

Stories Series INTRO

Great stories hold powerful lessons. Stories teach us about everything, life, God, self, others, and the world. The whole Bible is the story of God's glory, of His wisdom and great love for us. Jesus was a master storyteller who taught in stories called parables, a story created to teach a lesson. And of course, some stories recount real actions that occur in life. Stories help us because hard lessons are hard enough, and we often need help receiving their "moral", or truth, without additional burden in believing. Stories draw us in to make the lessons more meaningful and personable, and therefore more impactful for our lives. Three key qualities about stories will shape this Stories series. First, stories teach us lessons, a moral or truth that we need to learn. Second, stories draw us in to personalize the moral or truth for our own life. And third, stories expand our understanding and perspective (worldview) to see how that story involves our own life. Story is one of three Theological Perspectives that we introduce in our Covenant Membership seminar for understanding God.

When you think of a powerful lesson you learned, what was the story that taught you that lesson? Likely, it was not a story being "told" to you, but one "lived" by you. And this reminds us that life itself is the most powerful story. The story you are living in right now is shaping your life. **Have you ever thought about this?** We call this a testimony, where we tell a story of how our life has been shaped by stories into the person we are today. This reveals why stories are so potent. **Stories are powerful because they capture that which is most important, the essence of life and relationship.** [MPSeries] **For Christians, every story should be set within the greatest story that teaches us God's truth about everything, the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

TRANS Our hope and prayer for this series is that each week you engage the story to learn and be drawn in, that you might gain a clearer picture of God, His good news in Jesus Christ, to understand how relationship with Him changes everything about you and for you, and how He has sent you to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

Righteous Living

Matthew 15:1-20

MPS Glorifying God flows from a heart that trusts in Jesus Christ to honor Him with one's whole life.

OBJ Every person can apply the lesson of Jesus' parable by remembering a strong warning and an exhortation.

READ Matthew 15:1-20

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat."³ He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'⁵ But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," ⁶he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. ⁷You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

⁸"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;

⁹in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

*¹⁰And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: ¹¹it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."¹² Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" ¹³He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."¹⁵ But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us."¹⁶ And he said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? ¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone." **Matthew 15:1-20***

Today's story begins with one of the hardest truths for people to learn and accept. By our nature, we strive to earn what we feel we most want and need in life, but only by God's grace can one be made righteous to satisfy the needs of our soul.

The story opens with Jesus ministering in Galilee. A group of Pharisees and scribes have traveled a long distance from Jerusalem to harass him. This alone tells us much about their motive. Their primary tactic was to ask a question about the



law in hopes that they could trap him. So they ask, “*Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.*” Jesus immediately responds by exposing their own false teaching by asking, “*And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?*” He gives one example of how they dismiss God’s law by their own traditions. Jesus then tells them that they are hypocrites who fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy of people who say things with their lips that do not align with their heart, and who worship in vain because they honor man’s teachings above God’s Law. He then turns to the people, those who would have held the Pharisees and scribes in very high esteem, and tells them that the thing that defiles a person’s life before God, that which makes them unrighteous, is not determined by what they put in but revealed by what comes out of their life. God’s word to Samuel in choosing King David immediately comes to mind, “*For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*”(1 Samuel 16:7b) [Jesus told the people that what mattered to God was a heart filled with love from Him, not a life consumed by trying to fulfill traditions.](#)

Can you feel the tension in that moment? You should. You could probably even smell it, like a snake that emits an odor as a defensive mechanism when it feels threatened. Jesus’ disciples, the ones emitting the ‘fear-aroma’, ask him, “*Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?*” Jesus tells them that God will pluck them like the rootless weeds they are. He means that their teaching is meaningless and will not stand because it is rooted in the traditions of man and not God. And, if the disciples follow people that teach things like they do, they will be led into a pit with them. His words foreshadow the destructive end of both their false teaching and their condemnation as false teachers. [Jesus’ response reveals his disdain for religious leaders who misrepresent God and mis-lead people by false teaching.](#)

Peter, along with the other disciples, are still confused; “*Is Jesus saying that the way a person lives does not matter?*” He asks Jesus to explain the parable. Jesus first responds by asking them if they still do not understand. His question to the disciples should serve as a warning for us: religion, rituals, and tradition hold such a strong influence by participation that it can blind us to deception, and even our own heart absence. Surely the way we live matters greatly to Jesus, and that’s why He is teaching the truth here. He states simply that what goes into the mouth only proceeds to the stomach and is expelled. The washing of hands can only impact what enters the stomach. But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart.(Matthew 12:34) This is what defiles a person. Jesus is not speaking of the circulatory system but the center of one’s being. Our problem before God is not dirt on our hands but sin’s stain on our heart. This is what sources from our life all that is unrighteous, immoral, evil, and defiled.

Yes, friend, the way you live matters but not in the way religion tells you it matters. It’s a thermometer that measures what is inside, not a prescription to fix it. The way you live may serve as a reinforcement that fortifies your sinful nature, but no matter how sanitized your living may become it will not impact sin’s defilement in your heart. Jesus’ point is that cleaning up your living, doing good deeds, thinking right or positive thoughts, even loving the right things, will never change what is sourcing your sinful affections, attitudes, or activity. [Your problem before God is not external dirtiness but spiritual defilement from sin. Therefore, your righteousness before God will never be determined by sanitized living, in any realm to any measure, but only by His crucified Savior who washes clean to give you a new heart.](#)

The lesson of Jesus’ parable is this:

[Glorifying God flows from a heart that trusts in Jesus Christ to honor Him with one’s whole life.](#)

TRANS This lesson doesn’t seem that hard to learn. But as Peter’s request reminds us, we must be certain we understand.

OBJ [Applying the lesson of Jesus’ parable includes both a strong warning and an exhortation.](#)

[The strong warning is this: Guard yourself from false righteousness that is rooted in religion or self.](#)

We know that we are practicing religion, or religious tradition, when we come to think that God is pleased with us because we do or say the right things. We perform to get Him off our conscience or do good to offset some bad we feel or commit. In the same way, we live out of self-righteousness when we dismiss God’s Law or command by substituting it with our own idea or plan. Sometimes we do this because we don’t like God’s Law or command, and sometimes because we think we know better, but both are the same self-righteousness. And the other aspect of this warning is to remove any influence that



teaches or reinforces a wrong way of thinking about God. Any influence that leads you to think opposed to or less of God's Law or commands, or that causes you to question them, is a false teaching to be immediately rejected.

We may not always say or even think that we are being "religious" or "self-righteous", but in our heart we feel it this way. And that's the root of the problem. Honesty with self would cause us to admit that our relationship with God is driven more by how we feel about Him, or think He feels about us, and whether our feeling 'improves' or 'worsens' in response to our right or wrong actions. This means that our relationship with Jesus is determined for us more by our feelings, thinking, or behaving, than by what Jesus has done for us. Jesus warns every person to guard against this because it is false teaching that condemns. Anything as the basis of your relationship with God other than Jesus' sacrificial atonement on the cross reveals a faith in some righteousness other than Him.

The Exhortation: People who truly know God trust in Jesus through the gospel for a clean heart as the source for all of life.

Honoring God starts in the heart, not with your lips. Everyone can say the right things sometimes, and some even do the right things at the right times, but neither of these make any difference for who you really are. The more we trust in Jesus, the more His presence fills our soul, the more the fullness of His work cleanses our heart, the more the truth of His Word commands our mind, the more the reality of His love compels our living, and the more the commission of His Kingdom rules the purpose of our life.

Christians live to honor God because He is our righteousness. A heart full of His righteousness motivates a steadfast obedience to Him. Where there has been no heart change there can be no life change. Where there has been no heart change, no life practice matters. The more Jesus' righteousness consumes your heart, the less you will worry about your life because the more you will be consumed by Him.

Glorifying God flows from a heart that trusts in Jesus Christ to honor Him with one's whole life.

Is your whole life glorifying God, or are you still trying to wash your hands enough to make Him happy with you?

