

# Sanctified Or Sanitized

Matthew 15

Would you rather be sanctified or sanitized? It depends on whether you are a believer in God's Kingdom or a diaper pale, doesn't it?

Both are a type of cleansing and both are important to humans. And some in Jesus day thought sanitization was good enough.

I'm going to do a quick review of the first 14 chapters of Matthew, and then compare the characters we find in chapter 15. From the birth record, Matthew establishes Jesus link to Abraham and David, as well as some that his Jewish brothers might consider questionable characters. He establishes:

- Jesus identity with humanity,
- Conditions for those who would choose to live as kingdom people,
- Jesus authority over everything that binds humans,
- Jesus rejection and refusal to identify with the religious establishment.

Reading chapter 15, some might get the impression that Jesus is saying with his actions, "No more Mr. Nice Guy." After calling the Pharisees and teachers of the law that came from Jerusalem hypocrites, because their oral traditions nullified God's word, Jesus and disciples withdrew

to the region of Tyre and Sidon where a Canaanite woman approaches them, making a real pest of herself.

At first, Jesus ignored her, answering her pleas with silence, and then appeared to insult her. Has he reached his wits end with the lost sheep of Israel? Is he trying to get away for a break from the thickheads and whiners with their accusations and stupid shallow questions? Has he had enough of healing the ungrateful?

Follow along as I read Matthew 15: 1-20; 29-35. We will return to the Canaanite woman later.

It's obvious that Jesus has not given up on healing those brought to him in great need. If he was frustrated and headed to the gentile area for a break, it was not the lame, the blind, the crippled, and the mute that frustrated him. If he was frustrated, it would have been with the heart of man: those who were claiming to be shining examples of what God desired as true worshipers and leaders of the lost sheep of Israel; those sanitized saints that followed and preferred man's traditions over God's commands; the blind leading the blind, Jesus called them.

The washing of hands before a meal is a good thing for sanitary reasons, but the rabbis made it a mark of righteousness, overblown at great length in the oral

teaching. It was commanded to wash the hands before meals and after eating. The more "righteous" did it even between courses. The hands must be immersed. The water itself must be "clean" and the cups or pots used must be ceremonially "clean." Can you imagine Jesus eating at a Pharisee's house who practiced such ritual? The rabbis held the refusal to "wash" to be a mortal sin.

Jesus answered the Pharisees question with a question. Basically, he asked, why do you look for loopholes in the commands of God? Do you think God would be pleased with such gifts if your parents ended up homeless?

Jesus then calls the crowds to him and clarifies the "clean" "unclean" issue. Jesus correction of their teaching and application of Isaiah's prophesy in hearing of the crowds, offended the Pharisees.

In the explanation of the parable to his disciples, it's the condition of the heart that makes a person clean or unclean. This is not the blood pumping organ; to the Jew, the heart was what we recognize as the mind, will, emotion; the spirit of a person. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." Being sanctified, cleaned up from evil things and worldly ways, from God's perspective, is a condition of the heart.

When Jesus first came on the scene, teaching and healing, many were drawn to

Him. He was a curiosity: someone to be impressed with; someone to talk about. Even the leaders of the people viewed Jesus as God's messenger (John 3:2). But as Jesus' message became clearer, and as He confronted each hearer with the challenge to choose, attitudes began to change. His approval rating began to slip in the poles.

When Jesus returned to His hometown, He was resented rather than honored (13:57).

John the Baptist's death at the hands of Herod (14:1-12) added to the decline in his approval rating. The early mood of anticipation Jesus' ministry had stirred was vanishing. The Pharisees had taken sides against Him. The Herodians had joined in the plot to eliminate Jesus. Jesus had not performed as the expected King should. The hated Herod had even executed Jesus' cousin and Jesus had done nothing. Instead of mounting a vengeful attack on Herod and Rome, Jesus "withdrew . . . to a solitary place" (14:13).

The crowds followed Jesus. Waiting. Though Jesus would no longer perform miracles as authenticating signs to demonstrate the validity of his claim, he continued to be moved by compassion. Jesus continued to heal, because he cared. And, when the crowds around him were hungry and there was no source of food nearby, Jesus distributed loaves and fish—and fed the thousands who had followed.

But, he wasn't as compassionate with the sanitized group from Jerusalem. In 15:14 he said, "Leave them; they are blind guides. If

a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

In the previous verse, Jesus says something that sounds like a verse we have heard earlier in Matthew's gospel. In 3:10, John the Baptist said, "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

Jesus said in response to the Pharisee's offence said, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots."

Shortly after the confrontation with the Pharisees and this statement, we find Jesus and his disciples in Tyre and Sidon, a gentile region.

Often in scripture, we see Jesus going off by himself to pray, or taking his disciples somewhere for a brief rest. What was this trip for?

There is a statement: Do not judge a man until you know his whole story.

Had Jesus heard and seen enough from the religious leaders? Had they been "in his face" enough to prove their "whole story?"

We have all seen artist's renditions of Jesus with little children or carrying a lamb across his shoulders. But where are the pictures of Jesus turning over the tables of the moneychangers? Where is the artist's drawing of the name-calling Jesus in the Pharisee's face: you brood of vipers, you white washed tombs full of dead men's bones? Where is the harsh picture of Jesus

who said, "Let the dead bury the dead. You follow me?" Where is the offending Jesus? Hypocrites: breaking the commands of God for your traditions. You sanitized saints are all washed up!

Have you ever said to someone, "I've had it up to here with you?" That's a good time to walk away isn't it? Maybe that is what this trip is all about. Did the human side of Jesus want to punch these guys in the nose?

Have you ever had to walk away and count to ten? Twenty? One hundred? I know I have. And I bet you have too. Is there anything more frustrating than evangelism? Trying to talk to people about God's word verses the teachings of men. Sometimes it's best just to walk away before you have a stroke or do something stupid. I don't think that a punch in the nose would qualify as an evangelist tool.

Maybe that is part of the reason for this trip. But, during this trip, Matthew sees one of the greatest expressions of faith, and it's from a gentile of all people.

He tells the story of a pagan woman whose faith is rewarded and reveals the futility of the Pharisees' legalistic sanitized approach to religion. (Read vss.21- 28)

Paul graphically describes the position of the Gentile before Christ came. In Ephesians 2:12, he writes: "remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to

the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”

To the pious Jew, this Gentile woman was “unclean.” She deserved the silent treatment from Jesus. There would have been no surprise to Matthew’s brethren when her request was rejected and she was given the “dog treatment.”

At what point would most people have given up? During the silent treatment or the insult?

Guys, don’t you hate the silent treatment? Don’t you hate that? Wouldn’t you rather take the insult and get it over with?

How many times have you prayed without an answer, and then given up? Silence from God is tuff, isn’t it?

How many of you have been insulted while praying? This was an amazing woman. And we don’t even know her name.

So, here is a brief rundown of the characters found in chapter 15. We have the pretenders: the sanitized group that came from Jerusalem who became offended when Jesus pointed out their false religion.

We have the observers. These were the crowds of people following Jesus for various reasons. They witnessed the confrontation between the pretenders and Jesus.

We have some participants. These were the disciples who reported the offence to

Jesus. They could be considered observers as well.

And then we have the shining example of great faith: a Canaanite woman who went home to a healthy daughter.

No matter in which group you find yourself, Jesus calls us to self-examination. Is our faith essentially a matter of the heart, or have we fallen into the same pit and treated citizenship in God’s kingdom as a matter of “do” and “don’t” rather than an issue of personal relationship with Jesus? If we are just sanitized, we can show great faith one day, and slip right in to being a pretender the next. Or, we can be content just to be an observer, following the crowd, never taking the risk to be a participant. Are we being responsive to Him, or simply living by rules laid down by men that claim to show how we please God? Are we sanctified or sanitized? Questions like these must be asked and answered by every generation, and by each individual believer as well.

Do you see yourself in chapter 15? Do you need to make some adjustments? That’s why we come together on a regular basis. We need to help one another find correct information.

Paul writes to the Galatians: “even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (1:8)

(The following story adapted from Jewels for the Journey, a daily devotional

by Dr. Calvin Evans and Dr. Calvin Ray Evans.)

I read the story of a woman, traveling by train in a terrible winter storm. This woman, with baby in her arms, was going to a little town called Prairie View. Because of the blinding snowstorm, she became anxious because she did not know the time or place to get off the train.

A kindly gentleman in the car noticed how anxious she was and said to her, “I see that you are anxious about how to know when you come to Prairie View. I ride the train back and forth all the time, and I know exactly where we are. When we come to your station, I will tell you so you won’t have to be anxious anymore.”

The train finally came to a stop. The gentleman said to the mother, “This is Prairie View,” and he helped her off the train. As soon as she stepped off the train, it began to move.

After they had been traveling for miles in the blinding blizzard, the conductor came, looked around and asked, “Where is the mother with the baby?” The man said, “At the last stop. I helped her off at Prairie View.”

The conductor exclaimed, “No! She got off the train to her death. That stop of the train was a switch. We are just coming to Prairie View!” The mother and baby were left at a switch in the snowstorm, where there was nobody to meet her.

They backed up the train, searched the area and finally stumbled across her body. She was frozen to death with her dead baby still in her arms. She was the victim of wrong information.

If it is such a serious thing to give wrong information with regard to temporal things, what about spiritual things? If someone puts their trust in wrong information contrary to God's Word, their loss will be for all eternity.