

## **Lip Service!**

### **Matthew Chapter 15**

The Princess Bride is not a reference one would expect to see in a men's Bible study, but a statement came to mind as I started to write. It is Inigo Montoya response to Vizzini's continued use of the word inconceivable. Inigo looks at Vizzini and says, "You keep using that word, I do not think it means what you think it means." It reminded me of how many people use the word Christian. Throughout history, the word Christian has been attached to the Crusades, Salem witch hunts, racism and several other atrocities. It is the basis for many to discard the Christian faith but if we examine the actions taken, would they reflect Biblical guidance and obedience to God's Word or would they be reflective of individuals following their prideful, self-aggrandizing and sinful nature to achieve their goals. They may have called themselves Christians but were they really Christians at all?

While visiting Israel, I had a conversation with the tour guide and bus driver and asked if either of them were a Christian. The response from both men was direct and intense. They said, "No we are not Christians, don't ever call us by that name. We are followers of Christ and that term, Christian, is a term used by the crusaders who slaughtered both Muslims and Jews. We are not "Christians" we are followers of Christ."

Chapter 15 opens with some Pharisees' and scribes traveling about one hundred three miles to ask Jesus a question. The trip takes two hours and forty-one minutes by car today. At a speed of 3 miles per hour, a fit person can travel 72 miles in 24 hours of uninterrupted walking so, they had to travel several days to ask their question. "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." Tradition required Jews to wash their hands and say a blessing before eating meals including bread or matzah. The ritual is known as *netilat yadayim* and involves pouring water two or three times on each hand. After washing they would say a prayer or blessing, "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and commanded us concerning the washing of the hands." Their question was not a question about cleanliness but ritual.

Jesus answers their question with a question, "'And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" Jesus is accusing them of circumventing the divine commandment to "...Honor your father and mother, and He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death" and replacing it with their tradition. Essentially the Pharisees destroyed the commandment which required children to honor their father and mother by giving the children an excuse from helping their parents. It was called "corban" or "under the ban". By vowing or dedicating resources to God, they were legally unavailable to help aging parents. Literally they, "invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition". (v.6)

Jesus goes on to say, "'You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" Jesus was telling the Pharisees' and scribes' they were living proof that it is possible to honor God with their lips while their heart "is far away from Me". After making this statement, Jesus calls the multitude to Him and tells them "hear and understand". Now Jesus uses the Pharisee' and scribes' illustration against them. He tells the multitude, "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." If any bit of dirt clings to the unwashed hands and is eaten, it does not make the person a sinner. What makes a man a sinner is what comes out of a corrupt, unregenerate, prideful, self-serving heart. Montefiore, a Jewish writer expressed the logic of what Jesus meant, "Things cannot defiled by things, they can only be defiled by themselves, by acting irreligiously." The disciples go to Jesus and say, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" Jesus answers, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." These plants were the tares among the wheat, not planted by God that will be gathered up and burned. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." (Matthew 13:40-43)

**1. Who came from Jerusalem? Why? What were Jesus' disciples doing that was "breaking the tradition of the elders". What was the tradition of the elders? Is that a question you would travel 103 miles to ask? What question would you have asked?**

**2. What was Jesus answer to their question? Why does Jesus bring up the fifth commandment and what is His point? Why did Jesus call the Pharisees and scribes hypocrites? Explain Jesus quotation of Isaiah 29:13, do we have the same problem in church today?**

**3. Explain, "and after He called the multitude to Him". What did Jesus teach about what corrupts or makes a man unclean? What was the disciples response and how does Jesus answer their concern. Explain verses 13 and 14 in your own words. How does Jesus respond to Peter's question? (21-20) What do we learn from Jesus answer to Peter?**

**4. Where did Jesus go (21-18) and why did He go there? Why did the Syrophenician Woman call to Jesus? What was Jesus answer to her question? When she asks her question a second time, how would you explain Jesus response? What was the wisdom of her response to Jesus answer and what happened as a result?**

**5. What happens in verses 29 – 31? How does Jesus respond? How did Jesus minister to their needs? What was their response? How did Jesus show compassion on the multitude and how would you describe the disciple's response? What was left over from their meal?**