



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 15

Bishop Youssef





Introduction

Main Points of Chapter 15:

- The danger of traditions and vain worship
- Some Pharisee's accusation of violating Jewish customs
- The story of a Gentile woman begging Jesus to heal her daughter
- The story of Jesus feeding 4,000 men, plus women and children



An Overview

- Religious leaders from Jerusalem took issue with Jesus' disciples' failure to observe certain traditions, which led Jesus to warn against the danger of traditions and that which causes true moral defilement (1-20)

- Mathew 15:1-20 is a narrative with three scenes:
 1. Jesus with the Pharisees and scribes (verses 1-9)
 2. Jesus with the crowds (verses 10-11)
 3. Jesus with His disciples (verses 12-20)



An Overview

- After a quick trip to the region of Tyre and Sidon where He healed a Canaanite woman's daughter (21-28), Jesus made His way to a mountain near the Sea of Galilee where He healed many and fed 4000 with seven loaves and a few fish. He then sailed to the region of Magdala, located on the west coast of the Sea Of Galilee (29-39)
- Mathew 15:21-39 has three narratives focusing on Jesus' compassion:
 1. Jesus heals the daughter of the Canaanite woman (21-28)
 2. Jesus heals the great crowds that come to Him (29-31)
 3. Jesus feeds the crowd that had stayed with Him three days (32-39)

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- *who were of Jerusalem*, saying, There were Scribes and Pharisees throughout the land, but those of Jerusalem were the chief; they were men of the greatest learning and abilities, and were more expert in their religion and customs: these were either sent by the sanhedrim at Jerusalem, or came of themselves; taking upon them a greater power, and authority of examining, correcting, directing, and advising

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- *Why do Your disciples transgress?* Not the law of Moses, but the tradition of the elders, which had as much authority with the Pharisees as the written law
- The tradition of the elders: refers to the body of laws and customs that were added to the Law of the Sinai Covenant over the centuries
- They were spoken of the law upon the lip, and have been embodied in the Talmud
- They were additions to the written word, Galatians 1:14

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- *For they do not wash their hands,* The orthodox Jews insisted on washing the hands before eating, not to remove the filth, but less they might have touched something ceremonially unclean
- They were more concerned with ritual purification to remove defilement caused by contact with what is considered to be ritually "unclean."

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- This commandment was purely traditional, but so rigidly did they insist upon observing it that the Rabbi Akiba, imprisoned by the Romans and with scarcely water to sustain life, preferred to use all provided for his ceremonial ablutions, and to die of thirst
- St. Matthew offers no explanation since his Gospel was written for the Jews and they understood their own traditions, but St. Mark, who's Gospel was written for a mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles, explains, (Mk 7:3-4)

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- Instead of answering their question, Jesus accused them of perverting the command of the Law and transgressing the commands of God
- They preferred the inventions of men to the positive precepts of God
- In focusing so rigidly on their "traditions" they have neglected the divine commands of the covenant expressed in the Torah of Moses

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- The Ten Commandments promised long life to those who honored father and mother (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16)
- Here the Lord quotes the punishment of dishonoring them
- Jesus is acknowledging Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, as being written by God, which means it is the Word of God

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- “Following tradition, you say one thing while God says in the law just the opposite”
- They have excused themselves from the command to honor one's parents by caring for them in their old age by the excuse that their wealth is set aside to be given as a gift to the Temple in their wills
- Jesus clearly sees this as only an excuse to avoid their obligations to their parents

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- A proper application of that commandment has to do with financially taking care of their parents
- St. Paul taught this 1st Timothy Chapter 5 in his discussion about providing for widows of the church
- Jesus point is that this interpretation (their “tradition”) violated the commandment of honoring the mother and father

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- *hypocrites*, The world so rendered might mean one self-deceived as well as a deceiver, but was always a rebuke
- Calling them hypocrites, a Greek term Jesus will use fourteen times in Matthew's Gospel (Mt 6:2,5,16; 15:7; 16:3; 22:18; 23:13-15,23,25,27,29; 24:51)
- *Isaiah prophesy about you*, Jesus is saying that Isaiah wasn't just talking about the people of his time, but Isaiah was making predictions about the future

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- In quoting this passage, what charge does Jesus level against the Pharisees who see themselves as strict observers of the Law and the Law's authoritative interpreters?
- The charge is that in placing more emphasis on human traditions than on God's ordained commandments the Pharisees do not worship God properly and do not obey His commands "they only pay "lip service" to God's commands and prohibitions not "heart-service."

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- By putting the commandments of men on a level with the divine requirements, their whole worship was rendered vain
- The essential of true worship is that the heart be wholly given to God
- Even the forms commanded by God are worthless unless they are obeyed from the heart
- This rebuke to the Pharisees, who had added to the law of Moses many traditional human precepts, applies equally to all modern religionists who have modified or added to the Christianity of Christ and the apostles

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- Jesus addresses the crowd on the true meaning of purity and defilement
- In opposition to the doctrines of the Pharisees, the Savior took occasion to show them that the great source of pollution was the heart
- Christ shows that the defilement they ought to fear, was not from what entered their mouths as food, but from what came out of their mouths, which showed the wickedness of their hearts

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- Jesus, having put the Pharisees down, turns to the multitude
- The multitude were prepared at this time to drink in everything He said
- With admirable plainness, strength, and brevity, Jesus lays down the great principle of real pollution, by which a world of bondage and uneasiness of conscience would be worsen in a moment, and the sense of sin be reserved for deviations from the holy and eternal law of God

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- Why are the disciples concerned that Jesus has deeply offended the Pharisees and scribes?
- The Pharisees are the most powerful political and religious force in the land and offending them could be dangerous for Jesus
- Jesus' answer recalls the parable of the wheat and the weeds
- He says that the Pharisees and scribes are like the weeds planted by Satan
- Like the weeds in the parable eventually they will be uprooted and thrown into the fire of eternal judgment
- It is a fate that will be suffered by those who blindly follow them

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- They pretend to be spiritual guides of the people, while spiritually blind themselves
- The blind are unsafe guides of the blind
- Whatever doctrine is not delivered by God, or whatever ordinance is not instituted by him; whatever is not of heaven, but of man, of man's devising, and of human imposition, as the traditions of the elders, must be opposed and rejected; and sooner or later will be utterly rooted up, and destroyed; as will all the false notions, corrupt worship, and errors, and heresies of men, in God's own time

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- *Let them alone*, Have nothing to say, or do with them; do not mind their anger and resentment, their reproaches and reflections, nor trouble yourselves at the offence they have taken; if they will go, let them go; they are a worthless generation of men, who are not to be regarded, hearkened to, nor to be pleased; it matters not what they say of me, and of my doctrine

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- Jesus' teaching has shocked St. Peter and the disciples
- The Pharisees have exercised their authority over the common people, with their consent, during their entire lives
- As if our Lord is saying to St. Peter: “you, my disciples, you, who have been with me so long, who have heard so many discourses from me, who for so long a time have been instructed by me, both in private, and in public; and yet do not understand what is so plain and easy, that has nothing of difficulty in it, but what might easily be accounted for”
- Slowness of spiritual apprehension in His genuine disciples grieves the Savior

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- Jesus clarifies the difference between ritual defilement and moral defilement
- What is eaten passes through the body and passes away
- Nothing which enters from without can really defile us
- It does not defile the soul
- The seat of corruption is within - it is the heart itself

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- He speaks of the heart in the Biblical sense as the place of human understanding and action (for good and for evil) and contrasts the heart to the stomach and the intestines from which waste is emptied out
- Then, listing seven vices, Jesus' teaching is that these moral failures are what defile a person not unwashed hands
- In Matthew's Gospel the idea is not to list all the sins for which humans fail the law of love of God and neighbor, but if the list is seven, then as a "perfect" number, the list represents the fullness of man's weakness'

Defilement Comes from Within (15:1-20)



- Evil deeds are begotten of evil thoughts; evil words are the expression of these evil thoughts
- These indicate a sinful heart and make a man sinful, or defiled
- The first shape which the evil that is in the heart takes, when it begins actively to stir, is that of "considerations" or "reasoning" on certain suggested actions
- It is the heart that is desperately wicked, Jeremiah 17:9, for there is no sin in word or deed, which was not first in the heart
- Our Lord's argument is very plain

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- Tyre and Sidon were the two principal cities of Phoenicia, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea
- Tyre was about twenty miles south of Sidon, and about one hundred miles in a straight line northwest of Jerusalem
- In the days of David and Solomon, Tyre was the leading seaport of the world
- It was afterwards taken by the Babylonians, the Persians, and Alexander, but up to the time of Christ it remained a great commercial city

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- Since then its harbor has been filled with sand, and there remains only a wretched shadow of its former greatness
- Both were Gentile cities in a Gentile country
- That is the only instance in the Lord's ministry when He went beyond the bounds of Palestine
- *A woman of Canaan*, St. Matthew gives her this name because of the people from whom she sprung - the descendants of Canaan, Judges 1:31, Judges 1:32; but St. Mark calls her a Syro-Phenician, because of the country where she dwelt



A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)

- She approached Jesus and asked Him to heal her daughter
- It is remarkable that two of the brightest examples of faith seen in the ministry of Christ were exhibited by Gentiles, that of the centurion (Mt 8:8-10), and of this woman
- The fact that the latter addresses Jesus as the son of David, shows that she knew of the prophecies concerning the Christ and that he would be the son of David

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- The woman appeals to Jesus three times
- Seemed to take time to consider her request, and to give her the opportunity of exercising her faith, and manifesting her fervor
- There were reasons for hesitation, but there is no doubt that it was His purpose to have mercy
- He delayed in order to bring out a great lesson
- Jesus did not respond to the disciples' request to send her away

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- He tells her that He has only come for the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*
- This is His Messianic mission as stated in Ezekiel chapter 34
- It is His mission to gather the scattered sheep of Israel and to heal and restore God's people of the new Israel to fulfill their destiny to carry the Gospel of salvation to the Gentile nations of the earth
- The Lord's personal mission was to the Jews
- Under the first commission His apostles were directed to go only to the Jews (Mt 10:6)

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- It would be impossible to evangelize the Gentiles without setting aside the Jewish customs, the law of Moses, and arousing the bitterest prejudice of the Jews
- Hence it was the divine plan that the Son should keep the law blameless during His ministry
- It was only when the Jews crucified him that the handwriting of ordinances was nailed to the cross (Col 2:14), the wall of partition (Eph 2:14) between Jews and Gentiles broken down, and all prepared for the Great Commission which bade his disciples go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mk 16:15)

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- She bowed down to Him or did Him reverence
- *Lord, help me*, A proper cry for a poor sinner, who needs the help of the Lord Jesus
- Instead of being discouraged by the words of Christ, she only became the more earnest
- Dogs were unclean animals and Jews often referred to Gentiles as "dogs", unfit for worship or sacrifice

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- Those whom Christ intends most to honor, he humbles to feel their own unworthiness
- A proud, unhumbled heart would not have borne this; but she turned it into an argument to support her request
- The state of this woman is a symbol of the state of a sinner, deeply conscious of the misery of his soul

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- Observe that she agrees and accepts heartily in Christ's declaration: it is not fit that the dogs be fed before the children
- What argument does she make in response to Jesus second rebuke?
- Her clever reply is that even the house dogs eat the scraps under their master's table, suggesting that Jews as well as Gentiles are fed by God
- Yes, the food is for those at the table

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- I'm not a Jew, and therefore I don't get to sit at the table
- All I ask for is the crumbs that fall off."
- Jesus compliments her on her faith and heals her daughter
- He spoke, and it was done
- From hence let such as seek help from the Lord, and receive no gracious answer, learn to turn even their unworthiness and discouragements into pleas for mercy

A Gentile Shows Her Faith (15:21-28)



- We can see how greatness of faith is manifested:
 - (1) She came to Christ under difficulties
 - (2) She persevered when her prayer seemed to be denied
 - (3) She still pleaded when obstacles were presented
 - (4) She waited at the feet of the Lord until he had mercy
- Such faith always prevails

Jesus Heals Great Multitudes (15:29-31)



- Christ does not cease to be beneficial even where He is condemned, and in the midst of wolves He gathers together and cares for His flock
- He departed from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, where He would have been private and retired; but being discovered, and knowing that the fame of this last miracle would make him more public in those parts, He removed, and passed through the midst of the coast of Decapolis, (Mk 7:31)

Jesus Heals Great Multitudes (15:29-31)



- He went into a mountain: which was very usual with him, either for solitude, or for prayer, and sometimes to preach to the people
- Great Multitude came unto him where he had retired for rest and solitude to a mountain
- Jesus' compassion and His healing are in fulfillment of the prophecies of the prophets in Isaiah 29:18 (healing of the deaf and blind) and 35:4-6 (healing of the blind, lame, mute and deaf), as He told St. John the Baptist's disciples (Mt 11:4-5)

Jesus Heals Great Multitudes (15:29-31)



- They were Jews, but living on the border, somewhat under heathen ideas
- The miracles of Christ led them to praise and reverence God
- To glorify here means to praise; to acknowledge His power and goodness
- The God of Israel was the God that the Israelites or Jews worshipped

Feeding the Four Thousand (15:32-39)



- The feeding of the four thousand took place on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee
- The same account is recorded in Mark 8:1-10
- By doing this miracle again, Christ shows that he who follows Christ will never be in need, not even in the wilderness
- Because while seeking Him in his mountain solitude many of them had been for three days without regular food

Feeding the Four Thousand (15:32-39)



- Even after he performed all of these miracles, He still had compassion on this multitude and was concerned about their hunger
- The mention of the location of Jesus' teaching being a "deserted place" or "wilderness" (repeated from the first miracle feeding in 14:15) brings to mind the Old Testament miracle feeding of the manna in the wilderness and may be an allusion to Jesus as the new Moses feeding His people

Feeding the Four Thousand (15:32-39)



- *Where could we get enough bread*, This was not said in ignorance of the Lord's creative power, but probably to suggest the need of its exercise
- They could not have forgotten the events narrated in Matthew 14:15-21
- Or, may be they forgot feeding the 5000
- Jesus said unto them,.... In a very mild and gentle manner He asks

Feeding the Four Thousand (15:32-39)



- Not regarding the smallness of the provisions, nor any further consulting with His disciples; but knowing His own power to increase this food, and determining to feed the multitude before He dismissed them, in an authoritative way ordered them to sit down upon the ground in rows, that they might be the better seen, and served
- Gave thanks teaching us to do so likewise, and to be thankful for, and content with our portion, be it more or less

Feeding the Four Thousand (15:32-39)



- Every one had a share of the provision, and that to full satisfaction; no one was overlooked and neglected, and everyone had as much as he could eat
- This number of men, as well as of the baskets of fragments, clearly shows this to be a distinct miracle from the former of this kind, recorded in Matthew 14:15
- Some of the Gentiles who heard of Jesus' healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman may have followed Jesus back into the territory of Gennesaret

Feeding the Four Thousand (15:32-39)



- If so, the numbers seven and four may symbolize the coming of the Gentile nations
- Four, as in the four thousand, is the number of the earth and its peoples, while seven Gentile peoples were said to inhabit Canaan (Deut 7:1)
- If the twelve baskets represent the gathering in of Israel, then the seven baskets may represent that the Messianic blessings are also intended to reach the Gentile nations "as symbolized by the granting of the request of the Gentile woman who is identified as a Canaanite "the people who were dispossessed of the "Promised Land

Feeding the Four Thousand (15:32-39)



- This feeding miracle, like the earlier one, points to the Eucharist
- The district of Magadan is unknown, but is assumed to be on the west side of the Sea of Galilee
- Some scholars believe it is another name for the city of Magdala, a town on the western shore about four miles north of Tiberias and the home of Jesus' disciple Mary of Magdala
- It was a center of fishing and fish packing
- St. Mark names the destination as the region of Dalmanutha, also an unknown name



Conclusion

- What accusation do the Pharisees make against Jesus' disciples?
- Instead of answering their question, what question does Jesus put to them and what is the point of His question?
- In what way were the Pharisees, who advocated a strict observance of God's commandments, actually transgressing the law?
- Why did the Lord focus on this particular sin of not honoring our father or our mother?
- According to Jesus, when do traditions of men become wrong?



Conclusion

- What constitutes true moral defilement?
- What argument did the Canaanite woman make in response to Jesus second rebuke?
- What moved Jesus to grant the Canaanite woman's request?
- What lessons can be gained from the story of the faith and persistence of the Canaanite woman?
- What are some of the differences between the two miracle of feeding the multitudes?