

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 7

The Faith Demanded by the King

Matthew Chapters 14-15

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Introduction

The nation as a whole rejected the King of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11-12; see Lesson 5). As a result of this rejection, Christ's kingdom program was set aside and postponed until a future generation of Jews would be ready to receive it. The kingdom of God would be taken from the Jews living in the days of Christ and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matthew 21: 43). This nation will be the Jews who are alive and on earth prior to the second coming of Christ. This will be the nation who will say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord" (see Matthew 23: 39). The day of Israel's national repentance will be a wonderful day indeed!

National rejection, however, does not necessitate individual rejection. Though the nation Israel rejected her Messiah, individuals can still receive Him. God always

has a remnant of true believers in every age. This is illustrated in John 1:11-12. In verse 11 we have the nation rejecting Christ ("He came unto His own and His own received Him not") but in verse 12 God offers His salvation to individuals who will receive His Son ("but as many as received Him, etc."). Paul argues in Romans 11 that in this present age there is a remnant of Jewish believers (Rom. 11:5-6) and this remnant included the Apostle Paul himself. In Romans 11:25 Paul teaches that Israel's present blindness is not total, but only partial. This means that today there are some Jews who see very well, and they have recognized Christ as their Messiah and as their Saviour.

Nothing is more important than recognizing Jesus Christ's true identify. Individuals, if they are to receive Christ and believe on Him, must understand who He really is. Our faith must be placed in Jesus Christ as He is revealed to us by God. In the following passages we have examples of mistaken identity, where people misidentified who Jesus truly was. Notice the following mistaken ideas:

In Matthew 13:55 Jesus was misidentified as the carpenter's son. This was incorrect. Although He was the supposed son of Joseph, He was God's Son!

In Matthew 14:2 Jesus was misidentified as John the Baptist. This was incorrect. Jesus was the One whom John the Baptist pointed to.

In Matthew 14:26 Jesus was misidentified as a "spirit" (phantom, apparition, ghost). This was incorrect. He is the Son of God, the Lord of heaven and earth

In Matthew 16:13-14 Jesus was misidentified as "John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." This was incorrect; He is none of these persons. He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16).

The following verses give examples of people who correctly identified who Jesus was. Notice these correct statements:

Matthew 13:57	"a Prophet"
Matthew 14:33	"the Son of God"
Matthew 15:22	"the Son of David" (the Messiah!)
Matthew 16:15-16	"the Son of the living God"

Why is it important that we correctly identify Jesus Christ? Why is it important that we agree with God and receive as true what God has said about His Son? See 1 John 5:9-12 and John 8:24.

Hometown Unbelief (Matthew 13:53-38)

The Lord Jesus went to His home town of Nazareth (compare Matthew 2:23) and

taught in the synagogue there (13:54). [Note: He had been terribly rejected when He made an earlier visit to Nazareth as recorded in Luke 4; in fact, He was almost thrown off a cliff. What is recorded in Matthew chapter 13 is a later incident, according to the chronology set forth by A. T. Robinson in his *Harmony of the Gospels*.]

When a man is running for President of the United States he is expected to win by a big margin in his home state, and especially in his home town. If in his home state people do not vote for him, it is not likely that he will do very well in other places. The Lord Jesus did not win the vote of the hometown crowd (v. 57). They were offended by Him. What stood out the most was their unbelief. They saw Him only as a mere man, the son of Joseph, the son of Mary, the brother of the children of Mary and Joseph (13:55-56). Many people today make this same fatal mistake. They see Him only as a man. They have a high opinion of Him as a man, just as these people of Nazareth did (see verse 54 where they speak of His wisdom and His mighty works). Today people will often speak of Christ as a great prophet, as the greatest teacher the world has ever known, as a wonderful moral example, as the greatest man who ever lived, etc. but they consider Him merely as a man. Jesus was more than the son of Mary; He was the Son of God, the GOD-MAN.

What is it that keeps people from recognizing Him as God? See Matthew 13:58—unbelief!! Jesus had given ample evidence that He was exactly who He claimed to be, but the people rejected the clear evidence. Rejection of the light leaves one in the darkness! It is a dangerous thing to reject Jesus Christ for Who He really is (John 8:24--"if ye believe not that I AM HE ye shall die in your sins").

The Faith of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12)

In chapter 14 we are introduced to Herod, known in history as Herod Antipas. This is not the Herod we learned about in Matthew chapter 2 (Herod the Great who died in 4 B.C.). Herod Antipas was the Son of Herod the Great, the ruler of Galilee. He was the murderer of John the Baptist, the one Christ referred to as "that fox" (Luke 13:31-33). Also the Lord Jesus later stood before this man during His trial on the night before His crucifixion.

In Matthew 14, Herod learns of the fame of Jesus and Herod's terribly guilty conscience leads him to the conclusion that this must be John the Baptist (whom he killed) risen from the dead. This man was very bothered and troubled and haunted by the terrible crime which he had committed against John the Baptist. It is a reminder that we can never run away from the wrong which we do. It will always catch up with us. It will always come along to haunt us. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). Instead of trying to run away from the wrong, we must instead run to the Saviour who is the only One who can remove our sins and take care of our guilt problem.

Matthew relates for us the account of how Herod put John to death. Herod was

having an unlawful relationship with his brother's wife, and John the Baptist boldly and publicly rebuked him for this as well as for other sins (Luke 3:19-20). This greatly angered Herodias (Herod's brother's wife) and because of her Herod had John put in the dungeon located at Machaerus where Herod had a palace. Herod wanted to put John to death but was afraid to do so because the people so highly regarded him as a prophet (v. 5). To kill John would greatly anger the people. Herod was not concerned about doing right, but only about doing what was popular. How often today people do the popular thing instead of the right thing. Sometimes it demands paying a real price to do that which is right (being unpopular, losing friends, losing a job, etc.) and many are not willing to pay such a price. John the Baptist's principles were the opposite of this. He did what was right and spoke out against sin no matter what the cost. Doing right ended up costing him his head.

The occasion for the murder of John was the birthday party of Herod. [Only two places in the Bible mention birthday parties, here and Genesis 40:20, and on both occasions a man lost his head.] The daughter of Herodias danced to the delight of the male guests. She was in full sympathy with her mother's desires and probably had been previously instructed as to what to do. As we think about the gruesome death of John we are reminded of Matthew 10:28. The sword could not touch John's soul, only his body. John finished the race well. God's purpose for him on earth had been fulfilled. As George Whitefield once said, "A believer in Christ is immortal until his work is done." No believer can be put to death apart from the permission and consent of the Heavenly Father.

John the Baptist did not fear men, but only God. Are there times when we do not speak out or take a stand for Christ because we are afraid of people? Afraid of what they might think? Afraid of what they might say? Afraid of what they might do? *Where is the fear of God?* Are we afraid of what God might think? Are we concerned about what God has said or about what God might do? We need to get our focus off of men and onto God.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matthew 14:13-21)

This great miracle was preceded by amazing healing miracles (Matthew 14:14; compare John 6:2). There were five thousand men (males) and this number does not count the women and children. There could have been well over 10,000 total people who were fed on this day.

The resources of food available were small, but it's amazing what God can do with the little we have, if we give that little to Him. We may not have many talents and we may not have many abilities, but have we given the little that we do have to the Lord? My little becomes much when I give it to God. By faith I must place it into His hands and watch Him multiply it, bless it and use it for His glory. The life of Fanny Crosby illustrates this principle:

*There was once a little blind girl,
She couldn't even see;
But she had a little talent for writing verse and poetry.
The little bit that she could do
She gave to her Lord & King.
And now the entire Christian world
Can better rejoice and praise and sing.
Who could this little blind girl be?
Her name is long remembered: Fanny Crosby*

Some liberal preachers (those who do not really believe the Bible and who deny the reality of miracles) explain the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 as follows:

The people had their little lunches hidden away, perhaps under their outer garments. However, when they saw the way the little boy shared his fish and loaves, they turned from their selfishness and began to bring out their food and share it with one another.

What's wrong with this explanation? Men will do almost anything in order to try to explain the miraculous apart from God! They take the supernatural and try to make it natural.

The Faith of Peter (Matthew 14:22-33)

Notice in this chapter how important it was for the Lord to get alone to pray. We see this in Matthew 14:13 and 23.

Liberal preachers, who do not believe the Bible, also try to explain away the miracle of Peter walking on the water. One explanation goes something like this:

Jesus was not really walking on water; He was just walking on a sandbar so that it looked like He was walking on water. When Peter stepped out of the boat, he too stepped onto the sandbar. However, as he kept walking he stepped off of the sandbar into the deep water. Jesus (who was still on the sandbar) had to reach out and save Peter and help him get back into the boat.

Such a foolish explanation reminds us of the story of the farm boy who went to the city to study at a famous seminary. The unbelieving professor was teaching about the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea under Moses. He explained that the Red Sea was really the "Sea of Reeds" and was actually a very shallow marsh. Thus the children of Israel were able to easily walk across it to the other side. When he heard this the farm boy said, "Praise the Lord!" The professor was not used to such expressions being used in his class and asked the farm boy why he said that. The young man answered, "Professor, isn't it wonderful that our God is so great that He could drown the whole Egyptian army in just a few inches of

water!"

The unbelief of men sometimes appears to be humorous, but it is actually very sad and tragic. How much better it is to simply take God at His Word and accept the clear and simple statements of Scripture and let the Bible say what it says, with the attitude, "Lord, I believe!"

According to Matthew 14:27, recognizing the Person of Jesus Christ is the key to overcoming fear. Fear stems from a poor concept of Who God really is. Fear is a form of unbelief. It is doubting that God is able to take care of people in time of trouble or danger. Faith and fear can't live together. Peter's walk on the water illustrates this. He did fine as long as his eyes were on the Lord (a picture of faith). He began to sink as soon as he turned his eyes to the circumstances of life around him, to the wind and the waves. Winds and waves are no problem to the Son of God (verse 33), but they seem like big problems to us.

Tradition or Truth (Matthew 15:1-9)

Is your faith in tradition or truth? Are you trusting the teachings of men or the truth of God? Is there a difference between what men say and what God says? Do you know of religions and cults today that are based upon what men have said rather than what God has said? What happens when we add the teachings of men to the Word of God? What happens when we add error to truth? Do we end up with truth or error? If you add a little arsenic to pure orange juice, what do you end up with? Do you have pure orange juice or poisoned orange juice? Thus, if you add any amount of human error to God's truth you have ruined God's truth. The Pharisees were adding their human traditions to the Word of God.

Matthew 15:2 does not say that the disciples transgressed the truth of God, but rather the tradition of the elders. Verse 9 is the key: the Jews had added the doctrines and commandments of men and thus had made the Word of God void (v. 6). They poisoned the orange juice!

Some additional information may help in understanding Matthew 15:4-6. In Matthew 15:4 our Lord quoted from Exodus 20:12 and Exodus 21:17. He then contrasts this God-given law with the tradition of the elders which had become a sacred law to the Scribes and Pharisees. In verse 5 the word "gift" is the Greek term "corban". (see Mark 7:11)

The word "corban" was a word borrowed from the Hebrew, meaning "a gift or an offering." It was used to describe something which was specially given and dedicated to God. That is to say it was completely set apart from all ordinary purposes and usages and became the property of God. If a man had declared his property corban, this meant the property was sacred and dedicated to God, as if laid on the altar. When his father and mother were in dire need and came to him for help, he said, "I am sorry that I cannot give you any help because nothing that

I have is available for you because it is dedicated to God." The vow was made as an excuse or a reason to avoid helping a parent in need.

The rabbis allowed the individual to keep whatever money should have been given by the son for the support of his parents, if he would declare it as a gift to God. He could keep the money and by merely speaking the word "corban," justify his withholding it from his parents. This practice was heartless and inhumane, and certainly was the opposite of honoring one's father and mother.

This traditional practice gave them an excuse to get out of doing what God had commanded them to do, that is, provide for their parents. The result was that they only gave lip service to God (Matthew 15:8), but their hearts were far from God. God is after the heart. God is not looking for religious people who try to put on a good show of piety. God is looking for inward, heart reality. ("Thou desirest truth in the inward parts" --Psalm 51:6). The teachings of men will never set a person free, but God's truth will (John 8:31-32).

Heart Pollution (Matthew 15:10-20)

In Matthew 15:11 our Lord clearly taught that a man is defiled from within, not from without. The Lord's teaching followed the charge from the Pharisees and scribes that His disciples broke the tradition of the elders by not properly washing their hands (Matthew 15:1-3). These self-righteous men believed they could keep themselves clean and free from defilement by doing certain practices and abstaining from others. They failed to realize that the source of defilement is from within: "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, etc. . . .all these evil things proceed from within and defile the man (Mark 7:21-23).

Man's basic nature is evil, deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Reform, legal observances, environmental shaping, hereditary purging processes—all these things can never prevent man from being defiled. Man is defiled because of the sin that entered into the world by one man (Romans 5:12). The only solution is regeneration. Man needs a new heart and a new life which only God can give (John chapter 3).

In Matthew 15:13 we learn that there are plants which the Father has not planted and there are plants which the Father has planted. Those which remain rooted (and which are not plucked up) are of the Father's planting. Those, like the Pharisees, whose roots grab onto the teachings and commandments of men, will be plucked up. Those who have roots going down deep into the rich soil of God's truth will never be plucked up.

The Pharisees were blind leaders of the blind (Matthew 15:14). It is not very wise to be led by a blind man!

We need to be concerned about *inner heart pollution*. Today people are sometimes upset and in a frenzy about the things that go into the belly and stomach (v. 17), such as the chemicals that are put in foods, the insecticides that are sprayed on fruit trees, the kinds of foods to be avoided to keep oneself from getting cancer, heart disease, etc. Though we should certainly exercise wisdom and care in what we eat and seek to have healthy nutrition, this is not really the most important thing. The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. Those people who are so concerned about what goes into their stomachs are often surprisingly indifferent about the pollution and corruption of their own hearts! How inconsistent. Water and air pollution is nothing compared to the problems of heart pollution.

Only the living God can take care of the problems of the heart (Hebrews 10:22).

The Great Faith of a Gentile Woman (15:21-28)

The meaning of our Lord's puzzling statement in Matthew 15:26 centers on the nature and purpose of Christ's mission: "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15: 24 and compare Matthew 10: 5-6). The Lord had gone into the borders of Tyre and Sidon where the Gentile population was substantial, and it was necessary for Christ to make clear His appointed mission. The woman was a Syrophoenician by race, a Gentile of pagan Canaanite descent. She addressed the Lord as "thou Son of David" indicating that she knew something of Israel's Messianic hope (Matthew 15:22). She identified Jesus as the future King of Israel, the One in the line of David. It is interesting that Christ did not respond to that title (Matthew 15:23). The Lord then makes clear His mission, declaring that He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:24). Again the woman pleads with Him, this time calling Him "Lord." (Matt. 15:25). Finally the Lord answers, "Let the children first be filled" (Mark 7:27). "The children" must refer to the people of Israel (compare v. 24). Our Lord was saying that His mission was to the Jew first (compare Romans 1: 16). "For it is not meet (good) to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs" (Matthew 15: 26). Lenski translates this phrase as follows:

"It is not an excellent thing to take the bread of children and to throw it to the little pet dogs." The bread speaks of Christ's ministry which was intended for "the children," that is, the people of Israel. The Gentiles are here likened to little pet dogs. "These have owners who keep them even in the house and feed them by throwing them bits from the table." (Lenski)

The woman's response manifested her great and humble faith, "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table" (v. 27). It is clear that she was in complete agreement with the Lord's appointed mission. She was willing to humbly receive any "leftover" blessings that might fall to her from the Lord's dealing with His chosen people. The Lord honored her faith and fed her the

desired crumbs (Matthew 15:28). Her daughter was healed.

The Feeding of the Four Thousand and the Unbelief of the Disciples (Matthew 15:32-39)

Notice verses 32-33 and how they reveal the amazing unbelief of the disciples. If the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 had not happened, then we would not be shocked by these verses. The disciples' response would be what we would have expected. But we must remember that these were the same men who were witnesses of what happened in Matthew 14:15-21. We can excuse them for Matthew 14:17 but we cannot excuse them for Matthew 15:33!

What should the disciples have said (instead of what they did say in Matthew 15:33)? They should have said something like this: "Lord, it's impossible to feed such a multitude, but it's not impossible for You. We well remember what You did with the 5000. We know that You can do the same today! Nothing is too hard for the Lord!" Indeed, the situation presenting them was even less of a problem than what they had confronted previously. In their current predicament there were less people (a thousand less men) and more loaves (two more loaves). The main point is this: If God did it before, why can't He do it again? Faith cries out, "God is able! Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

The disciples should never have reacted as they did, and yet, as we think about our own lives, we find that we often do the same thing. How many times does the Lord do something wonderful for us, and when the same situation comes along again, we fail to trust Him! For example, let's say that in school you faced a very difficult test, and did not know how you would ever pass it. You worried about it a lot. You did not trust the Lord as you should have. You tried to study and do your best but you still feared that you would fail the test. Finally the day came for the test and you cried out to God for help (almost a desperation cry). God graciously helped you to pass the test and not to do as poorly as you had feared. You thank God for the result and confess your worries and fears and failures to trust God.

Two months later another test comes along which again seems very difficult. What do you do? Do you worry all over again? Or do you say, "Lord, the last time You got me through a very difficult test and I know that You are able to do the same thing this time. I'm going to trust You this time." It's amazing how we often fail to learn from the past. Faith remembers! Faith does not forget what God has done in the past, and uses that as a basis for what He can do today!

The children of Israel are an example of such unbelief. They saw how God delivered them from the Egyptians at the Red Sea. God rescued His people in such a miraculous and unforgettable way. However, later, when the children of Israel sent out spies into the promised land, ten of the spies discouraged the people by telling them how strong and big the people of the land were (Numbers 13:27-33). Israel's sinful and unbelieving conclusion was this: "We are not able to go up

against the people; for they are stronger than we" (Numbers 13:31). How unbelieving they were! How forgetful they were! Did not they remember what God had done to the Egyptians at the Red Sea? Unbelief looks at the problem and the problem seems huge. Faith looks at Almighty God, and the problem becomes very small!

God has already taken care of your biggest problem: saving your soul and making you fit for God's heaven. If God has taken care of your biggest problem, is He not able also to take care of all your lesser problems?

Notes For Further Study

Matthew 14:2; compare Matthew 16:13-14. The Jews of this time seemed to believe that saints of the past could rise from the dead and live on earth again. There was justification for this concept in the case of Elijah 17:11. The Jews expected Elijah to come prior to the coming of the Messiah (see Malachi 4:5).

Matthew 14:3. The Herodian family is prominent in the New Testament where we learn about four Herods, each of a different generation: 1) Herod the Great, who slaughtered the Bethlehem infants (Matthew 2); 2) Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great who is mentioned here in Matthew 14. He murdered John the Baptist. 3) Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, mentioned in Acts 12. He was the murderer of James who was the first disciple to be killed; 4) Herod Agrippa II, the great grandson of Herod the Great. This man crossed paths with the Apostle Paul and is mentioned in Acts 25:13-26:32.

Matthew 14:26. The term "spirit" is the Greek word *phantasma*. Compare the English word "phantom." A good translation would probably be ghost or apparition. To see the figure of a person at night, walking on the sea in rough waters would have been a frightening sight, to say the least. These experienced fishermen had never seen such a sight!

Matthew 14:36. A touch of the Master's garment was all that was needed for these spectacular healing miracles. Modern faith healers have an excuse for their inability to heal certain people: "You don't have enough faith." Christ healed these people whether they had faith or not. So also in Matthew 12:15—"He healed them all" whether they had faith or not. Also Matthew 15:30-31.