

# COMPASSIONATE KING

August 6, 2017

## MATTHEW 15:1-20

### Matthew 15

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.” <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>6</sup> he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. <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.’ ”

<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. 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>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.”**

*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016). (Mt 15:1–20). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.*

I have had the opportunity to visit Jerusalem a few times and will be leading a study tour there next year as well. At the Western Wall, formerly called the Wailing Wall, are dozens of men and women praying. It is an outdoor synagogue and tourists often visit to take pictures or to pray. There are various rules for preparation, with the most obvious being the requirement for head coverings. Paper yarmulkes are given to men who do not have head coverings. There is a men’s and a women’s section. There are also numerous fountains in the courtyard with running water flowing. Attached to the center of these water fountains are metal cups. These are to be used to wash one’s hands prior to praying at the wall. As I was reading this passage, I was reminded of this routine element at this location. There are many traditions that have been passed down for centuries and this is one for some Jewish people.

The washing of hands is not viewed as a sanitary requirement like when mom would make you wash your hands before dinner. It is a tradition that has been in place since the days of the Old Testament, in the era of the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah.

Just a bit of history for you:

- The washing was of the “tradition of the elders”
- In Ezra and Nehemiah’s day, the book of the law was rediscovered, after being lost and ignored by God’s people for generations.
- Teachers began to read it and implement all the ways the law they explored. Good intentions.

- End result – basically two authorities developed
  1. The law of God
  2. The teaching of the elders (Mainly oral and passed down from generation to generation. By AD 200, these oral traditions were written into a book called the Mishnah.)
- Over the years, the scribes and Pharisees added all kinds of rules and regulations to the law. Therefore, their traditions began to be seen as authoritative and even trumped the law itself.

In Jesus' day, this was a tradition that the Pharisees would enforce and when Jesus' disciples didn't wash ceremonially, they were offended.

### **Have you ever met someone who is easily offended?**

You know, someone who seemingly keeps a record of wrongs and just cannot believe other people do not behave according to their internal rules all the time?

You feel like you're walking on eggshells around them all the time, knowing that if you answer with the wrong tone, or don't answer, or look at them strange, or seem to ignore them...they're going to be offended and the rest of the day is shot.

My high school basketball coach used to say "You can't leave your feelings on your shoulder. Someone will knock them off." I really never knew what that meant exactly, but I think he was warning us about not getting our feelings hurt all the time, to grow up, and not be easily offended.

And, if you ever played organized sports, you know that there are times when others on the court or field (on the other team and on your own) will offend you. If not another player, then a referee or an umpire. Or, in today's world, Lavar Ball will probably say something.

The Pharisees were like this – easily offended and looking to be offended, and unfortunately, some Christians today behave more like this group of religious rule makers and enforcers than the Christ they claim to follow.

Jesus offended them.

And while it's trite to say "He didn't care" because he did nothing apart from caring, it is accurate to say that he was never shy about speaking the truth. That is clear here.

## **THE COLLISION OF WORLDVIEWS**

At the core of what is occurring here is a collision. There are two versions of truth at odds in this story. Since it is inconceivable to have two opposing truths and both be valid, there is an impasse.

One worldview is so steeped in tradition, that the truth of the gospel is lost. The thoughts of man overwhelm the perception of reality.

This is not unique.

Though most of us aren't dealing with issues related to ritual washings prior to coming to church, there are other things that get in the way of our hearing and knowing the truth.

These may be traditionally religious.

Some who are so tied to religious tradition cannot fathom anyone even questioning why certain things are done and others are not. Honest questions related to understanding biblical truth are pushed off as unbelievable and garner no need for response.

This leads to another worldview that is so anti-religious that forsakes that

which was taught as a child for the sake of a “deeper understanding.”

Teenagers and young adults may find themselves in this difficult place. Even those who have been seemingly protected by parents so steeped in religion that their version of Christianity has been less about leading their children into Gospel living and more about protecting them from the evils of the world. Thus, church becomes this strange, short-sighted, unintelligent, fairy tale, built on fear and mistrust, not to mention dislike and at times hate.

Welcome to postmodernism.

Then there are those who would not find a home in either extreme, but still question the truth claims of the Bible and of Christianity. Honestly questioning, but more apt to just not care.

At first glance, it seems that the atheist, agnostic, free thinker, religious expert, traditionalist, legalistic church attender, and protected cult-like religious identifier have little in common. Yet, at the core they are very much the same.

Some would say their worldviews are so varied, there is no common denominator. Yet, I believe this passage reveals just the opposite.

Ultimately, there are two categories of people:

1. Those who surrender in faith to the truth of the Gospel, are transformed and have garnered the right to be called children of God (i.e. true Christians) and...
2. Those who oppose, either overtly, covertly, consciously, or subconsciously God.

The Pharisees in this passage would be far from irreligious. They were steeped in religion. Yet, they were no better off than the Romans who worshiped false gods and goddesses of their pantheon. Or those in biblical

history who worshipped idols or Baals. Or those in modern history who seen enlightenment or inner peace through New Age mysticism. Or those who follow false prophets and pray to imagined gods who seem like different versions of the biblical God, but are not. Or those who pray to dead ancestors. Those who hope to come back as another animal. Or those who seek refuge in humanism and scientific theory, falsely believing that God and science cannot coexist. Or those who seek to disavow the God of Scripture, believe in their own idea of transcendence, buying the lie of inner energy, and evolved existence because in doing so one can eliminate the concept of sin and absolute truth.

You see, there are many flavors of opposition. Yet, the opposition remains constant.

Jesus stands up to these lies and addresses the hypocrisy of the rule police.

***And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?***

When worldviews collide, debate often occurs. This may be in the Sunday School room, at the dinner table, on Facebook, through text message, or in varied other ways. There are good and valuable debates and discussions that we as Christians must be prepared to enter into. These cannot be ignored. To do so is to sin in our calling as light and salt.

Yet, there are debates as well that exist solely to fill time, celebrate pontification, and ignore issues that truly matter.

In this case, Jesus confronts a group holding a façade of holiness while centering upon a worldview focused on the thoughts and teachings of man. They had forsaken the truth for a version of truthiness.

Jesus, stops. He speaks clearly. He is firm and truthful. He reveals their

pettiness and view of the world that centers on themselves.

And this is no small feat. In fact the residual effects of an oppositional worldview to the gospel is the elevation of self: self-focus, self-interest, self-righteousness, self-centeredness, and even self-esteem.

Cults are built upon this. Even some self-defined Christian churches, both new and ancient, have abandoned the authority of Scripture and added more books (other testaments or even the Apocrypha), tradition, and even the teaching ministry of the church as equal to or superseding that of the Holy Bible.

And that is as faulty as the other world religions and those who claim no religion whatsoever, that deny the veracity of Scripture as the inerrant word of God. No one discounts God apart from creating another.

### **Psalm 115:1 (ESV)**

**Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!**

*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016). (Ps 115:1). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.*

Yet, with the debate raging. Even following Jesus' total discounting of the false power of legalism, this truth remains...

It's **not** clean hands that are our most pressing need.

Jesus wasn't discounting religious tradition necessarily. He was clarifying what should be obvious.

**Clean hands with a soiled heart leads you to hell with ... clean hands.**

When Christians are more focused on the appearance of cleanliness and behavior apart from transformation, we fall in line with those Jesus

opposed – religious with a humanist worldview, intently focused...on the wrong thing.

We need changed hearts.

**Changed hearts** – transformed by the power of God. Surrendered fully, even when it doesn't seem logical, and it rarely does. Yet, it is clear that it is the answer.

Jesus affirmed this - <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.”**