

Matthew 21-02-28a

Good morning, this is Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is the 28th of February 2021 and we continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew, picking up this morning in chapter 15. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll begin.

Father, what a blessing it is for us to have the opportunity to assemble ourselves in whatever fashion is possible for us to center our attention and focus our worship on you through the Lord Jesus Christ and the presence and power of your Holy Spirit. We thank you for the preservation of your word and the opportunity that we have to look at it closely to be nurtured and energized and strengthened through it. And we pray that as we look at this portion together this morning, that the Holy Spirit will minister to each of our hearts in a way that is meaningful, memorable, and applicable in the days in which we live and the time that remains to us in this life.

We ask these things in Jesus name, amen. Having seen the emphasis of the preceding section here and gone to some lengths to try to implant it in our hearts, can you think, this is like the pop quiz to get your hamster running in his wheel, what was the theme of our study Thursday night? It was six words, right? It is all about the bread. And one of the helpful things about remembering that is it is going to inform our next section at which we will now look.

So if you have your Bible open to Matthew chapter 15, you can follow along with me in the inspired New King James. In Matthew's account, which we fleshed out quite a bit from the gospel of John and also from Revelation last time, having crossed back over the sea and the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent unto all that surrounding region, brought to him all who were sick and begged him that they might only touch the hem of his garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well.

Touching the hem of the garment. This is a pregnant phrase, if you will, for our upcoming study and for the future when the shadow of an apostle would fall upon someone who was ill or a apostle had touched. I think if the apostles had it to do over again, the handkerchief thing they might avoid because I think this led to the whole fascination with relics and the finger bones of the apostle John in a little wooden box under the altar and so on.

But notice that even though Jesus has diagnosed the problem in Israel, the spiritual problem with not understanding who he is and why he's here, it does not interfere with his compassion to take the people who come and heal them all just at a touch. There's no indication that faith is required or a doctrinal test. It is simply compassion.

And this is going to bear on the point that we're going to look at this morning as we continue into chapter 15. Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came

to Jesus. Now, the notoriety that Jesus has earned and has come to experience results in this multiple day journey from Jerusalem by scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus has become important enough on the religious landscape that they feel that he needs to be squelched in some way, needs to be taken in hand, needs to be discredited somehow. They have not come from Jerusalem to learn from him, to recognize him, to investigate and see if he is the real deal. They've already concluded that he is not.

So they are looking for something to criticize. Let's think about that for a moment, especially in our day and our time. What is the purpose of looking at a thing? Are we coming to it already with a dim view, already with the notion that we are going to tear it down, to disparage it, to find fault? This is a dangerous attitude to have because it spreads to almost every area of life.

Turn with me to the text of one of our memory verses. Keep your finger in Matthew chapter 15 and turn to the book of Philippians. Philippians chapter 4. We have the benefit of the Church Age application of the truth that we are going to be looking at here in Philippians chapter 4, beginning at verse 8. As Paul is about to conclude this letter, he says, Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy, meditate on these things.

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. The peace is what we are after. To the extent that it is possible, live in peace with all men.

When we memorized this, when we studied it in Philippians, you will remember that a good translation of this is, Finally, brethren, to the extent that, when it says whatsoever things, it really means to the extent that there is truth, to the extent that there is nobility, to the extent that there is something just. So, when we look at a thing, what are we looking for? Are we finding the flaws? Are we finding fault? Or are we focusing on that which is good? Just make a note, Philippians 4, 8 and 9, as we come back to Matthew chapter 15, because these things are going to connect. Scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus.

Are they of the mindset of Philippians 4, 8 and 9, or are they coming to find fault? There's a syndrome we've talked about before called confirmation bias, where if you expect to find a thing, you probably will. You buy something, you can examine it, and you're expecting to find a seam that's not quite straight. You're expecting to find a scratch.

You're expecting to find an imperfection or shoddy workmanship. Very often, when somebody else has bought a thing, we like to do that there. I read an interesting article

about our tendency, when we pick a thing, if we've spent any time at all in choosing, regardless of the actual quality, we will find ways to justify that that really was a smart, good purchase.

Because we chose it, and because we went through a process, we think this is the best of all of the options. We'll convince ourselves of this because we don't like walking around thinking, boy, that was a mistake. I mean, sometimes it is, and you can't help it.

It fails, it breaks, a piece comes off on your foot, and you say, I think I bought the wrong one. But our general tendency, when things are in the normal range, and they're not obviously flawed or defective, is if we've chosen between Ford, Chevy, Dodge, and GMC, and we picked a Ford, we're going to say this Ford is really superior to the other three choices I looked at. We're built that way.

Well, we should be this way when it comes to spiritual perspective, when it comes to moral perspective, when it comes to ethical perspective. I'm going to tread into an area I don't normally address this morning in connection with this passage, and it has to do with the climate in our current American society. So be thinking about that as we read this.

What do you look for when you come to a thing? Are you looking for what is true? Are you looking for what is noble? Are you looking for what is just? Are you looking for that portion that is lovely, that which is of good report, or are you just looking for the fly in the ointment, the flaw, the negative aspect? The disciples are of one caste of mind. The scribes and Pharisees are of another caste of mind. They come to Jesus saying, why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? It's pretty hard to look at the Lord Jesus and find something faulty.

He's faultless if you're using the right standard. So, and evidently Jesus kept to himself when it came to eating and so on. Notice they do not say, why do you not wash your hands when you eat? And you transgress the tradition of the elders.

It's your disciples. Your disciples are uncouth. Your disciples are unrighteous.

Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders. They do not wash their hands when they eat bread. What was our Thursday night study? It's about the bread, right? Now it's about how you eat the bread.

What kind of bread do you eat? Where does it come from? How do you eat it? They do not wash their hands. Jesus answered and said to them, why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? They say, why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders and violate it? And he says, why do you transgress and violate the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? But he's not going to cite this tradition. He's going to illustrate with something else.

For God commanded saying, honor your father and your mother and he who curses father or mother, let him be put to death. But you say, whoever says to his father or mother, whatever profit you might've received for me is a gift. Notice to God is in italics, but this is the dedication gift.

It's a religious dedication. This is reflected in the modern day with endowments that are enacted upon death. You make a bequest.

When you do estate planning, you'll be approached if you have great wealth. Nobody's approached me or is likely to, but especially people that have got considerable assets, they will be approached by educational institutions, medical research facilities and such to create an endowment so that upon death, a portion of their estate is going to go into supporting that entity. Christian schools in particular are beneficiaries of this kind of gift.

What the Pharisees were doing is saying, I have allocated my estate and a lot of the Pharisees were very well off. I've allocated my estate to go to the temple or some facet thereof when I die and I don't want to spend it down and have nothing left to give to God. So therefore mom and dad, I can't honor you.

I can't support you and meet your needs because that would be spending down that which I have dedicated to God. So what you would have, what you might have received for me is a part of this bequest. So therefore he needs not honor his father or mother.

Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. This is a, just a simple dodge. Hypocrites.

Well, did Isaiah prophesy about you saying these people draw near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain, they worship me teaching his doctrines, the commandments of men, teaching his doctrines, the commandments of men. What is in their heart? What is in their heart when they come to Capernaum, when they come to the North shore of the sea of Galilee, looking for Jesus from Jerusalem, what are they looking for? What is in their heart? Is it hate or is it honor? They don't honor their own parents.

They don't love their own parents. Why would they love the one that the heavenly father has sent? So Jesus points out this hypocrisy. When he had called the multitude to himself in verse 10, he said to them, hear and understand.

It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles him. His disciples said, you know, you offended the Pharisees when you said that. You're saying offends the Pharisees.

He answered and said, every plant, which my heavenly father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind.

And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch. Peter answered and said to him, explain this parable to us. And the great thing is because Peter has love for the father, because Peter has in his heart, a desire to learn, a desire to understand, a desire to obey.

It is given to him. Jesus does not explain what he said to the Pharisees to help them understand it better, or to try to argue them into a right frame of mind. But he does explain what he said to Peter because Peter asks.

And that's important because as we've seen in recent weeks, those who say all the father gives to Jesus will come to Jesus. This is election. The father chooses who's going to come to him.

The father chooses the sheep and they hear his voice and come to him. We'll come to this same verse in 13, every plant, which my heavenly father has not planted. See, it's all passive.

If the father hasn't planted the plant, it's going to be uprooted. It's elect or it's not. Why does the father plant? Because it is a plant that is going to grow and bear fruit.

It is not one that is going to wither. It's not one that's going to have its roots go shallow. It's not going to let itself get choked out.

There's a reason why God plants some plants and not others. We put ourselves in a position to receive the grace of God. We do that.

Everybody has that opportunity. That opportunity creates responsibility. If we could not put ourselves in a position to be planted, how could we be justly held accountable? Now, reformed theology says, well, God holds us accountable anyway.

Well, the God-given conscience that has been placed in the heart of every normal person understands that it's not fair to hold someone accountable for that over which they have no control. That's why there are different laws for children than there are for adults. We believe children don't have the full capacity to understand moral implications of things that they do.

And so there is juvenile court and then there is adult court. And we hold young people to a different standard because they are assumed to not be able to understand what an adult understands. Human justice understands this.

If someone is incapable of understanding, we don't hold them accountable. We send them to a facility where they can be kept from harming others. We try to treat them or whatever.

But you don't hold someone, even someone who is under medication or is on something,

if it's not their fault, if there's a mix of medication that messes up their mind and then they do strange things, they're not held to the same standard. Accountability and responsibility go hand in hand. And opportunity to choose with a clear mind means motive and opportunity and someone makes a choice.

Without freedom of choice, it is unjust to hold someone accountable. How can you punish someone for something over which they have no control? The whole idea behind racism is that society or individuals are punishing someone for the color of their skin or the culture that they come from and they can't control that. Therefore, everyone agrees that this is a heinous thing to do, to punish someone, to perpetrate negative consequences on them for something that they had no control over, had no say so.

Used to be illegitimate children would come into the world and in days when that was frowned on and there were names for such children, that is wrong. The child had no control over how they were conceived or whether or not their parents were married and so on. Why hold them accountable? With negative consequences and caste dispersions, Alexander Hamilton, the circumstances of his birth were ignoble and it was a big deal in those days.

He was able to rise above that. But society understands and we've gotten rid of those kinds of attachments to the extent that they are recognized. People should be held accountable for what they choose, what they decide.

And so, what is in the heart is what counts. Every plant which my Heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Well, we decide whether we are going to receive the implanted word and we are going to be that tree that is planted by the rivers of water in Psalm 1, bringing forth its fruit in its season.

If you want to know where and why the Father plants these plants in Matthew 15, verse 13, look at Psalm 1. The man who chooses to not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, who chooses to not stand in the way of sinners, who chooses to not sit in the seat of the scornful, who chooses to delight himself in the law of the Lord, and chooses to reflect on it and meditate on it day and night, he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth his fruit in his season. Look at the order. It doesn't say God plants the tree by the rivers of water and therefore it doesn't walk, stand, and sit in the bad places.

It's the other way around. The man who decides that his delight is going to be in the law of the Lord is going to be planted. Decision, planting.

It doesn't get any clearer. Just write Psalm 1, 1 and 2 out beside Matthew 15, verse 13. Now, I want to direct your attention to something.

I don't know if I'm actually going to read it or not. I had some of my family members look at it yesterday, but there is an article in the most recent edition of the Audubon Society's

magazine. And if you go to their website and click magazine, you will find this article.

I encourage you to read it because it is called, What do we do with Audubon? What do we do with him? And he's the guy that founded the Audubon Society. You know, he's the birdwatcher and the spring issue has this article. And it is by a black man who started birdwatching when he was eight years old.

He details his early birdwatching and his fascination with all things Audubon. And he is in this article, What do we do about John James Audubon? Calling out Audubon because he owned slaves. The founding father of American birding soared on the wings of white privilege.

The birding community and organizations that bear his name must grapple with this racist legacy to create a more just inclusive world. That's the subtitle of the article. Now, this is a typical example of many things.

It is a parable, if you will, for the nation as it exists today. Much of America was built in the 1500s and the 1600s and the 1700s and a great part of the 1800s by Europeans who used slave labor, not just blacks, but indentured Europeans, Native Americans were enslaved. And we frown on slavery now.

We frown on using human beings as chattel. It has been a historic practice. The Roman Empire ran on slave labor.

And so it is instructive to look at the word of God to find what our position should be on this. Do we sponsor, approve, condone, practice slavery now? Do we look at people based on their color, based on their origin, based on their culture, and make judgments of them based on things over which they have no control? A healthy moral sense says that's not just, it's not fair, right? And there are great upheavals and movements afoot in the present day seeking to redress this kind of wrong. What is a biblical Christian perspective that honors God and reflects the word of God and the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit for us when it comes to thinking about these things? Oddly enough, this passage before us is timely in that regard.

It is true that there have been great evils perpetrated all the way down to the present day by people who hold other people in a negative light, cast dispersions, discriminate, oppress, limit opportunities, and exert power in an unhealthy way to their detriment based on such things, race, religion, place of birth, and so on. And this is a genuine evil. We are where we are now.

And some people who want to redress this kind of wrong say we should do more than just work on this kind of problem in the present. We should go back and dig through history and find ways to do everything from reparations to tearing down statues and renaming things. The Sierra Club, for example, John Muir, the great wilderness explorer

and conservationist, the Sierra Club, which has done wonderful things to preserve a lot of the beauty of America's natural landscapes.

The Sierra Club has fired John Muir as their founder. They've vilified him, excoriated him, disowned him. Disavowed him is the word.

John Muir has been disavowed. I'm sorry, but it reminds me of the old Groucho Marx quip that I refuse to be part of any club that would have me as a member. Well, John Muir has been kicked out of the Sierra Club and has been disowned by them because of aspects of his life in the past.

You've seen these attempts to do so with founding fathers and so on. To the point, Philippians 4, verse 8, if someone has a flaw in their life, do we destroy and cancel and negate everything else they've done? If you're a Christian and you like piano music, do you pull all of your Liberace albums and throw them away because the man had something in his lifestyle? Do you go through your music collection and analyze who's in there and what kind of life they led or what they may or may not have done? Or do you focus, this is a secular example, you'd have to pretty much throw away almost everything in your collection unless you've got George Beverly Shea, perhaps. But there's a lot we don't know and don't need to know about people who are in the public arena.

But there is a fashion now to pick through the historical remnants of people in the past, find something that's wrong and then cancel them, hold them up to scorn and ridicule and vilification. This is an example of that. What do we do about John James Audubon? And this has been published by the Audubon Society in their magazine and on their website.

They're ready to say John James Audubon needs to be held to account. Audubon, according to this article, I think over the course of his life had eight or nine people he referred to as servants, but would be classified, in taking a dim view, as slaves. There's no record that he abused them, that he mistreated them, but he did own them.

Many people in these days, 200 plus years ago, did. And in today's light, this is seen to be an enormous moral failing. You can read the article.

This is by J. Drew Lanham in the spring 2021. And I encourage you to read it because it's a good expression in a particular case of a general attitude that currently prevails. Now, do we think that slavery is a good thing? Do we go to the Bible and say, well, Israel only owned slaves and God told them how to do it, so it's okay.

We don't. We also do not go back and try to rewrite or redress things that by today's standards are considered heinous and unconscionable because you cannot change the past. We can endeavor to be just and noble and lovely and honorable and of good report

in the present day.

It is significant to me that the apostle Paul and the Lord Jesus, with the vast amount of teaching that we have from Jesus, from Paul, you can add John and Peter in there, but we've got the epistles of Paul that talk directly to slaves and masters and do not call out slavery for the evil that it harbors and fosters and enables by putting people under other people's power without choice. You could argue that there are forms of slavery today. There are people who have to keep their job and are put through all kinds of mental and psychological torture because their boss has leverage and they can't afford to lose their job.

Therefore, they are abused in a lot of ways, but slavery proper is what we're talking about, where people are owned, bought and sold as property, families divided, children separated, and a lot of evils are perpetrated under that system. Nobody seriously argues that question. The question today is, because slavery has been gone from this country for a long, long time, what should our attitude be now toward those who are using this issue to make changes that tear down the accomplishments of the past? Audubon owned slaves.

If he were around today, he wouldn't, but in that day, 200 years ago, he did. So do we dismiss and write out of the history books the good things that Audubon did for birding, for ornithology, the paintings that he did, which are unmatched, the admirable work that was done in this country by all kinds of people, should it be rubbed out and pushed out of the history books and forgotten and dismissed and canceled because they were in some way, shape or form associated with slavery? Owned slaves. George Washington had some slaves of his own.

He had some that he married into that he had no legal control over and couldn't free even though he wanted to. They belonged to the Custis family and were by law to be passed on to his wife's progeny and so on. George couldn't legally free them if he wanted to.

Even his president, presidents don't make law. So it raises a question and it's pertinent for today. What should our attitude be? I commend to your attention what the Lord Jesus says here and what Paul says in Philippians chapter four.

What does Jesus say? When Peter asks the question, explain this parable to us in 1515 to Matthew, Jesus said, are you still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? These people are saying you're not eating the right way. You didn't wash your hands. You didn't go through a formality, a traditional ritual washing, which the Pharisees took great pride in.

They felt like this was symbolic righteousness, that they were washing and ensuring that what entered their bodies did not defile them. Jesus says, you know what happens to

what you eat? You can wash it all you want, but it's eventually going to leave your body as something else. This is a very abstruse and indirect way of saying you can wash your food all you want.

It's eventually going to come out as something that everybody recognizes as defiling. That's what he's saying. Wash it all you want.

When it comes out of your body, it is defilement personified. Whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart.

They defile a man. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are what defile a man.

But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man. What is Jesus saying here? What is in your heart? We may be unaware that we are unconsciously, you know, this whole thing of it's intrinsic. There's racism that's just intrinsic.

Just walking around as a person that's not of obvious color, you're perpetrating a bad thing. Just by spending your money that you've made at your job, you're perpetrating an evil because there are other people who don't have that money and you probably have your job because you're not like them and they don't have your job because they're not like you. And so the implication and the assumption is you can be wrong without and be held accountable for it without even knowing it.

This is not a biblical principle. We'll look after the break at something in the book of Acts that makes this clear. And our eyes are going to be on the Apostle Paul in a particular episode.

But the guiding principle, and I hesitate to tread away from just strictly looking at the word of God, but this is a point of application. And I think it's important in our day and time to have clarity in our thinking as Bible-believing Christians who love the Lord and want to be pleasing in His sight to understand how what we've learned from the word of God applies in this climate and in this day. And to what extent should we support recently developed movements in society.

So as we go to the break, be thinking about Philippians chapter 4 verses 8 and 9. Be thinking about what Jesus says about the heart. There is accountability where there is responsibility. How many people today are responsible for slavery and slave ownership two, three, four hundred years ago? Who today is responsible for that? Who today is responsible for actively oppressing or discouraging or discriminating against someone as an act that proceeded from the heart? I would submit to you by way of application that it is fair to be held accountable for that which proceeds out of my heart.

It is not fair to hold me accountable for what may or may not have proceeded out of

someone else's heart 200 years ago. The idea is guilt by association. If I were a birdwatcher and a member of the Audubon Society, there are those who would now hold me to account for being a part of an organization whose founder allegedly was associated with bad things.

He's associated because slavery is held to be an intrinsically bad thing. And he had some slaves, a single digit number, no indication that anything proceeded out of his heart to harm them, to do bad things to them, to beat them, rape them. But on paper, he owned them.

And ownership in and of itself is a heinous thing. Well, what does the Bible say about this? When we come back from the break, we're going to see what the Word of God has to say. And I will say that this is my understanding.

You can look at the Word of God and perhaps come to a different understanding and go be warm, be fed. I am treading into these waters very cautiously, but you can't not observe the signs of the times. And it's important for us to take what we know the Word of God and reflect on it and think about it and then think and act in our lives and interact with our culture on that basis.

And you really can't go very long ignoring the elephant in the room. And this is our current one of several. There's getting to be several elephants in the room.

And this is one of the larger ones. So we're going to look at it in the light of the Word of God. And these are our primary passages.

We look at what the Lord Jesus said and what the Apostle Paul said and something that the Apostle Paul did in the book of Acts. And we will see that when we come back from the break. If you get a chance during the break to pull up the Audubon article and just skim it so that you have an idea of the kind, it's very well reasoned.

It's not emotional. I think it makes the rational argument for that point of view. And I respect it on that basis.

But I disagree with the application that is drawn from it. And perhaps you'll see why when we come back. But we'll pause here and take our break.