

BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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MT. 15, EATING WITHOUT RITUALS; WOMAN OF TYRE; JOHN 5 BREAD OF LIFE



After Peter's incident trying to walk on water like Christ, they all arrived by boat at Gennesaret, and although Jesus must have been exhausted, we see His tireless compassion and servant's heart. The Bible says, "When the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well" (Mt. 14:34-35).

Once back, the concerned Jewish leaders sent a delegation from Jerusalem to interrogate Jesus on why He didn't back their man-made rituals. We read, "Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 'Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread?'" (Mt. 15:1-2).

Mark 7:3 adds, "For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands *in a special way*, holding the traditions of the elders."

Matthew 15 continues, "He answered and said to them, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God,' then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. 'Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth. And honor Me with their lips. But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'" (Mt. 15:1-9).

A. T. Robertson explains, "Jerusalem is the headquarters of the conspiracy against Jesus with the Pharisees as the leaders in it. Already we have seen the Herodians combining with the Pharisees in the purpose to put Jesus to death. Soon Jesus will warn the disciples against the Sadducees also. This was the oral law, handed down by the elders of the past in *ex cathedra* fashion and later codified in the Mishna. *Handwashing before meals is not a requirement of the Old Testament*. It is, we know, a good thing for sanitary reasons, but the rabbis

made it *a mark of righteousness* for others at any rate. This item was magnified at great length in the oral teaching. The washing of the hands called for minute regulations. It was commanded to wash the hands before meals; it was one's duty to do it after eating. The more rigorous did it between the courses. The hands must be immersed. Then the water itself must be 'clean' and the cups or pots used must be ceremonially 'clean.' Vessels were kept full of clean water ready for use (John 2:6-8). So it went on *ad infinitum*. Thus a real issue is raised between Jesus and the rabbis. It was far more than a point of etiquette or of hygiene. The rabbis held it to be *a mortal sin*. Jesus admits that the disciples had transgressed the rabbinical traditions. Jesus treats it as a matter of no great importance in itself since they had put the tradition of the elders in the place of the commandment of God. When the two clashed, as was often the case, the rabbis transgress the commandment of God 'because of your tradition.'There could be no compromise on this subject and Jesus accepts the issue. He stands for real righteousness and spiritual freedom, not for bondage to mere ceremonialism and tradition. The rabbis placed tradition (the oral law) above the law of God. They dodged this command of God about the penalty for dishonoring one's father or mother by the use 'Corban.' All one had to do to evade one's duty to father or mother was to say 'Corban' or 'Gift' with the idea of using the money for God. By an angry oath of refusal to help one's parents, the oath or vow was binding. By this magic word one set himself free from obedience to the fifth commandment. Sometimes unfilial sons paid graft to the rabbinical legalists for such dodges. Were some of these very faultfinders guilty?" (*Word Pictures of the NT*).

So Jesus Christ shows how the breaking of God's laws is what is really important and not the breaking of these man-made rituals.

He explains, "Hear and understand: 'Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles man.' Then His disciples came and said to Him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?' But He...said, 'Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.

Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch...Do you not yet understand whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts (breaking the 10th Commandment), murders (6th Commandment), adulteries, fornication (7th Commandment), thefts (8th Commandment), false witness (9th Commandment), blasphemies (3rd Commandment). These are the things which defile a man, *but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man*" (Mt. 15:10-20). That was the point! Matthew shows this only had to do with eating with "ritually unwashed hands" and not about eating biblically unclean foods.

Mark 7 is the parallel account where at the end Jesus says, "Are you not with understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus purifying all foods?*" (verses 18-19).

Yet some modern versions (such as the ASV) add an extra phrase to vs. 19, "'For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body. **(In saying this Jesus declared all foods 'clean')**.'" That *false added verse* has been used as one of the main scriptures to allow a Christian to eat what they want and not follow the biblical food laws. Yet these words in parentheses are *not* in the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts!

Even evangelical scholar Keith Hunt admits, "Each of the following [old] versions of Mark 7:19 shows a normal physical elimination process that has absolutely nothing to do with 'making unclean meats clean.' The last four [modern] versions have added (in parentheses) *a dishonest statement* that is nothing more than a *biased commentary* designed to alter the true meaning of God's Word. This verse, with its *man-made additions*, *should not* be the basis for negating two chapters of the Bible - Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14." *The Complete Jewish Bible* renders Mk. 7:19 as "Thus He declared all foods ritually clean." *Barnes Commentary* adds, "The meaning is, that the process by which life is supported 'purifies' or 'renders nutritious' all kinds of food. The unwholesome or innutritious parts are

separated, and the wholesome only are taken into the system. This agrees with all that has since been discovered of the process of digestion....The food taken into the stomach is by the gastric juice converted into a thick pulp called chyme. The nutritious part of this is conveyed into small vessels, and changed into a milky substance called 'chyle.' This is poured by the thoracic duct into the left subclavian vein and mingles with the blood, and conveys nutriment and support to all parts of the system. The useless parts of the food are thrown off."

After this encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus had to get some rest where the crowds did not overwhelm Him and that meant going outside of Israel—into Phoenicia (modern Lebanon).

We read, "Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, 'have pity on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed'" (Mt. 15:21-22).

Even in Tyre someone recognized Him as the healing Messiah and begged Him to intervene. Clearly, Jesus had finished such an exhausting period of dealing with huge crowds and wanted some rest along with His disciples. But now began new petitions for Him to heal people here.

We read, "And He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, for she cries out after us.' But He answered and said, 'I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (15:24). His commission from God was to deal with all the 12 tribes of Israel and at this time not to the Gentiles.

It continues, "Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!' But He answered and said, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs'" (15:25-26). The term for "dogs" here is not the same one that is pejorative but like "puppies." As Vincent points out, "*Little dogs*...The picture is of a family meal with the pet dogs running round the table" (*Word Studies*).

"And she said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour" (Mt. 15:25-28). Christ was not a respecter of

persons, and seeing her real faith in Him, she was granted the healing. What an example of true servant leadership His astonished disciples saw by healing what they considered an 'unclean' and an unworthy Gentile!

Afterwards, He returned back home and again the teeming multitudes came with their sick and again He healed them all (Mt. 15:30).

But the day dragged out and the multitudes became hungry, so Jesus had compassion on them and again multiplied the bread and fish, this time the crowd was a bit smaller, closer to 10,000 people. He then asked the crowds to depart and took the boat to Magdala (Mt. 15:39).

It's important to note that the Gospel of John adds a sermon by Jesus after these incidents of the multiplication of the bread and fish.

It is found in John 6, when it was close to the Passover (vs. 4), "And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted...On the following day...Jesus answered, them and said, 'Most assuredly I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.' Then they said to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.' Therefore they said to Him, 'What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our father ate the manna in the desert, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.' And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to life shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by

no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me...No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day...Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world....Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink the blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day...This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:11-58).

So we see here how Jesus' words had to do with the multiplication of the loaves of bread and how He was showing symbolically that He had much more important bread to give – His life for all of mankind – and the way to express that faith is to eat the symbols of the Passover – the bread and the wine, representing His beaten body and His shed blood.

Later, traditional Christianity changed this vital ceremony of the New Testament Passover and also changed the date when it was to be taken, which should be on the Passover night of every year. As the apostle Paul says, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'Take, eat, this is My body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Notice Paul was giving precise instructions on how to take this New Testament Passover. It was to be done "on the same night in which He was betrayed" – at the beginning of Passover evening.

We faithfully follow these instructions every year as we take the New Testament Passover.