

Matthew 15:1-9 Bible Study Transcript

Today we are starting Matthew chapter 15, one of two chapters that are supplement to chapter 13. Remember, we have five messages in this section. We've already studied three of them, the third one was in chapter 13, The Parables of the Kingdom. In chapters 14 and 15 we have The Ministry of the Principles of the Parables. That is to say, those parables lived out. The examples and the fulfillment of them, as Jesus presented them. The parables showed the various reactions and responses to the ministry of the Word of God, and that's what we are studying here.

In chapter 14 verse 1 is a historical marker, that is, it records for us the death of John the Baptizer. And at the word of John the Baptist's death, Jesus moves on to head towards Jerusalem. It's a historical marker in that this is one year prior to His crucifixion and so He heads for Jerusalem after the death of John. Then while He's traveling, He has at least twenty thousand people that are thronged behind Him following Him. And they find themselves out in the wilderness with no place to eat nor anything to buy food from. So, He feeds the five thousand miraculously, so that the disciples would see His miraculous power even over the normal necessities of life for the human being.

But then after He fed the five thousand, He went down, and He had the disciples get into a boat and go across the sea while He Himself went up onto a mountain alone to pray. And we know that while He was up there, Mark tells us in Mark chapter 6, that Jesus was watching the disciples as they went across the sea and a great storm came up on the sea. And the wind was contrary to them, they had been rowing for about nine hours and had gone about 3 to 4 miles against the wind. Again, Mark tells us that they were tired from the rowing, and Jesus was watching them, and Jesus came to them, walking on the water. Of course, they were terrified. But when Jesus revealed Himself to them, that it was He, then Peter wanted to come out to walk with Jesus on the water.

Interesting, as we studied that from last week, Peter told the Lord to command him to do it. He didn't claim any promises. Peter didn't command the water. He asked the Lord to command that he come out, because on the Lord's command he'd be able to come out. And the Lord commanded him to come, and he went out on the water, and he got almost to Jesus and he began - there's a present participle in that text, which tells us that he was occupied with, focused on, - looking at the waves in the water. Rather than keeping his eyes on Jesus, it was focused now on the storm and the circumstances, and he began to sink down into the storm. It tells us that we have the possibility, that if we get occupied with our circumstances, the circumstances will draw us down into them, and we will be occupied with them and they will become the focal point of our lives: mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

But what did Jesus do when Peter called out, "Lord, save me?" The Lord reached out and grabbed him and kept him from going under. It had nothing to do with Peter's faith. There is no lesson there, other than the fact: keep your focus on Jesus, stay occupied with Him at all times. The Lord does not have to remove the storms. He does not have to remove the difficulty. We just need to keep focused on Christ, knowing that if we do sink down into our circumstances because we are occupied with it, that the Lord is there, faithful to pull us up. He will not let us sink. Period. It's impossible for us to sink with Jesus there. And that is the great lesson of the text for us.

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So, the disciples had a great lesson about who Jesus is on land as He fed the five thousand, and then they had a great lesson about Jesus on the sea as He came walking to them revealing to them who He is. He is Yahweh God, the great I AM of the Old Testament, the Creator and the Controller of all of human nature and physical nature, and that they were to focus on Him and trust Him.

As we begin today in Matthew chapter 15, we are taking the first part of Matthew 15:1-20, The Protesting of the Scribes and Pharisees. While the throngs of people were experiencing the compassion of Christ, the religious leaders were now confronting Jesus on stops along the way as He comes to Jerusalem. And they began to express their resistance, and their challenge, and their rebellion, and their rejection of Christ Himself. So, we have The Protesting of the Scribes and of the Pharisees here in the first nine verses. Actually, the entire twenty verses is around the protesting of the scribes and Pharisees, but verses 1 through 20 is broken up into three sections: (1) Verses 1-9, The Lord's direct speaking to the Pharisees and Scribes; (2) verses 10 and 11, Jesus turns to the crowds and addresses them; (3) then verses 12-20, He talks directly to the disciples.

So, here in our focus, the first nine verses, we have the Lord in confrontation with the Scribes and the Pharisees. If you will look with me, please, in Matthew 15:1-2, it presents to us the circumstances surrounding this section. It says, **Then comes to Jesus the scribes and the Pharisees from Jerusalem.** Now, by way of explanation of the text, some people have different English translations than some of the others. So, people come to Jesus who are who are described as *scribes* and *Pharisees*.

The scribes are a certain sect of the Jewish religion. The scribes were those who began their ministry and their part in the religious function by copying manuscripts. They didn't have photocopies, they didn't have copy machines, so they copied everything by hand, so they were copyists. And then, as they copied some of the manuscripts, they began to notice what they were copying, and they began to look into it, and began to study some of the things that they were copying. And then after a while they began to teach the things they were copying and the things that they had studied about what they were copying. And they became teachers, after period of time you became a teacher if you were a scribe. They held at least in philosophy and in approach they held very strictly to the Scriptures itself, nothing outside of the Scriptures. And so, they are sticklers when it comes to the Scriptures, or the Word of God. So, these were the scribes.

They came with the Pharisees, which is another sect of the Jewish religion, Judaism it's called. But the Pharisees, in fact, the word *Pharisee* means a *separatist*: somebody who separates himself from everybody else. They were the legalists. They followed the law to the nth degree, in fact, they added to the law to make sure that the law was kept. And by that, I mean they would take the law for instance to keep the Sabbath day, God says in the ten commandments to obey the Sabbath day and keep it, and keep it holy, more than all other days. So, the Pharisees made up, in fact, most of their leaders most of their scholars made up volumes of books.

One volume of book is called the Mishnah, which is a commentary on all the rules and regulations you have to keep in order to obey that law that's in the Bible. All the rules and regulations are not in the Bible, God didn't give the rules and regulations to keep it, but they expanded the law to say, "Here are the lists," in volumes of books, "on how to keep the Sabbath day," that God never said [about] how to keep it. The Pharisees were the legalists and they and the scribes were coming out to Jesus to confront Him.

And so, we see in our text, **Then comes to Jesus the scribes and the Pharisees from Jerusalem.** A technical point in order to emphasize to you what the text wants to emphasize, is that the term *from Jerusalem* is found in the Greek text between the word *the* and the word *scribes*. It is the, "from Jerusalem scribes and Pharisees." It is not telling us where they have come from, but rather, showing us that this is a delegation that has been sent out from Jerusalem itself. He's not in Jerusalem. He's on His way to Jerusalem. Matthew focuses on the Lord's ministry in Galilee which is north of Jerusalem and so from Matthew 4:12 - 19:1 Matthew focuses on the Lord's ministry in Galilee. And that's where He's at now, but He's heading back towards Jerusalem. So, this delegation of scribes and Pharisees are from Jerusalem. They've now been set out as an official delegation in order to confront Jesus about His teachings and about His practices.

John's Gospel, the Gospel of John, focuses mainly on the Lord's ministry and His activities in Jerusalem; whereas Matthew is focusing on His ministry in Galilee, north of Jerusalem.

So, we have here, **Then comes to Jesus the scribes and Pharisees.** Another technical point for those who have a different English translation. Some English translations coming from the Greek manuscript that they are copying from, call them "the Pharisees and the scribes," not, "the scribes and the Pharisees." And they put the word *Pharisees* first because the confrontation with Jesus is all about the Pharisees and their rules and regulations. They are called *halakah*, that is what the Jews call the rules and regulations, they're pharisaical *halakah*. So, some manuscripts put the Pharisees first, ahead of scribes, because that's really what this is all about. They are questioning Jesus about Him violating the pharisaical *halakah* about a certain religious function. So, **then come to Jesus**, our text says, **the scribes and Pharisees.** Now you know why some English translations will say Pharisees and scribes. It doesn't change the meaning of who they are or the fact that they have come from Jerusalem.

They come from Jerusalem and here's what they say to Him, notice verse 2, **Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands whenever they should eat bread.** So, that's the *halakah*. We are dealing now with the issue, not about the keeping of the Sabbath day, but we are dealing with ceremonial cleansing and purification. It's about washing ceremonially to be considered religiously pure and clean. But they asked Him, **Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?** You have to understand too that in the back of my mind, I'm thinking I just love this section, when they're coming out and they're saying that basically our tradition has taken the place of the Word of God, which is what we have today mostly in our churches, which is why we have differences in our churches. Same Bible, just different traditions. **Why do Your disciples transgress the**

tradition of the elders? The Tradition of the Elders probably should be capitalized because that is a title. It is the *halacah*. It is also called the Oral Torah, Torah being the Law, the verbal or oral Law. It is the *halacah* of the Pharisees concerning washing and cleansing.

It's found in the Mishnah. The Mishnah is a set of books that is probably in different numbers of volumes now, but many years ago they came out in 32 volumes of books, of all the rules and regulations you had to keep in order to be obedient to God's Word. God's Word didn't give the rules and regulations, but the Pharisees came up with it, how to keep the commandments. There is also the Talmud, which instructs you how to keep those rules and regulations. How to apply them, it is called the Talmud. And so, the tradition of the elders is what Jesus was accused of violating.

But notice, on the second part of this by way of explanation, **For they do not wash their hands whenever they should eat bread.** This is not physical hygiene, this is not questioning Jesus about why they don't wash their hands before they eat, as we would our kids or even ourselves; but it is ceremonial cleansing. There are washing laws in the Bible, in the Old Testament, but very general. And it doesn't even apply to the common people unless it is under certain circumstances.

For instance, for the for the priests, the priests had to wash their hands and feet before they did service. Exodus 13:19 gives us that instruction.

In general, there are two general places in the book of Leviticus, where when the general public comes in contact with unclean things such as a dead body, if you touch a dead body there are certain sacrifices that you have to present, and you have to go through a certain washing or water cleansing in order to fulfill God's command about coming back into society.

In Leviticus 11:34-38 it even talks about the pots and pans and the plates, if they become unclean. That's why Jesus in one of His teachings says, "You clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but you don't clean the inside." So, He is making reference to this law not found in Scripture, it is found under certain conditions. Obviously if you have a plate in your hand and you touch a dead body, you are now unclean, and your plate is unclean, so the plate has to go through the same cleansing you do. But it's only for that specific reason, those specific circumstances is there a ceremonial cleansing.

In Leviticus 7:21 it tells us anything unclean that you touch, that God considers to be unclean, you have to go through certain procedures in order to be considered cleansed.

But it's interesting, the Pharisees took these general laws about cleansing and expanded them and made them into volumes of books on how you must ceremonially keep yourself clean, that God never prescribed. So, they took the concept of ceremonial washing with water, and incorporated into the Jewish lifestyle.

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Now the procedure for washing your hands before the meal, it wasn't just put soap on your hands and wash, or even dip it into a special bowl that has been sanctified for religious purposes. What they would do is you had to have at least an egg and a half measurement of water and hold your hands together fingertips pointed to the top, and then somebody has to pour water over your hands and let all the water drip down. It has to cover all the skin, both fronts and backs, and then once the water reaches the bottom you have to reverse it; to where your palms are up and the fingers are down and the water has to run back the other way, just to make sure that you got it all covered, and you had to go through this before every meal. And you had to do your plates and your pots and your pans. You had to ceremonially cleanse them before you could use them or before you can eat.

So, you can imagine Jesus going through the cornfields with His disciples and they get hungry and He authorizes them to pull the husks off the corn crop and then eat because they're hungry and they're on their way to the next village. They didn't wash their hands. Again, we are not talking about hygiene, we're talking about ceremonial cleansing. **They do not wash their hands whenever they should eat bread.** So, it's a ceremony of washing hands according to the *halakah* of the Pharisees that really we are dealing with here. It's the *halakah*, not the ceremony itself that were dealing with.

In verses 3-9, The Confrontation with the Religious Leaders. Remember, they asked Jesus, **"Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" But He answered, and He said to them, "Why do you transgress the commandment of God on account of your tradition?"** Boy, there's the question of the year, right there. It is not whether I break your tradition, why do you break the commandment of God by your traditions? You've added to it. You've said what it doesn't say. You try to make it mean what it doesn't mean. And you're trying to hold people to traditions and not to the law of the Word of God itself. So, He's telling them, tradition had come to a point where it supplanted (or took the place of) Scripture. We now go by tradition rather than the Scripture itself. It can be applied to a group like the Pharisees or individuals. Individuals can come up with their own tradition to take the place of Scripture and that's mainly what we have today. The denominational differences between churches, the denominational difference is because of tradition.

I can remember when we first walked into this church, there was a little plaque right inside the door that says, "Here are our beliefs." And I remember looking at it and reading through it. It was just a general thing and I thought to myself, "Well, that's okay, a lot of it is just general fundamental Christian faith." But there are one or two items that I called them on. I said, "Well, what scripture do you have to back this statement up?" They said, "Well," and they gave me the Scripture. And I said, "But that Scripture doesn't even talk about that." "Well, we believe it does." So, it became the traditional belief of the church about what that Scripture is saying.

Which is why, I don't know if you really understand, why we have so many different churches. Sometimes there's two or three churches on one block and then another group comes in and starts another brand-new church right down the street from the other churches. If there are other churches here preaching the gospel, why do you have to bring in another one? It is because

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they do things differently than we do. Our style is not their style. Our way of doing things is not the way they do things. We don't do things that way. We do things a different way, and it's all by tradition, all backed by Scripture, of course; but it's the tradition that has the authority, not the Scripture itself.

So, there's denominational differences, differences between the Presbyterian churches and the Methodist churches and the Baptist churches and Community churches, all the differences. But then there are differences among individual churches within those denominations. Not all Baptist churches do things the same. It is all different. It's because that's the tradition that they have chosen to function under. You'd think that we are not united on what the Scripture says and you would be absolutely correct.

In fact, we've come to a point that most graduates from Bible school with their degrees in Bible would have to tell you, and this is something that they have been told during their educational process, is that we can't be sure really what the Bible says exactly. But our denomination says this and you're totally, I call it brainwashing, because that's what it is. When you go to Bible school, you're being your choosing to be brainwashed, under a certain influence, under a certain theological system. And you get a degree in that theological system and you go out and find a church that believes in that theological system and that's the church that you minister in. Traditions. So, it is not just denominations differing, it is individual churches within the denominations that also differ.

Sermons, oh one of my favorite topics. Sermons are also mostly tradition. Read a Scripture to you and then I make up a sermon all week long. Just because I read the Scripture to you, doesn't mean that my sermon is the Word of God. But most people in ministry have been taught how to formulate sermons from after reading and studying the Scriptures and those sermons become authority, and the Word of God.

But individuals, individual Christians within denominations and within individual churches, individuals practice religious tradition: how certain activities are done, whether it be baptism, whether it be serving communion, how people take communion. We've got Christmas coming up. Every church is going to celebrate Christmas differently, a different Christmas program. Some are going to have candlelight services, others are not. Everybody's going to choose the tradition that their church has followed for years. The individuals - our problem, and this is a problem, and it can be a problem for coming out here - the problem is that individuals have their own personal convictions and beliefs of how they want church to be for them and go visit various churches until they find the church that does it exactly the way they believe. That's a problem because we are using ourselves as the barometer and standard about what is truth. Doctrinal belief now is based mostly on traditional teachings, rather than on the Bible itself.

You can go find books, and I'm in discussions all week long with people, either by phone, or by email, a few of them in this area local in person, with discussions about teachings and doctrines that are going on out there. And the very first thing I have to point out to them, right away, is that those teachings or traditions - traditional teachings that were handed down that other people adopted and said, "Yeah, I agree with that, I think that's what the Bible is saying."

But when they are challenged about what the Bible is actually saying, they are lost. They have no idea. And most of the time, I've taken the time to show people what I'm saying about what the Bible says, and you can just see the wall go up. "He is showing me that I'm not right," and they are waiting until I'm through and just say, "Well, that's just not what I believe." It's tradition. We follow, we go down to the book store. We buy books and we follow the teaching system that we believe in, or that we believe is true, which is different from everybody else. These are all teachings that have been handed down, that's what the word *tradition* means, a hand-me-down. Things have been handed down for years.

We find these three principles being used in study of the Scriptures, which when people read the Bible, or teach the Bible, they use one of three principles:

- 1) "I believe this text is saying..." and then they give their opinion in their sermon or in their teaching.
- 2) Or, "The text indicates...." It doesn't indicate anything. It either says it or it doesn't.
- 3) The text implies something. It might imply something to some people, but not to all people.

It's easier to choose a system of belief than to actually study the Bible itself. Most people that I'm listening to now, and I survey people in ministry, I survey Bible teachers and listen to what the latest presentations are. Most teachers today and preachers today show that they are totally ignorant of the Scriptures. They have never really studied the Bible. They have studied tradition and they give their personal beliefs, their personal opinions, and even will stand up and I had someone tell me this week and I forgot the exact words that were used, but basically the person says, "We are really not sure what this text means, but I'm going let you know what it means to me," and that person from the pulpit gave his opinion, which is nice. I mean that's real nice but what about the text itself? Have you ever studied the text?

Someone asked me this week about how do you study the Bible? What is the best way to study the Bible? Just study the text. Not people's commentaries. Not people's opinions, but actually study the text itself. And then there's research works out there that'll talk to you about the text, but not about tradition. Just stay away from the traditions.

So, then Jesus, after He says, "Why do you basically violate and transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?" He says in verse 4, by way of illustration, **For God commanded, saying** (He says, "I'm going to give you an example of what you guys do.") **For God commanded, saying**, (and this is from Exodus 20:12) **He commanded, saying, "Honor your father and your mother,"** (and then the second quote is from Exodus 21:17) **"The one speaking evil"** (The word *curse* if you have curse in your text, "the one who curses mother and father," it doesn't mean *to swear*, it means *to insult or verbally abuse*, any type of evil.) **"The one speaking evil against father or mother let him have his life ended by death."** And that's right in the Scriptures. I'm glad we don't live under the law. Some people wish we did, because kids wouldn't be able to get away with the things they get away with. So, that's what the

Scriptures say. **Honor your mother and father and let the one who speaks evil against mother and father let him die, let him be put to death.**

But in verse 5, in contrast, **But you yourselves say, "Whoever should say to the father or the mother, 'A gift,' (δῶρον, doron) whatever from me you might be profited.** So, what they're saying is, here is mother and father coming, and they are in need. So, the Bible says I'm to honor my mother and my father according to the law. If I was Jewish, the law would tell me that. So, the traditions said, I can come and take my money and give it and dedicate it to the church. That's what the word *gift* means, δῶρον (doron) in the Greek is actually for the Hebrew word *korban*. *Korban* means *a gift that is dedicated or sacrificed to a God*. So, I can take my money and I can go down to the Pharisees down at the Temple and I can dedicate my money to God. They in turn give me back my money, they of course charge 10% for this transaction fee going on here, I can now take my money and I can go home. This money now belongs to God, it doesn't belong to me, so I have no right to give it away. If my parents come to me and say, "We are homeless, we have no food."

"I'd really like to help you, but this is a gift. My money is a δῶρον (doron). It's a korban to us Jews, which means it belongs to God, it doesn't belong to me. I can't help you." And so, they break the commandment of God by this tradition. So, whatever I have that might profit you and help you has been dedicated to God as a gift.

Verse 6, says, let me read it to you in the King James, **"And honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free."** Literally it's, **"He will never honor his father and mother."** In other words, according to Numbers 30:2, once you make a vow to God you can't break it. In other words, "I can't help you even if I wanted to, now that I have dedicated that money to God." **And you make void the commandment of God on account of your tradition.** You just cancel out what God's word says by your tradition, to let people get away with things.

He says, **"Hypocrites!"**, verse 7. The word *hypocrites*, He is not calling them names, the word *hypocrite* means *somebody who answers according to the script*. It is a theatrical term. The actors and actresses that you see up front in a play, they are hypocrites because they're just acting and functioning according to the script, it is not really who they are. So, a hypocrite is someone who is religious, who functions outwardly according to the rules and regulations, but inwardly there's no life, there is no truth, there is no Spirit of God. **"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you,"** and this is from Isaiah 29:13, **"This people is drawing near to me with their mouth, and with their lips they honor Me; but their heart is far distant from Me."** That's a hypocrite. Outwardly speaking and saying and physically moving in certain positions, carrying out certain ceremonies, but the heart is not in it. The heart doesn't belong to God.

He says, in verse nine, **"But vainly they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."** That's the bottom line right there. That's the main issue. Taking tradition and personal beliefs and making it be the commandment of God. It isn't. When you ask people to show you in the Scriptures, "Well, it's there, it implies it." Or, "I believe that's what this text is saying." Well, the text either says it or it doesn't. So, the Lord looks at the heart, not the performance. He wants a personal relationship with a person in their heart. Even

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though we are not Jews or Hebrews, we are still religious about a lot of the things that we do, just outward performance. Checking the box. Fulfilling our duty. In fact, most of Christianity today is filled with traditions, just going through the motions, but in the heart there's no life, there's no response to Christ.

Let me finish with this one. In summation of everything we've talked about today, tradition has become the Word of God. That is what Jesus is saying. Tradition has become the word of God because nobody understands the Bible. But we have our traditions, and if you agree with it, it's the Word of God for you. If not, you go find a church that has a different tradition and go agree with them. But it's all tradition.

Very few people are actually studying and sticking with the Scriptures, which is why the churches that focus on the teaching and preaching of the word of God, there is very few people there. That's not what people are looking for.

In fact, I've had someone recently that talked about not coming here because there are no programs for the kids. We've got Sunday school. We've got teaching of the Bible there in back, we've got fellowship. That is not what they are looking for. They want programs with Christian themes.

You've made null, you've made void the word of God by your traditions. And that's where we have come so far at this point in time in history, to where tradition has become the Word of God.

Let's close with prayer.