

**Peace** be with you. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

In our last program, we saw the Lord Jesus multiply five loaves of bread and two fish to feed a crowd of more than five thousand men. On the following day, a great crowd surrounded Jesus, but Jesus, who knew their hearts, said to them, *"You are looking for me because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life! I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty!"*

Sadly, many people turned away and no longer followed Jesus because they valued the food that could nourish their bodies more than the food that could nourish their souls. But some continued to follow Jesus because they believed in their hearts that Jesus was the Holy One from God and the source of eternal life.

Today we plan to continue in the holy Gospel and see how Jesus was **confronted by the religious rulers** of the Jews, and how the Jews were **divided because of Jesus**. Before we begin, it is helpful to know that the religious experts known as the Pharisees, and most of the Jews, followed the customs that they and their ancestors had established. For example, when they returned from a public place, they would not eat until they had washed themselves in a certain way. They also had many other traditions, such as how they were to wash cups, water pots, and kettles so that they would be "clean."

Listen to what is written in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter fifteen. The Scripture says:

*Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "**And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?** For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. **Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.** You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: '**These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.**'"*

Did you notice how Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law in front of everyone? The religious leaders were trying to be righteous before men, but the Lord Jesus knew what was in their hearts. Their **hands, feet and faces** may have been **clean**, but their **hearts** were **contaminated** with sin! **A clean heart is more important than clean hands.** Ceremonial washings, or ablutions, do not purify your heart. If you have a cooking pot that is dirty on the inside, will merely washing the outside make the pot clean? No, it will not! Similarly, the religious ceremonies which the Jews followed could not remove **the sin** that was in their hearts. That is why Jesus said to them:

*"**You hypocrites!** [The prophet] Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: <sup>8</sup>'These people honor me with their **lips**, but their **hearts** are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'"*

*[Then] Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean', but what comes out of his mouth, that is*

*what makes him 'unclean'." Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. **If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.**"*

*Peter said, "Explain the parable to us." "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. **These are what make a man 'unclean'**; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean'."*

*Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel."*

*[After that,] the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah."*

*"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now **one greater than Jonah is here.**"*

Thus Jesus predicted that, as the prophet Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days, similarly, Jesus would spend three days in the tomb. And as Jonah came out of the fish on the third day, Jesus would rise from the dead on the third day, thus giving an undeniable proof that He is the Messiah from heaven, the One who came to save us from the power of sin and death and hell!

In the remaining time let us continue in the Gospel and see how the religious experts persisted in their unbelief. In the Gospel of John, chapter seven, the Scripture says:

*After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." For even his own brothers did not believe in him.*

*Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?" Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.*

*Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who*

sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.... Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

"You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? **Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment!**" At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. **Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"** The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "**If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.**" On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?" "**No one ever spoke the way this man does,**" the guards declared. "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. "Has

*any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law - there is a curse on them." Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee." Then each went to his own home.*

This is where we will stop today. We have seen how the priests, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees harassed Jesus. They wanted to arrest Him and have Him put to death, but they could do nothing to Him, because the time which God planned for Jesus to die as a sacrifice for sin had not yet come.

Sadly, most of the Jewish religious leaders had **hard hearts**. They despised Jesus and they threatened to expel from the synagogue anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah. Thus there was **a division** among the crowd because of Jesus. No one would say anything openly about Jesus because they were afraid of the religious leaders and the priests. Secretly, among themselves, some whispered, "He is a good man." Others retorted, "No, he deceives the people!" The rest wondered, "When the Messiah comes will He do more miraculous signs than this man?"

What do **you** say about Jesus? What do **you** think about Him? Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah of whom all the prophets have written? Or do you think that Jesus was just one of the prophets? Let no one misleads you in this matter. Your destiny in the hereafter depends on your response to this question! **Do you know who Jesus really is?** Do you know why He came into the world? Listen to what Jesus said about Himself:

*"I am **the way and the truth and the life**. No one comes to [God] the Father except through me!...For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. **Everyone on the side of truth listens to me!**"*

On whose side are you? Are you willing to side with the Truth--even if means being rejected by your own family? As the old African saying goes, "Whoever wants honey must brave the bees." The Lord Jesus said,

*"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth....I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. **Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me!**"*

Thank you for listening. Join us next time when, God willing, we continue in the Gospel to see how Jesus healed a man who was blind from birth...

God bless you as consider these words of Jesus the Messiah:

*"Everyone on the side of truth listens to me!"*