 again. The Pharisees come from Jerusalem to pick on Jesus devotion to Judaism. The Canaanite woman comes from a land of idols seeking healing. The disciples are blind to what is really happening. All they see is annoying women and hungry people. Matthew is showing us bad religion. People that see their own faith and their own needs. Look deeper. See more. Listen harder. God just might be showing us something we are unwilling to see, hear, and help that is beyond religion.

Matthew 15:32 “Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.”

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

What it all means?

Matthew is training us. It’s a shame if we only see the story. It’s a shame if we only preach on the famous verses. Verse 26 is hard learning. Why does Jesus call her a dog? Verse 3 has Jesus arguing with the religious rulers. I know that churches guard traditions. I also know they swing the other way. I know a church called “true Jesus.” Compared to the untrue churches of Jesus? I know churches that call themselves undenominational. They break from tradition I guess. What does it all mean?

I feel that many of these places read the Bible looking for meaning. They are looking for themselves within the words. What they miss is the meaning and words of Matthew and Jesus. This chapter is not just about Jesus. This chapter is not just about witty verses, miracles, or feeding 4 thousand. Do you know how many books are written on "if" the feeding of five thousand or four thousand are the same story. Maybe, just maybe, they were accounted for to get our attention. Faith means miracles can happen. Faith means we can provide when all seems impossible. Religiously speaking: what do you really have faith in?

I know a man who believed the notes written in his Bible were scripture. He refused to believe they were just comments by another writer about his Bible. Why? In his church they used those quotes so much that they became bigger than the Bible itself. In a way, they trained him to read the notes. Follow the notes. Believe the notes. The true word of God was being ignored. That is what this chapter means. Making Jesus ministry more than it was, is a crime. The message is plain. What God wants done is there before us. Most of the time we are too busy creating religion to see what needs to be seen.

Matthew 15:28 "Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment."

Romans 1:17 "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."