

# The Rejected King's Continued Ministry of Mercy

by John F. Walvoord

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*John F. Walvoord's sermon explores the themes of tradition versus true worship, the nature of defilement, and the power of faith and prayer in Jesus' ministry of mercy.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 15:3-36, John 16:23

**Topics:** "Divine Mercy", "Faith Healing"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the controversy with the Scribes and Pharisees, highlighting Jesus' rebuke of their emphasis on religious traditions over the commandments of God, exposing the need for a changed heart rather than outward rituals. Jesus teaches on the wickedness of man's heart, emphasizing that true defilement comes from within, not from external sources. He then withdraws to Tyre and Sidon, where a Gentile woman's persistent faith leads to the healing of her daughter, showcasing the power of prevailing prayer and implicit faith. Upon returning to Galilee, Jesus performs miracles, including healing the lame, blind, and dumb, with the people glorifying the God of Israel. The feeding of the four thousand demonstrates Jesus' compassion and provision, emphasizing the contrast between spiritual nourishment and physical sustenance.

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## Transcript

Controversy with the Scribes and Pharisees, 15:1-9

Chapter 15 runs parallel to Mark 7:1-8:9, with some variation in the details and order of the discourse. It is clear that both Matthew and Mark are summaries of incidents that were actually much longer and more detailed.

The Pharisees and scribes were incensed at the disciples because they did not follow the tradition of washing of hands when they ate bread. They drew the implication that this disregard of tradition was taught by Jesus as a matter of principle rather than as a single act of transgression of ceremonial law.<sup>70</sup> Mark gives a longer explanation, that what was involved was not simply the washing of hands but the washing of cups, pots, brass vessels, and tables (Mk 7:4). The traditions referred to were the haggada and the halacha which were teachings derived only in part from Scripture. The Pharisees paid more attention to these ceremonial washings than they did to the Scriptures themselves.

Jesus answered their question by another question, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (Mt 15:3). He then cited the fifth commandment (Ex 20:12) and Leviticus 20:9, which imposed the death penalty on one who cursed his father or his mother. He pointed out that they controverted the Scriptures in their honor of father and mother by their allowance that a child could declare something a gift or dedicated to God, and, by this means, free himself of the obligation to care for his parents. Jesus summarized this, "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Mt 15:16). Jesus did not accuse the Pharisees of cursing their fathers and mothers, but He did point out that the deep-seated principle of honoring the father and mother is violated by their tradition.

After having denounced their doctrine, Jesus then turned to their own spiritual need. Addressing them as hypocrites, He quoted from Isaiah 29:13 that Israel would draw nigh to God with their lips but not their hearts. Such worship, Christ said, is empty because it teaches the commandments of man in place of the doctrines of God. The real need of the Pharisees was a changed heart, not more religious traditions.

#### Teaching on the Wicked Heart of Man, 15:10-20

After having used the objection of the Pharisees as an occasion for exposing the spiritual need of man, He pointed out that the spiritual law is the opposite of the natural law, namely, that not what goes into the mouth defiles a man as the Pharisees held; rather it was that which came out of the mouth that defiled him. Matthew records that the disciples warned Jesus that He had offended the Pharisees. In answering this, Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees were blind leaders of the blind and, eventually, because of their blindness, would fall into the ditch. They were plants not planted by God the Father and would ultimately be rooted up. In the parallel account in Mark 7, these comments are omitted.

When Jesus went into the house to get away from the people, as explained in Mark 7:17, the disciples and Peter in particular (Mt 15:15) wanted Him to explain what He had said. Jesus had said, in effect, that food did not cause spiritual problems for men; it was rather what had come out of one's heart in the form of words and actions. Jesus itemized such things as "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (v. 19).

These things do not necessarily proceed from the mouth but do proceed from the heart. And these things, Jesus said, are the real problem and the real defilement of a man, not when he eats with hands which have not been ceremoniously washed. The occupation with the outward religious ceremony, instead of inner transformation of the heart, has all too often attended all forms of religion and has plagued the church as well as it has Judaism. How many Christians, in the history of the church, have been executed for difference of opinion on the meaning of the elements of the Lord's Supper or the mode of baptism or for failure to bow to church authority? The heart of man, which is so incurably religious, is also incurably evil, apart from the grace of God.

#### Withdrawal to Tyre and Sidon, 15:21-28

Having previously attempted to withdraw into the desert (Mt 14:13), Jesus again departed from the multitudes which thronged Him, going probably the longest distance away from Jerusalem. Proceeding to the far northwest of the coast, where Tyre and Sidon were located, He encountered a woman of Canaan who pleaded with Him to heal her daughter who was demon possessed. In the parallel account in Mark 7:24-30, the woman is declared to be a Greek, a Syrophenician, meaning that she was a Gentile, using the more contemporary name for her nationality.

Although she addressed Jesus as "Son of David," He did not answer her. Her repeated cries irritated the disciples, who suggested that Jesus send her away. In an explanation of why He had not replied, Jesus told the disciples, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24). The woman, however, was not to be easily discouraged, and bowing and worshiping before Him, she said simply, "Lord, help me" (v. 25).

Jesus, attempting to explain to the woman His commission to preach to the house of Israel, said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs" (v. 26). The woman, in reply, pleaded that even dogs were allowed to eat crumbs which fell from the table. In response to this faith, Jesus said, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (v. 28). Matthew comments that her daughter was healed immediately, implying that they had a later report as to what the outcome of it was.

According to Mark, Jesus also told the woman, "The devil is gone out of thy daughter" (Mk 7:29). Mark also goes on to say that when the woman returned home, she found her daughter laid upon a bed and that the demon had departed (v. 30). The story well illustrates the power of prevailing prayer, when coupled with implicit faith. How much has been accomplished by prayer, and how many times children of God have not because they ask not. This incident is the only recorded miracle on this trip of Jesus, many miles away from His familiar area of ministry. Could it not be that, though she was a Gentile and even though dispensationally it was not the time for blessing among the Gentiles, Christ had come expressly to meet the need and faith of this woman? The lesson of this miracle should be to encourage Christians to fulfill the command of God to pray in the name of Christ, claiming the promise, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it [to] you" (Jn 16:23).

#### Return to Galilee, 15:29-31

Upon His return to Galilee from His short visit to the coast, the multitudes again found Jesus in the mountains. In His customary role as a Teacher, He sat down, healing the lame, the blind, the dumb, the maimed, and many others, with the people glorifying the God of Israel because of this unusual visitation. Mark 7:31-37 singles out one outstanding case of a man deaf with an impediment in speech whom Jesus healed.

#### Feeding of the Four Thousand, 15:32-39

The period of miracles following His return to Galilee apparently extended over three days, or at least parts of three days, and lack of food might cause people to faint on their way home.

This incident should be contrasted to the feeding of the five thousand. As Edwin W. Rice has pointed out, "Here the crowds are chiefly of Gentile or semi-Gentile origin; the five thousand were mainly Galilean Jews. Here four thousand are fed; before five thousand. Here they sat on the ground, for the summer sun had burned up the grass; before, they were on grass as it was early spring."<sup>71</sup> Other details also differ.

As in the feeding of the five thousand, the earlier incident, Jesus asked what the disciples had available. This time, He found that they had seven small loaves and a few fishes, about enough for one person, in contrast to five loaves and two fishes in the earlier incident. This time the disciples apparently anticipated a miracle. Again, following the preceding order of the feeding of the five thousand, the multitude was asked to sit down. Jesus gave thanks for the food and, breaking it, gave to the disciples to distribute. This time there were seven large baskets of food left over, in contrast to twelve small baskets in the feeding of the five thousand. The place was Decapolis, the opposite side of the lake from the feeding of the five

thousand. Sending the multitude away with full hearts and full stomachs, Jesus went by boat to Magdala, or Magadan, an area just north of Tiberias on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee.

70 Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, pp. 581-83.

71 Edwin W. Rice, *People's Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 162.

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