

Sermon Outline

“The Heart That Honors God,” Matthew, Part 44 – Matthew 15:1-20 – Robin Boisvert – July 28, 2013

Introduction

1. At this point in Matthew we see an escalating conflict between religious authorities and Jesus. A group of Pharisees and scribes has come from Jerusalem – 75 miles away – to see him. This is no social visit. They have come to investigate, to undermine and discredit him.
2. This is a stern passage of Scripture, marked by conflict and hard words. But amidst the controversy we will be edified as Jesus reveals the kind of heart that honors God.

The Heart That Honors God Keeps Traditions In Their Proper Place (Matthew 15:1-6)

1. The Pharisees challenge Jesus with a question, asking why his disciples “break the tradition of the elders” by not washing their hands when they eat. Jesus responds immediately and strongly: “Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” He goes on to call them hypocrites whose hearts are far from God. It’s a stinging rebuke.
2. Traditions are things handed down from one generation to the next. They glue families and cultures together. In the classic musical production “Fiddler On The Roof,” a Russian community of Jewish families has traditions for everything – how to sleep, how to eat, how to work. These customs provide stability and identity. But as the main character learns, doing things a certain way just because we have always done them that way can create problems. And when religious traditions become elevated to the status of Scripture, they become evil.
3. The Pharisees were breaking the 5th Commandment (“Honor your father and mother”) using a legal loophole that allowed them to neglect aged parents while dedicating their goods to the temple. This tradition enabled them to dodge biblical responsibility. Because they assigned more weight to their traditions than Scripture, they felt free to judge others by their standards. What hypocrites! But we should be slow to judge; we are inclined to do the same thing. To honor God, our hearts must keep tradition in its proper place.

The Heart That Honors God Avoids Hypocrisy (Matthew 15:7-9)

1. What is hypocrisy? Pretending to be sincere about something you don’t really believe. Everybody detests a phony, a poser, a chameleon. We are good at spotting hypocrisy in others (young people are especially keen observers), but we rarely see it in ourselves.

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2. In a real sense we are all hypocrites. Do any of us fully obey the command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? There's a gap between what we know and what we actually do. This should humble us. If we throw the hypocrisy label onto others, we may find it sticking to ourselves.
3. Only Jesus had the absolute integrity of heart to call anyone else a hypocrite. And the Pharisees truly were; their religious traditions amounted to lip service, more words (Isaiah 29:13). Their hearts and words did not match up. There is much for us to reflect on and learn from their example. The heart that honors God is sincere and avoids hypocrisy.

The Heart That Honors God Understands The True Source Of Defilement (Matthew 15:10-20)

1. The Pharisees criticized Jesus and his disciples for not washing their hands before they ate. According to their tradition (which had evolved from God's original instructions to priests), failure to wash one's hands made you ceremonially unclean and thus unable to approach the holy God. The effect of their tradition was that defilement became understood as something external, something to be remedied through outward actions.
2. It's a common but fatal misunderstanding. Though it offended the Pharisees, Jesus clarified that defilement is an internal problem: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander" (Matthew 15:19).
3. The heart has been called the "moral helmsman." It steers the ship of a person's life. Made up of the mind and will and emotions, the heart is the true center of a person. And according to Scripture, our hearts have a fundamental problem: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). All the sinful actions we commit which make us unfit to appear before a holy God begin with wicked thoughts in our hearts.
4. Washing our hands won't deliver us from defilement. We need new hearts. When we repent from our sin and trust in Jesus Christ, God performs the miracle of regeneration and fulfills the promise he made through Ezekiel: "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

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Conclusion

1. Do not allow a focus on external matters to keep you from the real issue: the state of your heart (Proverbs 4:23). Our faith must first and foremost be an internal faith if we are going to avoid the Pharisees' sin of hypocrisy.
2. How can you have a heart that honors God? Talk to him in prayer. Let him talk to you through his Word. "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a Care Group to read Matthew 15:1-20.
2. Describe a tradition that has been passed down in your family or community over time.
3. Have you witnessed situations in which religious tradition seemed to carry more weight than Scripture itself?
4. It would be easy to come up with examples of hypocrisy you have seen in others...but where have you seen hypocrisy in yourself? Where have your words and actions failed to match up? Where has there been a gap between your knowledge and practice?
5. What defiles us? What enables us to stand before a holy God without fear of condemnation?
6. If the group context seems appropriate, share any heart issues the Spirit is addressing and pray for one another.