



Matthew Lesson 19

November 24, 2020

Scriptures from TLV

“The *Megillah* of Matthew”

15:1 - 23

As our last session ended, many people were continuing to come to Yeshua to try and touch His *tzitzit* because they knew that if they could, they would be healed. As far as we know, at this time He was still in the region of Gennasaret which is not far from Capernaum.

1 *Then some Pharisees and Torah scholars came to Yeshua from Jerusalem. They said, 2 “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not do the ritual handwashing when they eat bread”* (Matthew 15:1-2). These men made a special trip up into the Galilee just to question Yeshua. They most likely had heard about him from others and wanted to find out about Him themselves. I would have to think that they were sincere in asking Yeshua this question because of their dedication to following “the Traditions of the Elders.”

Before going on, we should understand what they were referring to when they spoke of the Tradition of the Elders. When the Jews returned to Israel from Babylon, a group of leaders, including the priest Ezra, came together to try and lead the people back into dedicated worship of ADONAI. The information we have about this is not from the Bible, but I believe that this part of it is true. A group of sincere men of that time became known as “the men of the Great Assembly.” I believe that what these Pharisees were calling the Traditions of the Elders, also called the Oral Torah, originated at this time. This early group over time evolved into the Pharisees of Yeshua’s day. They taught, and rabbinic Jews still do, that the Oral Torah originated with Moses and was therefore equal to the written *Torah*. They say that it was taught from person to person, “from mouth to ear” from Moses to Joshua and so forth. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, it was still oral. Jewish tradition today says this is true and the primary written authority for this is a writing called *Pirkei Avot*, the Ethics of the Fathers: **1** “Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly.” There is no evidence regarding it in the *Tanakh*. Nowhere in Scripture does it speak of an “oral torah.” In fact, the evidence there is against it: *35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, including the women and the little ones and the outsiders walking among them* (Joshua 8:35). Standing in front of Mount Ebal as he had been commanded to do, Joshua read the *Torah* to Israel. If he read every word that Moses commanded, it is impossible for the Oral Torah have been there at that time.

In Yeshua’s day the Oral Torah was still oral and was not written down until about the year 200 CE. In its oral form, it was known as *Torah sheb’al peh*, the Torah that is on the mouth. After it was written down, it became known as the *Mishnah* (meaning study by repetition) and it became the first part of the *Talmud*. Commentaries on the *Mishnah* by the rabbis are known as the *Gemara* (meaning completion) and those two parts together, make

up the *Talmuds* (meaning instruction), of which there are two. The most important one is the Babylonian *Talmud*. Many Jews did not return to Israel after the captivity and made Babylon their home. The rabbis there continued to write and were a major part of the spiritual life of Israel after the Temple was destroyed. The *Mishnah* plus rabbinic comments make up the Babylonian *Talmud* and it was completed around 500 CE. The *Mishnah* plus the comments of rabbis in Israel make up the Jerusalem *Talmud* and it was completed around 400 CE.

But, in Yeshua's day it was still oral, what the Pharisees and *Torah* teachers had called the Tradition of the Elders. Their question was, "why don't your *talmidim* do *netilat yadayim* before eating bread?" *Netilat yadayim* is the name for ritual handwashing, literally, lifting up of the hands. It's not necessarily a bad thing. As followers of Yeshua in Messianic Judaism today, we do *netilat yadayim*, ritual handwashing. Mary Louise and I do this every Friday night during our *Erev Shabbat* meal service. And, we all do it twice during our Passover *seder*. But there is a difference in what we do and what the Pharisees were accusing Yeshua's disciples about. To them, the Pharisees, it was a law, a command from the Oral Torah and which was required to be followed by all Jews. In their understanding, the laws of the Oral Torah were equal in authority to those of the written *Torah*, which by the way, was known as *Torah she-bi-khtav*, literally, *Torah* that is in writing. The *Torah she-bi-khtav* is our only authority today, not the Oral Torah or any other writings. For us, the *Torah she-bi-khtav* is the whole Bible, Genesis through Revelation.

For many of us today, *netilat yadayim* is beautiful symbolism. Psalm 24 which we quote before we wash hands explains it: *1 A psalm of David. The earth is Adonai's and all that fills it—the world, and those dwelling on it. 2 For He founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers. 3 Who may go up on the mountain of Adonai? Who may stand in His holy place? 4 One with clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted his soul in vain, nor sworn deceitfully* (Psalm 24:1-4). This, for us, is in effect, a prayer that our hands would be spiritually clean. It's not something that we have to do, but something which we get to do. But to the Pharisees, it was something different. They believed it was a commandment from G-d. They insisted that Yeshua's disciples must wash their hands up to the elbow before eating bread because ADONAI commanded it. But, He did not command it and Yeshua corrected them.

*3 And answering, He said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'He who speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death.' 5 But you say, 'Whoever tells his father or mother, "Whatever you might have gained from me is a gift to God," 6 he need not honor his father.' On account of your tradition, you made void the word of God"* (Matthew 15:3-6). Mark tells the story in a slightly different order in his chapter 7, but all of the essentials are there. We'll look at it in a moment. Yeshua now turns the tables and accuses the Pharisees themselves. He said: "*Why do you also transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?*" They were breaking the fifth commandment, a command from ADONAI to honor one's father and mother. By declaring that they had made their funds *korban*, a gift to G-d, they denied their elderly parents the care that they needed. Yeshua said to them, "you're breaking ADONAI's law for the sake of your tradition." That sounds to me like He said, "it's just a tradition and not a law." But, the Pharisees claimed that it was *Torah* and equal to the written Scriptures. Yeshua told them that they made void the word of G-d by their tradition. That to me means that there was a conflict between what they claimed as authoritative traditions and the "real Word of G-d," the *Torah*. By following their traditions,

they did not follow the real Law, in this case, the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment. These two, eating with unwashed hand and designating their money as a gift to G-d, were just two of the many oral traditions which became incorporated into the *Talmuds* and rabbinic law. In rabbinic Judaism, both *Talmud* and written *Torah* have equal authority, what the rabbis have decreed and what ADONAI decreed. But, we only follow what ADONAI has had written down for us by His servants, Genesis through Revelation.

7 *“Hypocrites! Rightly did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, 8 ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’* (Matthew 15:7-9). Yeshua was quoting from Isaiah 29:13 which says: 13 *“So Adonai says, ‘Since these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, yet their hearts are far from Me, and their fear of Me is a mitzvah taught by men’* (Isaiah 29:13). These men had no true love for God or faith in him. They did not fear Him and their hearts were in the world. Their money was more important to them than their very own fathers and mothers. For them, it seems that religion was a tool. They made a show of honoring G-d in public, but their hearts were far from Him. Later in Matthew 23 (5) Yeshua spoke about their making a show in public when they make their *tefillin*, their phylacteries, large and their *tzitzit*, their fringes, long.

10 *Then Yeshua called the crowd and said to them, ‘Hear and understand. 11 It’s not what goes into the mouth that makes the man unholy; but what comes out of the mouth, this makes the man unholy’* (Matthew 15:10-11). Yeshua was definitely talking about food when He said “it’s not what goes into the mouth,” but He was not saying that we can eat anything we wish to eat. He was referring to food, but what is the definition of food? It depends upon who you ask, but in Scripture there is only one definition. It’s what *Torah* says that we can eat. It’s animals with a cloven hoof that chew the cud, fish that have fins and scales and clean birds and insects. If it doesn’t fit into that category, it is non-food and nowhere in Genesis to Revelation do you find any other definition of food. When Yeshua referred to what comes out of the mouth He was referring to what comes out of the heart. What comes out of the heart, if it is an uncircumcised heart, can make a person unholy.

12 *Then the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard this saying?’ 13 But He replied, ‘Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14 Leave them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit’* (Matthew 15:12-14). It is clear here that Yeshua meant that those who have not trusted in Him will be uprooted in the end. And, we have blind guides today.

15 *Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Explain this parable to us.’ 16 ‘Are you also still lacking understanding?’ Yeshua said. 17 ‘Don’t you grasp that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and then is ejected into the sewer’* (Matthew 15:15-17)? Here, again, Yeshua was speaking about what we eat, food. It goes into our stomach, is digested and then becomes feces which is put into the sewer.

18 *But the things that proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things make the man unholy. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander. 20 These are the things that make the man unholy; but to eat with unwashed hands does not make the man unholy’* (Matthew 15:18-20). Yeshua is much more concerned with the heart condition and makes it clear that what comes from the heart and then out the mouth is what makes a person unholy. Even if we have trusted in Yeshua, we can be temporarily unholy if we allow unholy thoughts to come

out of our mouths. A follower of Yeshua should guard his thoughts and his speech. But, not washing his hands before eating does not make him unholy. He might get sick if his hands are dirty, but not unholy. With these words, Yeshua made it clear that the tradition of the elders, the Oral Torah, was of no effect and that His disciples need not follow it. And, neither are we to follow it today. The written Scripture is our only guide.

Yeshua's response to the Pharisees leads us to a discussion about what we believe today. If we are a follower of Yeshua, Jesus, we should not just receive what we hear from someone or something we read in a Bible without checking it for truth. Can the Bible not have truth? You better believe it. It depends on who wrote it and what their intentions are. Reading about this same event in Mark we find this: *19 For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.*" (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) (Mark 7:19 NIV). Where did that last statement come from and what does it mean that He declared all foods clean? It appears that by saying "all foods," the translators of the NIV Bible mean that anything you wish to eat, everything, is food. Here is another translation: *19 Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.*" (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.). (Mark 7:19 NLT). That's even worse, isn't it? It's clear that pork chops are on the New Living Translation's menu. A very popular Bible version today is The Message: 18-19 Jesus said, "Are you being willfully stupid? Don't you see that what you swallow can't contaminate you? It doesn't enter your heart but your stomach, works its way through the intestines, and is finally flushed." (That took care of dietary quibbling; Jesus was saying that all foods are fit to eat.) (Mark 7:18-19 The Message).

The translators and interpreters of these three versions had already made up their minds about what is food before they even began writing. All of these versions are anti-nomian. That means they are anti-law and anti-Torah which also means that they don't believe that the food laws which ADONAI gave to Israel are for Jesus's followers. Okay. They have the right to believe that. But, do Matthew and Mark really say that?

What does the Greek say? Here it is: 19 .. "because not it enters of him into the heart but into the belly and into the sewer goes out purifying all the food" (Mark 7:19 Strong's Greek into English). The Greek word translated "purifying" is *katharizó*. It means to cleanse, make clean, literally, ceremonially, or spiritually, according to context. The TLV translated Mark 7:19 this way: *19 "For it does not enter into the heart but into the stomach, and then goes out into the sewer, cleansing all foods"* (Mark 7:19 TLV). We must read this literally and not interpret for our own use what we want it to say. Here is how I understand what both the Greek and the TLV are saying. When food, food that G-d says is food, passes through the intestines and is excreted, it is cleansed. Whatever contamination that may have been on the food caused by putting it in the mouth with unwashed hands, if there was contamination on it, is now cleansed. It is no longer a problem for the body.

Yeshua's point was that eating with unwashed hands does not spiritually defile us. We might get sick by eating with dirty hands, but we will not be spiritually defiled. Our hearts are the determiners of that. On the other hand, those three other translations are all about what you can eat, something which was never in Yeshua's discussion.

I urge each of you to look beyond what you read in the Scriptures. Every Bible has its flaws and we need to look into the Hebrew or the Greek, as the case may be. Be Berean and search the Scriptures. *Shalom aleichem!*

