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By Dan Maines

Matthew 15

Matthew 15:1-2

Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

† The Pharisees attacked the disciples over traditions, not Scripture. Their accusation exposed their obsession with externals.

† Josephus records that Pharisees elevated traditions above the law itself (Antiquities 13.297).

† The Mishnah confirms their laws of ritual washing (Yadayim 1.1).

Matthew 15:3-6

But He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'The one who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God," he is not to honor his father or mother.' And by this you have invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition."

† Jesus rebuked them for nullifying God's command with man-made vows. The command to honor parents was undermined by false piety.

† The Mishnah (Nedarim 9.1) confirms these vows, and Josephus criticized Pharisaic corruption.

† Their traditions prepared the nation for judgment because they made void the law of God.

Matthew 15:7-9

"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy about you, by saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. And in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

† Jesus declared that Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 29:13) was fulfilled in them. Outward worship was worthless without obedience.

† Early church fathers, like Irenaeus, condemned the same error of replacing God's truth with man's rules.

† This hypocrisy marked Israel's leaders as ripe for covenantal judgment.

Matthew 15:10-11

After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand! It is not what enters the mouth that defiles the person, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles the person."

† Jesus shifted the focus from ritual purity to moral purity.

† He announced the true standard of holiness, the heart, not externals.

† This teaching foreshadowed the end of ritual law at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Matthew 15:12-14

Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted. Leave them alone, they are blind guides of the blind. And if a person who is blind guides another who is blind, both will fall into a pit."

† The Pharisees were offended because truth exposed their system.

† Jesus prophesied their uprooting, fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem. Josephus describes their corrupt leadership leading the nation to ruin (Wars 4.316).

† Tacitus likewise observed that Jewish leaders drove their people into destruction (Histories 5.13).

Matthew 15:15-20

Peter said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." Jesus said, "Are you also still lacking in understanding? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and those things defile the person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, acts of adultery, other immoral sexual acts, thefts, false testimonies, slanderous statements. These are the things that defile the

person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the person."

† Jesus explained plainly that defilement is moral, not ritual. Food passes through the body, but sin flows from the heart.

† Josephus described the wickedness inside Jerusalem before AD 70, including murders, thefts, and false testimony (Wars 5.10).

† Their obsession with ritual blinded them to the real corruption that would bring judgment.

Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David, my daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came up and kept requesting Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us!" But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" Yet He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, but please help, for even the dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great, it shall be done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed at once.

† The Canaanite woman's persistence showed faith greater than Israel's leaders. She called Him "Son of David," acknowledging His Messianic role.

† Jesus tested her humility, but she persisted, proving that faith, not lineage, gains blessing.

† Early fathers like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus pointed to this as proof that Gentiles were brought into the New Covenant.

Matthew 15:29-31

Departing from there, Jesus went along the Sea of Galilee, and after going up on the mountain, He was sitting there. And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they placed them down at His feet, and He healed them. So the crowd was astonished as they saw those who were mute speaking, those who were crippled restored, those who were lame walking, and those who were blind seeing, and they glorified the God of Israel.

† The miracles fulfilled messianic expectation. Isaiah promised that the lame would leap and the blind would see.

† Philo recorded that Jews expected the Messiah to heal the afflicted (On Dreams 2.242).

† These signs proved the kingdom had arrived in their generation.

Matthew 15:32-39

Now Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, "I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now for three days and have nothing to eat, and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way." The disciples said to Him, "Where would we get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?" And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few small fish." And He directed the people to sit down on the ground, and He took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. And they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, seven large baskets full. And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan.

† The feeding of the four thousand showed Jesus' power to provide abundantly. Seven baskets symbolize fullness and completion.

† Josephus records famine and hunger in Jerusalem during the revolt (Wars 5.13.6), contrasting with Christ's provision for His people.

† The Messiah was the true provider, unlike Israel's failed leaders who left the nation starving.

How it applies to us today:

† Matthew 15 shows that ritual traditions cannot save, only Christ can. The Pharisees' hypocrisy and blindness led to the destruction of the Old Covenant order in AD 70, exactly as Jesus warned. The Canaanite woman proves that faith, not bloodline, brings covenant blessing, which was fulfilled when the gospel went out to the nations. The miracles reveal the compassion and sufficiency of Christ, in contrast to the famine and ruin of unbelieving Israel. For us today in the fulfilled kingdom, this means we rest in Christ's completed work, reject empty traditions, and live as people purified from the heart.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† Josephus, Antiquities 13.297-298; Wars 4.316; 5.10; 5.13.6

† Mishnah, Nedarim 9.1; Yadayim 1.1

† Tacitus, Histories 5.13

† Philo, On Dreams 2.242

† Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 121

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.20.2; 4.12.1

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