

THE WORD OF GOD IN WORSHIP

Matthew 15:1-9

Mark 7:1-13

— Intro: There is no activity that men or angels can engage in than the worship of God. When the Devil tempted the Lord just before the beginning of our Lord's ministry, he took the Lord up into a very high mountain, and showed Him all of the kingdoms of the world. And then he said this:

All these things will I give thee,  
if thou wilt fall down and worship me (Matt. 4:9).

The Lord responded immediately by saying,  
Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written,  
Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God,  
and him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:10).

It seems that the Lord was quoting from Deut. 6:13. The fact that the word "fear" is used in Deuteronomy instead of "worship," would indicate that there is a very close relationship between these two words. To fear the Lord is to worship the Lord, and to worship the Lord is to fear Him.

— Since worship has from the beginning been associated with various ceremonies, it has never gotten beyond this in the thinking of worldly-wise men, even though they may be religious leaders. It has been separated entirely from a person's life, and anything that he might do by way of serving the Lord. And so this has tended to make worship something that we do in a church building and service, but not, as the Lord evidently intended it to be, a description of a person's life! It is good to come together to worship the Lord as hopefully we do in our services, but if that is the extent of our worship, it is not really worship at all. And it seems that the more spiritual an act is, the greater the possibility that man will corrupt it. Worshipful acts in a service are only meaningful to God if they are expressive of the way we live, i.e., our humility before God, our submission to the Lord, and our intention to live according to His Word.

We don't have to be in church to worship the Lord. We should begin every day by worshipping Him. We can worship the Lord privately, or we can worship Him as families, or as a church when we come together. But the Lord can only be pleased with our worship if it is expressive of our love for Him, coming from our hearts, and our desire to do His will.

— The passage before us tonight has to do with Jewish scribes and Pharisees. While they were the religious leaders of the Jews, they were unregenerate men. They did not know the Lord. Their main objective seems to have been to control the people, but spiritually they could do nothing for them. They

made the people believe that worship was getting involved in the ceremonies of the day, and in the preparations for them.

Over the course of time we know that when our Lord came to earth the Jews had added to the Scriptures many of their own regulations to such a degree that neither they nor the people really knew what was the Word of God, and what were the traditions of men. But the scribes and Pharisees sought to impose their traditions upon the people just like they were the Word of God. And all of this was done in spite of the warnings God had given about either adding to, or taking away from, the Word. For example, we read this in Deut. 4:2:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you,  
neither shall ye diminish ought from it,  
that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God  
which I command you.

One interesting thing about adding to the Word of God is that no one can do this without taking away from the Word. There is a glorious harmony to Scripture. We don't find any contradictions in Scripture. God may deal with His people in different ways at different times in history, as, for example, when they were under the law, but one proof that we have that the Bible is divinely inspired is in seeing the unity of Scripture.

But when anyone starts to add to the Word, then conflicts begin. And you will always find that when men add their words to God's Word, it is always man's words which become more important.

One of the purposes of our Lord's ministry on earth was to bring the people of Israel back to the Word of God. And this is exactly where He ran into trouble with the scribes and Pharisees. And this is why they came to Him on this occasion complaining about the way His disciples were eating without washing their hands. Let us notice what they said to the Lord.

I. THE CRITICISM MADE BY THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES (Matt. 15:1, 2).

When we were in Israel several years ago we saw Moslems at a fountain outside of one of their mosques at which the men would sit and wash their hands, and, if I remember correctly, their feet also, before they would enter the mosque. This was to prepare them for worship.

We don't know exactly all that was behind the objection of the scribes and Pharisees, but we do know, as Mark brings out even more clearly, that this extended to washing all kinds of

utensils.

Now it is a good idea to wash before you eat. My folks made me do this all of the time, and I remember occasions when I had to leave the table and go wash my hands before my folks would let me eat. But they never did give me the idea that I had to do this to be acceptable to God. It wasn't for worship; it was to safeguard my health.

The objection of the scribes and Pharisees was that the Lord's disciples were violating "the traditions of the elders." What a relief it must have been to them to learn that the way they washed and what they washed had nothing to do with their relationship with God. The Lord had set them free from such regulations.

But now let us consider our Lord's response to the scribes and Pharisees. His words are recorded for us in the remainder of our text, down through verse 9.

## II. THE LORD'S RESPONSE TO THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES (Matt. 15:3-9).

The Lord's charge against the scribes and Pharisees was much more serious than their charge against the disciples. He charged them with transgressing the commandment of God by their traditions. This meant that they were going contrary to Scripture by insisting that the Jews be obedient to their traditions. And He had an example for them. See verse 4 through 6. (Read.)

I think that you all know that the ten commandments were divided into two parts. The first four had to do with their relationship to God; the last six had to do with their relationship with each other. And right at the head of all of the commandments which had to do with their relationships with each other, was Commandment #5: "Honour thy father and thy mother." And placing this where the Lord did, we must assume that this was very, very important to Him. This was necessary for the preservation of the family.

Prov. 23:  
22-25

However, the Jewish leaders were smart enough to see that a lot of money was getting away from them by this commandment. And so they had devised a way that would excuse their people from this responsibility which God had placed upon them. If they wanted to designate that which should have gone to their parents as a gift to the Temple, then they were no longer obligated to take care of their parents. They were released from that fifth commandment. And so it was just as though the Lord had never said such a thing.

And so the Lord said, "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." This meant that they had disannulled that portion of the Word of God. It was the same as cutting it out of their scriptures. At the same time it made them ignore the warnings that God had given about doing something like this.

And so the Lord pressed the charge against them that they were "hypocrites" -- and they were! Here they were men who supposedly were devoted to instructing the people in the Word of God, teaching them how to live so as to please God, and they were doing just exactly the opposite. And we can see why the Lord called them "hypocrites." A hypocrite is actual an actor under an assumed name. They were not helping the people. Instead, they were making them do things that would bring the judgment of God upon them. And the scribes and Pharisees were guilty of an even greater sin for which they would face even greater judgment. Nothing is more serious to God than tampering with His Word.

Then the Lord did what He and His apostles often did in their ministry and in the writings of the apostles, He cited an OT passage which was a perfect description of what the scribes and Pharisees were doing. It was not a new sin because the people of Israel and Judah in OT times were guilty of the same sin, and were encouraged in it by those who claimed to be the prophets of God, but who were in reality false prophets.

What was their sin?

Worship to them had become merely certain religious ceremonies that they went through, but they did not really worship the Lord from the heart. And this was what led to the captivities, and even to the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans a few years after our Lord's ministry.

And this is the sin of the professing church today. The church is occupied with many things that have nothing to do with Scripture, and when that happens, the things that are important, the things that really matter to God, are not only neglected, but completely forgotten.

Long before our Lord came to earth, the Spirit of God led Solomon to say something that is of paramount importance to the people of God in any generation. He wrote it for his son, and no one could get any better advice who is concerned about pleasing God and really worshipping Him. Listen to what Solomon said: **"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life"** (Prov. 4:23).

Everything begins to go wrong when our hearts go wrong, and the only way we can keep our hearts right is when we leave the Word of God as it is, refusing to take anything away from it, and refusing to add anything to it, but seeking by God's grace to make it the way we seek to live day by day. This is what it means to live a life of worship, so that when we do come to a service to sing of our love for the Lord and to worship Him, the Lord who sees our hearts will be glorified because He knows that what we are singing and what we are saying really does come from the heart.

Concl: Let us remember that the Word is very precious to our God. He has given it to us exactly as He wants it to be. If we try to add to it, we will always have to take something away from it, and it will no longer be the pure Word of God. But when we love it, and seek to understand it, and obey it, this is true worship, and there can be no greater expression of our love for God.