

Matthew 15A

- Today as we end Chapter 14 and enter into Chapter 15, we find something familiar and something new
 - The something familiar comes first tonight, and it takes us back to the beginning of the feeding of the five thousand
 - Take another look v.14 of Chapter 14

Matt. 14:14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

- When I covered this verse I explained that this moment was an exception to Jesus' general pattern of healing after Chapter 12
- In Chapter 12, the religious leaders of Israel rejected Jesus' claims to be Messiah and in doing so, they committed the unpardonable sin
 - As a result, Jesus withdrew the offer of the Kingdom, and He stopped teaching openly and healing the masses
 - From now on Jesus only teaches His disciples and He only heals those who demonstrate faith first
- But this new pattern has its exceptions and v.14 was one of those exceptions
 - On occasion, as an act of compassion, Jesus would still heal crowds without requiring faith
 - That's what we saw happening in v.14: a compassionate Jesus going against His normal practice
- But now as we leave Chapter 14, Matthew shows us that the new rules are still very much in effect

Matt. 14:34 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.

Matt. 14:35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent word into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick;

Matt. 14:36 and they implored Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were cured.

- Following their night crossing of the Sea of Galilee, we suppose Jesus and the disciples probably rested somewhere for a time in Capernaum
 - But eventually, the men begin traveling by foot again headed south along the Jewish (western) side of the lake
 - Until they came to a region near a fishing village called Gennesaret
 - That village still exists today along the shores of the Galilee
 - It's called Ginosar, and it has a kibbutz and is also the departing point for tourist boat rides on the Galilee
 - As Jesus and the disciples enter the town, the men of the town recognize Jesus, reminding us how well-known Jesus was
 - Quickly the word spreads in and around the region, and naturally people come flooding to see Jesus for healing
 - In a time when sickness was a fact of life for so many, the opportunity to obtain relief was worth dropping everything
 - As they come to Jesus for healing, notice how it happens in this case
 - Matthew says in v. 36 that the people "implored" Jesus to allow them to just touch His garment
 - The people were literally begging Jesus to heal them, and that's our indication that Jesus is withholding healing again
 - Jesus wasn't healing the crowd freely as He did back in v.14, because He first requires the people to demonstrate faith in Him
- In an effort to persuade Jesus, some in the crowd ask Jesus if they may touch the fringe of Jesus' cloak
 - Jesus allows this request, and as many as touched His garment were cured, Matthew says
 - Now where did that come from? This sounds like a strange, superstitious practice, so why did Jesus allow it?
 - And why did Jesus heal those who were willing to touch His cloak?
 - The answer is faith...those who reached out for the hem of His garment were acting in faith believing that Jesus is Messiah

- In Jesus' day, men wore two garments: a light inner tunic, like underwear, and a heavier outer garment worn over the tunic
 - The outer garment is called a *tallit*, and the Lord told the Jews how to construct that garment in the Law

[Num. 15:37](#) The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying,

[Num. 15:38](#) "Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue.

[Num. 15:39](#) "It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot,

[Num. 15:40](#) so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God.

- At the corners of the tallit were tassels of knotted thread called *tsitsityot*
 - These tassels were knotted five times to represent the 5 books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
 - Over time, these tassels had become a very important symbol within Jewish society representing a person's character
 - Ancient tablets have been found with the impressions of a man's tassels used as his signature on a document
- And cutting off the hem of a tallit was considered a personal disgrace
 - Under rabbinical law, a man could divorce his wife simply by cutting off the hem of her tallit
 - And in 1 Samuel 24, David sneaks up behind King Saul in a cave and quietly cuts off the hem of Saul's tallit to humiliate him
- And the Old Testament prophet Malachi taught that the tassels of the Messiah would have even greater significance

[Mal. 4:1](#) "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

[Mal. 4:2](#) "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

- In verse 2, we hear that the “sun of righteousness” will rise with healing in its wings
 - The phrase sun of righteousness is a reference to the Son of God, the Messiah rising (or appearing) on earth
 - The word “sun” sounds like “son” but that is merely a happenstance of the English language
- So Malachi tells us that when the “sun of righteousness” rises, He will have healing in His “wings”
 - Wing is another euphemism in Hebrew which refers to the corners or tassels on a man’s outer garment
 - In fact, back in Numbers 15 the word “corner” was the same Hebrew word we find translated as “wing” here (*kanaph*)
- So the Jewish Scriptures taught that when the Messiah appeared, He would have healing in the tassels of His tallit
 - That’s where faith comes into the picture here in Matthew 14
 - The crowd begged Jesus for healing, but He withheld it
 - But those who had faith in Him as Messiah didn’t let that stop them, because they believed the promises in the word of God
 - They remembered the prophecies of Malachi concerning the Messiah’s power to heal in His wings
 - So they reached out to touch the corners or Jesus’ tallit confident that it would result in healing
 - They took Malachi’s promise literally, with child-like faith
 - With faith in God’s word they acted, and by their actions they gave evidence of their faith
 - And because of their faith, they were healed, as Matthew says in v.36 – as many as touched Jesus’ hem were healed
 - I really appreciate moments like this in the Gospel because they remind us what true faith is all about
 - Faith is a conviction in the truth of something, and conviction is a powerful force directing our actions...or it should be

- You hear people say sometimes that they have “faith”, but so often they don’t complete that sentence
- They say, “I have faith...” but they don’t tell you what they have faith in...they don’t put an object at the end of that sentence
- Faith by itself is meaningless – it’s like someone saying, “I have trust...”
 - Obviously, that person doesn’t trust in everything and everyone
 - So if they say I have trust, you would naturally ask them to finish the sentence: “...you trust in what?”
- Similarly, when someone says they have faith, we must ask “faith in what?”
 - Faith by itself isn’t the cause of anything...faith is just a trusting in something that we believe is worthy of our trust
 - So faith’s value is found in what we place our faith in
 - For example, we can’t say we have “faith” in winning the lottery
 - The odds of winning the lottery are infinitesimal...it’s been said that the lottery is a tax on people who are bad at math
 - In reality, we mean we wish we win the lottery, and wishing isn’t faith...wishing is meaningless and powerless
 - And there is a false and powerless form of wishing masquerading as faith in the church today
 - False teachers will tell us that if we have faith in receiving something we desire from God, our faith will make it come true
 - For example, if we have faith that God will heal us, we will be healed
 - If we have faith God will make us rich, then He will give us a great “harvest”
 - That’s not biblical theology...that’s Disney theology
 - It turns God into a genie in a lamp, as if we can control God by our desire
 - In reality, that’s not faith...it’s really wishing and it’s powerless
- Take another look at the men and women who reached out for Jesus’ hem... what was their faith rooted in?

- They weren't merely wishing to be healed
 - They weren't trusting in their desire to bring them healing
 - Nor were they trusting in some superstition about Jesus' garments
- They were acting out of faith in the testimony of the word of God concerning Jesus as the Messiah
 - They believed what Malachi told them about the Messiah's healing ministry
 - And they believed Jesus' own testimony that He was that long-awaited Messiah sent to Israel
 - That crowd had faith in the testimony of the written word and in the testimony of the Living Word
 - They trusted that God wasn't a liar, so they took His word to the bank
- That's how faith works in a Christian's life...it begins by trusting in the testimony of the word of God, correctly interpreted
 - But it moves to acting in confidence according to our belief
 - Faith isn't found in substituting our own promises or wishes for what God's word says
 - That's just trusting in ourselves instead of in the Lord
- But even after coming to faith, if we fail to act according to our faith, then as James says, our faith is dead – meaning useless and by itself
 - It does us no good nor does it bring Christ glory
 - We can believe and be saved by our faith yet fail to experience the blessings of faith that Christ has for us in the meantime
- Remember...virtually every Jew in the crowd that day knew Malachi's prophecy because they all studied Scripture from childhood
 - They all knew the promise concerning the Messiah's healing power, yet only a few touched Jesus' hem that day
 - And only those who *acted* in faith received the benefits thereof

- And speaking of substituting our thinking for God's word, it's time for the something new in today's lesson
 - Matthew takes us into a new conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over invented rules vs. the word of God

Matt. 15:1 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,

Matt. 15:2 "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

Matt. 15:3 And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Matt. 15:4 "For God said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.'

Matt. 15:5 "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,"

Matt. 15:6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

Matt. 15:7 "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:

Matt. 15:8 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,

BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

Matt. 15:9 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,

TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'"

- Conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel is a major theme in all the Gospels, and those conflicts usually centered on the Mishnah
 - The Mishnah was the rabbi's rule book in Jesus' day consisting of rabbinical commentary and regulations
 - These rules covered virtually every aspect of Jewish life and Jews were expected to follow these rules as they would Scripture
 - In fact, by Jesus' day the rabbis had come to view the Mishnah as *more* important than the Bible
 - But it wasn't Scripture... and as a result Jesus largely ignored what it said, which infuriated the religious establishment
 - Jesus was undermining the rabbis' source of power over the people, and He was allowing His disciples to do the same

- We've already seen conflict over the rabbinical rules concerning fasting and the Sabbath, and now they contend over washings
- Next to the Sabbath, there were more rules on washing than any other area of Jewish life
 - The Law of Moses called for ritual washing under certain circumstances
 - But the Mishnah took those requirements to a whole new level
- Mark explains this with a couple verses of helpful background

Mark 7:3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders;

Mark 7:4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)

- Mark says the religious leaders were scrupulous about how they washed before meals
 - They cleansed themselves publicly through an elaborate process involving numerous steps
 - And they didn't just wash themselves, they also washed the cups, pitchers and pots used for the meal
- Notice that Mark emphasizes these rituals were the traditions of the elders, not the commandments of God
 - The phrase "traditions of the elders" is the New Testament way to describe the Mishnah
 - Mark says these rituals came from the Mishnah...rules that the leaders invented...worthless burdens that God never required
- And therefore, Jesus paid these rules no regard when He walked the earth
 - And of course, the religious leaders didn't like it
 - In v.2 the Pharisees ask Jesus why His disciples were allowed to break the traditions of the elders?
 - Specifically, why did they not observe the ritual washings required by the Mishnah before eating bread

- But Jesus avoids getting trapped in a conversation about the value of the Mishnah, and instead He asks them a question
 - In v.3 Jesus asks why the Pharisees violated the commandments of God for the sake of their traditions?
 - Jesus is referring to how the Pharisees elevated the authority of the Mishnah above the authority of Scripture
- The Pharisees viewed a violation of the Mishnah as more serious than a violation of the word of God
 - In fact, Pharisees lived in Jerusalem, so they would have traveled three days just to get to Jesus so they could accuse Him
 - The fact that they are in the Galilee shows us how much they valued their Mishnah and hated those who violated it
- But Jesus tells the Pharisees they are honoring their own rules while willfully violating God's rules
 - And in v.4 Jesus chooses as His example the fourth commandment to honor parents
 - In v.4 Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the Law requires honoring parents and imposes severe penalties for failure to do so
 - Jewish culture understood that honoring parents includes caring for them in their later years when needing assistance
 - And just as it is today, caring for elderly parents involves spending money
 - But the Pharisees were lovers of money, the Bible tells us elsewhere
 - So out of a desire to hold onto their wealth, these men invented a creative way to avoid meeting their obligations to their parents
 - And their solution was classic Pharisaic thinking...
 - They created a rule that prohibited them from giving money to non-Pharisees
 - In v.5 Jesus refers to this rule when He quotes the Pharisees saying that their resources were given to God

- The Pharisees' rule was called *corban* in Hebrew, which means an offering or dedication
- Mark gives us background on this rule

Mark 7:9 He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

Mark 7:10 "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH';

Mark 7:11 but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),'

Mark 7:12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother;

- The Pharisees declared that they and everything they owned was under the Corban, meaning it was set apart or dedicated to God
 - Since they were dedicated to God, everything they owned could only be given to God
 - According to this rule, a Pharisee could choose to keep his wealth
 - But if he decided to give it away, he could only give it to the temple
- Obviously, this was simply a ploy to avoid their financial obligations to their parents or the poor or anyone else
 - So if anyone asked a Pharisee for money – a beggar, a friend, a parent – he would point to the rule of Corban and say I can't
 - His hands were tied...his money was dedicated to God, he would say
- How convenient and how hypocritical! God doesn't need our money for His own sake...only human beings need money
 - When the Lord asks us to give money, it's not like our money floats up to Heaven to be stored in God's piggy bank
 - Our wealth is shared with other people, whether in the church or elsewhere
 - We're giving to God in the sense that we're putting our money to work in furthering the work of God

- So when a Pharisee said he couldn't honor their parents or give to the poor because God needed the money, he was being a hypocrite
 - Out of greed, they refused to let their money be used by God
 - Notice in v.7 Jesus says they are hypocrites fulfilling the words of Isaiah, and in v.8 Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13

Is. 29:13 Then the Lord said,

**“Because this people draw near with their words
And honor Me with their lip service,
But they remove their hearts far from Me,
And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,**

- You've heard the term "lip service" but did you know that phrase comes from the Bible?
 - That's the Lord's term for hypocrisy
 - Hypocrisy is serving the Lord with your words but not with your deeds
- The Jewish people favored a particular form of hypocrisy in which they followed traditions rather than the word of God
 - It was hypocrisy and lip service because it involving claiming to be obedient while in reality giving themselves license to sin
 - They changed the rules to suit their selfish, sinful desires and called it obedience to God
 - Meanwhile, they ignored or dismissed the commandments of God whenever it suited them
- The Pharisees may have fooled the people with their little game, but they weren't fooling God...Jesus certainly wasn't fooled
 - But it is easy to fall into this trap, because obeying the word of God is tough at times
 - It requires we crucify the desires of our flesh, and our flesh hates doing that
 - The Bible says our flesh is opposed to God in everything...our flesh always wants the opposite of what God wants

- So our pride is continually seeking ways to get around the rules without having to admit that we are breaking them
 - And if someone tells us that there's a way for our flesh to get what it wants while still obeying God, then we're all ears...
 - Jesus says I must honor the marriage bed but if someone else says I can sleep with my girlfriend while still being a good Christian, please *tell me more!*
 - If Jesus says I can't serve two masters, but you say I can pursue earthly riches while also earning treasure in Heaven...*sounds good to me!*
 - If Jesus says I can receive grace and forgiveness for all my sins, but something inside me says I'm supposed to judge others for their sins, then *sign me up!*
- That's hypocrisy and it's living in the flesh rather than walking by the Spirit
 - It's practicing evil while calling it good
 - It's how the enemy tempts us into self-righteousness and away from sanctification
 - We become comfortable judging behavior according to our own rules so we don't have to consider the reality of our own sin
- There's another word for this kind of thinking: legalism, and we all know that word...but perhaps you didn't realize the connection between legalism and hypocrisy
 - Legalism is the process of establishing rules for ourselves and for others that God Himself didn't place upon us
 - Legalism helps us feel more holy and more pious because we can point to all the rules we keep as proof of our righteousness
 - But in reality the opposite is generally true...legalism is an attempt to avoid obeying God's word
 - It's a bait and switch strategy...legalism substitutes our rules for the commandments of God
 - The rules we invent will always be easy to follow because we like them...*that's why we invented them*

- And we use them to replace the rules God has given in His word, rules we don't like, rules that demand we change our behavior
- So our meaningless, obscure rules become equivalent to Scripture in our thinking, because we give them equal or even greater priority in our life
 - Then we inspect others to see if they follow our rules, and when they don't, we hold them accountable calling it sin
 - Meanwhile, we neglect the hard work of our own sanctification by avoiding God's rules
- I call legalistic Christians "splinter inspectors"
 - They are preoccupied with fixing everyone else's sins while ignoring the logs projecting from their own face
 - It allows the person to feel more holy, but ironically it actually makes them less holy
- Rather than taking every thought, word and deed captive to the obedience of Christ, they judge themselves according to their own rules
 - They move the goal posts closer so they will always win the game, at least in their own mind
 - But Jesus calls it what it is...lip service, and He commands the crowd to do better

[Matt. 15:10](#) After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand.

[Matt. 15:11](#) "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

- Jesus challenges the crowd to hear and understand the truth...it's not what enters a mouth that defiles a person but what comes out of the mouth
 - Jesus is teaching a fundamental spiritual principle using a simple example of the dietary rules found in Israel's law
 - The law placed severe restrictions on what a Jew could eat
 - And the purpose of those restrictions was to unite and isolate Israel from the rest of nations

- In the process, the laws were also intended to teach Israel how sin separates us from God and that it must be cleansed
- But along came the Pharisees and their Mishnah, and before long they had made these laws a means of establishing self-righteousness
 - No longer were the dietary laws just a picture of sin and holiness
 - Instead, the Pharisees taught that the dietary laws made Israel righteous because they kept bad things out of their bodies
- Jesus explains this was all wrong...it's not what you put in your mouth that makes you righteous or unrighteous...it's what comes out
 - In other words, we are not sinners because we sin...we sin because we are sinners
 - We are inherently unrighteous beings, born sinful and living sinfully in our corrupt bodies
 - The evil present in our hearts is coming out of us all the time...in our words, thoughts, and deeds
 - We have a spiritual birth defect that we can't escape and we can't fix on our own
- Therefore, there is nothing we can do to make ourselves righteous
 - There is no rule, no list of do's and don't's that can fix what's wrong with our heart
 - Because as long as the heart is sinful, it will produce sin in the members of our body
 - And therefore, guarding what goes into our body is useless, because the enemy is within us
 - Inventing new rules is not only pointless, it makes matters worse
 - Because besides not fixing the problem, it suggests that rules are a means to pleasing God and becoming righteous
 - But the word of God teaches that the only way to please God is to accept by faith God's gift of righteousness found in Jesus Christ
 - Jesus is the only One Who is perfect, righteous and pleasing to God

- And when we place our faith in Him, Christ's righteousness is credited to us, the Bible says
- Thank you, Jesus, for Your grace and mercy and for Your righteousness