

Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2020 1:41 PM  
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Matthew 15

"This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me! But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men!" (Matthew 15:8-9)

Last week, we learned how Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, who had had John the Baptist beheaded at the behest of his wicked wife, had heard about Jesus' words and actions and didn't know who He was--but thought He sounded a lot like John the Baptist, and even fantasied that he (John) just might have returned from the dead to "provoke" him more! And so, he determined to learn more! In last nite's lesson, there was another group that wanted to check Him out too, a special delegation of Pharisees and scribes who came from Jerusalem and raised what they considered a highly serious question!

"Why do Your disciples break the traditions of the elders," they wanted to know! The "traditions of the elders" represented a body of extra-biblical "rules" that had been generated over the years but only existed in oral form until later committed to writing in what was known as the "Mishnah," which became a part of the Jewish Talmud. Included among many other "rules" was one which required the washing of hands before eating, with a severe penalty for non-compliance! (Interestingly, the accumulation of these rules began basically after the Jewish people returned from their Babylonian captivity and their rabbis tried to re-establish their religious rituals and ceremonies and seize control over the people in all matters of their lives!

Jesus responded with His own question: "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your traditions?" (Using, as an example, how they basically gave sanction to an argument by some people that they couldn't support their parents financially because they had dedicated a certain amount of money to the temple, thereby violating the Law of God to "honor their father and mother!) But He didn't stop there! Calling them "hypocrites" and quoting from Isaiah, the prophet (which also happens to be our memory verse): "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of Men!" Wow!

The disciples were shocked that Jesus would respond this way to the Jewish hierarchy! But Jesus explained how the Pharisees were actually "blind guides of the blind"--and that "it's not what enters the mouth that defiles a man, but what proceeds out of the mouth"! And He further explained that "the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart! And Matthew records eight specific "sins" (Mark's account records thirteen!) that proceed "out of the heart"--including evil thoughts, fornications, false witness, slander, deeds of coveting, deceit, pride, etc. etc. And He ended His teaching moment by re-emphasizing that "these are the things which defile a man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man!" Wow! So there!

As Jesus and both the Old and New Testaments make so clear: it's all about the heart! I Samuel 16:7, concerning God's selection of David as the "least" of the line of Jesse to be king over Israel: "But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him (speaking of David's older brother Eliab); for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart!"

Interestingly, it's the heart of David that later would become the "brunt" of condemnation, and ultimate pardon, in Psalm 51, after his grave sin with Bathsheba! The Psalmist writes that God "desires truth in the innermost being..." and that "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise"! And quoting David, who cries out for cleansing and forgiveness: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me...Restore to me the joy of Your salvation!" And so much more here and elsewhere throughout the Bible--about the heart!

Well, there's so much more in Matthew 15, which Jesus is using primarily as a teaching moment for His disciples! John Neal noted, as a bottom line last nite, that this text demonstrates what ministry is really all about!

It's for this very reason that Jesus again "withdrew" from the crowds in Galilee, and headed north, Matthew 15:21 says, "into the districts of Tyre and Sidon" (which just happened to be Gentile territory)! And He "just happened" to be confronted by a Canaanite woman who "cried out" to Him for mercy (for her demonily-possessed daughter) and addressed Him (correctly) as "Lord, Son of David"--and "bowed down before Him" and persistently pursued Him, to the point that Jesus recognized, and commended her faith, and healed her daughter! (Interestingly, the Canaanite woman was only one of two people praised for their faith by Jesus, in the book of Matthew--the other one being the Gentile centurion, in Matthew 8:5-13! All of which punctuates the fact, and again, especially for His disciples, that Jesus came to minister, and provide salvation, for all the people of the world!)

Well, there's more, as Jesus then heads down along the east side of the Sea of Galilee (again Gentile territory), with "large crowds" again coming to Him and bringing with them, verses 30-31 says, "those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others...and He healed them"! And the crowd (again, apparently mainly Gentiles) "marveled...and glorified the God of Israel"!

But Jesus is not finished with the Gentile world! And verse 32 says that Jesus "felt compassion" for the people who again had "nothing to eat" and that Jesus didn't want to "send them away hungry"! And so, déjà vu all over again! He feeds 4,000 men, besides woman and children! And, verse 37 says, "they all ate and were satisfied"! Jesus did the same thing in Gentile territory that He had done among the Jews, in Galilee--with the disciples taking it all in! Jesus demonstrated for all to see, as John Neal pointed out last nite "what ministry is all about"!

The "heart" of the matter is that "God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life!" And this is clearly demonstrated in our study of the book of Matthew!

As someone has said, we could all probably use a little "softening of the hearteries" as we try to follow the example of Christ in "ministering" to others!

May we live out this week with a heart for God and others!

Lowell