

# TRUE AND FALSE FAITH

MATTHEW 15



*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

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**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

True and False Faith: Matthew 14  
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## Matthew 15: Introduction

In Matthew 15 we're in the middle of Jesus' earthly ministry, and Matthew uses this chapter to clarify the matter of faith – what it is, and what it isn't.

True faith is a matter of the heart, of what we earnestly long for and desire. If our heart is pure in seeking the Lord and His Kingdom, what we allow into our souls – heart, mind, and conscience – will only edify us and bless others.

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We hope you find this study of Ecclesiastes a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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## 1 Transgressive Traditions

*Pray Psalm 12.1, 2.*

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!  
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.  
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;  
*With* flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.

*Sing Psalm 12.1, 2.*

(Hamburg: [\*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross\*](#))

Help, Lord! The godly cease to be.  
They who believe in Christ are few.  
Falsely the wicked confidently  
flatter, deceive, and mock Your truth.

*Read and meditate on Matthew 15.1-9.*

*Prepare.*

1. To what did the religious leaders object?
  
2. To what did Jesus object?

*Meditate.*

When we're reading Scripture and come across the word "tradition", we tend automatically to think that's a bad thing. We shouldn't be led by tradition. Tradition bad; Scripture good.

However, that's only partly true. We ought always to be led by Scripture. But Scripture can help us to shape good and reliable traditions, as Paul indicated in 2 Thessalonians 3.6. Tradition is bad either when it goes beyond Scripture (1 Cor. 4.6) or supplants it altogether (Matt. 15.6, 9). Such traditions make a mockery of faith, and turn faith in God into legalism and salvation by works.

This is where the scribes and Pharisees had come to in their practice of "faith". They were all about control, using traditions to keep people subservient to them – and to preserve their status in the Roman social order (cf. Jn. 11.45-48). They confronted Jesus about what they considered a transgression of their traditions on the part of His disciples. Jesus blew them and their tradition away, rebuking them for embracing traditions of control rather than the Law of love (vv. 1-3). In the process, Jesus exposed another bad tradition, one that allowed religious leaders to avoid caring for their parents – in clear violation of the fifth commandment – in the name of fulfilling some religious duty – which ultimately redounded to their own benefit (vv. 4-6).

Jesus told it like it was: These men were hypocrites (v. 7), living a false faith and deceiving the people who looked to them for leadership.

But this didn't sneak up on God, as if their hypocrisy could foil His plans. Isaiah had foretold the day when men would teach their own favorite doctrines in place of the commandments of God (vv. 8, 9), all the while espousing their faith in God and desire to honor Him. Sadly, in many ways, that sounds a lot like the day in which we live.

*Reflect.*

1. What makes someone a hypocrite? What would be some examples of hypocrisy?
2. What are some traditions that Christians observe in our day which are not inherently bad?
3. What should be the role of Scripture in helping us decide which traditions to hold and follow?

*Why did they turn things upside down? Because they were afraid that someone might take away their power. They wanted others to be more afraid of them. They themselves had become the lawgivers. The issue of transgressing the traditions of the elders had gotten so inverted that they were insisting that their own commandments be kept even if God's commandment was violated. John Chrysostom (344-407), *The Gospel of Matthew* 51.1*

*Lord, shelter me in Your Word today as I...*

*Pray Psalm 12.3-8.*

Thank God for His Word, and pray that it may have increasing sway and power in your life, and throughout the world.

*Sing Psalm 12.3-8.*

**Psalm 12.3-8** ((Hamburg: [\*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross\*](#))

Stop, Lord, the lips that utter lies,  
all those who speak with boasting tongue!  
See how Your holy Word they despise,  
while their own praises they have sung.

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all  
Your precious children sore distressed.  
Save those who faithfully on You call;  
grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true,  
like silver seven times refined;  
You will preserve Your Word ever new,  
and keep the heart to You inclined.

Proudly the wicked strut and stand;  
Your indignation builds on high.  
Men may exalt their wicked plans,  
but You will judge them by and by.

## 2 You Can't Help the Willfully Blind

*Pray Psalm 53.5, 6.*

There they are in great fear  
Where no fear was,  
For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you;  
You have put *them* to shame,  
Because God has despised them.  
Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!  
When God brings back the captivity of His people,  
Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

*Sing Psalm 53.5, 6.*

(Leoni: [\*The God of Abraham Praise\*](#))

The wicked flee in shame; their ways our God rejects.  
Renew Your people in Your Name with great effects!  
Let great rejoicing sound once we renewed have been,  
and let salvation's Word resound from us again!

*Read Matthew 15.1-14; meditate on verses 10-14.*

*Prepare.*

1. What did Jesus say to offend the Pharisees?
2. What advice did Jesus give concerning those who are willfully blind to truth?

*Meditate.*

We call improperly digested food that spews from our mouths “vomit.” Vomiting is a pleasant experience for no one. He was saying that it doesn't really matter what you take into your soul – in terms of ideas, insights, opinions, news, and the like. As long as you digest and process that input properly, there's no danger of it coming out of your mouth in the form of lies, half-truths, deceptions of various kinds, or transgressive traditions. The implication of Jesus' remark is that the Pharisees believed whatever suited them, without processing their ideas through the digestive system of Scripture (vv. 10, 11). Indeed, in just a little bit, Jesus will say it plain: “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22.29).

No wonder the Pharisees took offense. Jesus was saying of these posturing theologians that they were vomiting undigested notions on the people, making them and themselves a stench in the nostrils of God.

Did the disciples suppose that Jesus did not know this would be offensive (v. 12)? Jesus knew, and Jesus intended it to be. He replied to their caution in two ways, with two brief parables. The first was meant to say that the Pharisees were not what they presented themselves as being; God had not planted them – like the tree in Psalm 1 – and they would therefore be uprooted in due course (v. 13).

Next, Jesus indicated that the Pharisees were blind; they did not know the truth of God. Thus, they were leading the people into blindness as well, and together they would fall into the catastrophe that engulfs all those who will not obey the truth of God (v. 14).

Jesus' counsel to His disciples is important: "Let them alone." There is no sense arguing with those who are determined to be blind. You'll only make them angrier and harder of heart. Jesus responded to the Pharisees often, and He quibbled with them on occasion, leaving them with a question they either could not or chose not answer. But He didn't argue with them. He didn't try to reason them out of their false views. He proclaimed the truth and made His point clearly; then, He left the Word to linger with them, to sort it out as they would.

We are sowers of the Word, not changers of the heart (Matt. 13.36-43). The hearts of people are in the Lord's hands, and He will turn and change them as He pleases (Prov. 21.1). Our task is to *sow* the Word into the souls of the people around us, and to *show* the Word as living and active in our own lives, making all things new according to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

So don't trouble yourself with the willfully blind. Be available to them, but only insofar as you can show them the love of Christ, or sow His Word into their hearts.

*Reflect.*

1. How should we process, through the digestive system of Scripture, the ideas, news, opinions, and other forms of information that enter our soul each day (cf. Acts 17.11)?
2. How can you tell when someone is willfully blind to the truth of Jesus?
3. Why should we not argue with such people? What should we do instead?

*We ought to avoid being guided by those blind persons. Not only should we do this, but we certainly should also listen with caution in the case of those who claim to lead in the way of healthy teaching and ought to apply healthy judgment to what they say. We should do these things so that we ourselves do not appear to be blind because we do not see the meaning of the Scriptures. We would become blind like this if we were guided by the ignorance of people who are blind and people who do not perceive the issues of healthy teaching. Origen (185-254), Commentary on Matthew 11.14*

*Keep me in Your truth today, O Lord, and help me sow and show the good seed of the Kingdom as I...*

*Pray Psalm 53.1-5.*

Think of people you know, and people in places of influence in our society, who seem to be blind to the Word of the Lord. Pray for them, that God Himself will persuade and open their hearts to the Gospel.

*Sing Psalm 53.1-5.*

**Psalm 53.1-5** (Leoni: [\*The God of Abraham Praise\*](#))

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God at all!"  
Corrupt are they in whole and part, unjust and small.  
Not one of them does good; God sees their wicked ways.  
None understands the Word of God or gives Him praise.

Have all these wicked men no knowledge of God's grace?  
The Church they hate with passion and seek not God's face.  
Lord, strike their hearts with fear, where fear was not before.  
And scatter all who camp so near Your holy door.

### 3 The Primacy of the Heart

*Pray Psalm 138.1-3.*

I will praise You with my whole heart;  
Before the gods I will sing praises to You.  
I will worship toward Your holy temple,  
And praise Your name  
For Your lovingkindness and Your truth;  
For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.  
In the day when I cried out, You answered me,  
And made me bold *with* strength in my soul.

*Sing Psalm 138.1-3.*

(Regent Square: [\*Angels from the Realms of Glory\*](#))

I will give You thanks and praise You, God of gods, with all my heart.  
I will bow before Your temple, grateful praise to You impart.  
For Your Name and for Your glory, You have magnified Your Word!

*Read Matthew 15.1-20; meditate on verses 15-20.*

*Prepare.*

1. What defiles a person?
2. Where do such things originate?

*Meditate.*

Prompted by Peter, Jesus elaborates on His “food-in/food-out” parable which offended the Pharisees. It turns out He wasn’t really talking about food at all; or, rather, He was talking about food to talk about character.

He is blunt: The food you eat goes through the digestive process, and whatever is not used in the body is eliminated. Everybody got that, I’m sure.

Now Jesus peels back the wrapping of His metaphor. The mouth becomes a symbol for the whole soul and body of a person (v. 18 – a device known as synecdoche). It represents our thoughts (the mind), our speech (false witness, blasphemies), and evil works (murders, etc.). And these are not meant to be inclusive, but merely representative. What comes out of the mouth – the soul and body of a person – originates in the heart (v. 18), which is the seat of our affections, and where desire operates to lead us to say and do what we say and do. The heart has the primacy in the soul and thus in the life (cf. Prov. 4.23).

If our heart takes in falsehood – like the transgressive traditions of men – so that we love and honor and cherish such things above all else, they will produce negative fruit in our speech and deeds. Jesus leaves the positive part of this parable unspoken, as if He did need to turn the coin over and say, “On the other hand...”

And the other hand is, that if we take into our soul and body those Kingdom aspects of mercy, righteousness, meekness, and truth, then these will produce wisdom, and wisdom bears its fruit in good works (Matt. 11.19). It is instructive that Jesus did not complete the parable. He was trying to

help His followers understand (v. 16), so naturally He would leave *some* thinking and concluding to them. What comes out in our thinking, being, and doing will tell us what's in our heart, and whether the state of our heart is "garbage-in/garbage-out" or something more conducive to faith, wisdom, and good works.

So stay away from spiritual and moral "junk food." Seek the pure milk and solid food of the Word of God, and feed on it daily. Then you will bear the kind of fruit that indicates that you really do know Jesus and love Him (Matt. 7.21-23).

*Reflect.*

1. Why do we need to understand that the heart has the primacy in the soul? How does what we *desire* affect what we *think* (mind)? Or what we *value* (conscience)?
2. Defilement occurs not by what goes *into* the soul, but what *issues* from it. Explain.
3. The Word is our spiritual food. What are the components of the "spiritual digestive process"?

*"Out of the heart," he said, "come evil thoughts." Therefore the soul or principle of action is not in the brain according to Plato but in the heart according to Christ. Jerome (347-420), Commentary on Matthew 2.15.19*

*Lord, help me to trust You in every situation, especially today as I...*

*Pray Psalm 138.4-8.*

Make sure your heart is clean before the Lord. Then dedicate your heart for this day to loving and serving Him.

*Sing Psalm 138.4-8.*

**Psalm 138.4-8** (Regent Square: [\*Angels from the Realms of Glory\*](#))

On the day I called You answered, made me bold within my soul.  
When I walk in troubled places, You revive and make me whole.  
For Your hand will gently shield me, and my fearsome foes control.

All the kings of earth will praise You when Your words of truth they hear.  
Of Your ways, of Your great glory, gladly they will loudly cheer.  
For the proud shall not approach You, yet You hold the lowly dear.

Your Right Hand will save and keep me; all I need You will supply.  
For Your love is everlasting, reaching from beyond the sky.  
You will not forsake or leave me; You will save me when I cry.

## 4 The Faith of a Gentile Woman

*Pray Psalm 29.1, 2.*

Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones,  
Give unto the LORD glory and strength.  
Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name;  
Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

*Sing Psalm 29.1, 2.*

(Toulon: [\*I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Art\*](#))

Give praise to God, you children of the earth!  
Tell of His strength, proclaim His glorious worth!  
Give to the Lord the glory due His Name!  
Worship in holiness; His grace proclaim!

*Read Matthew 15.1-28; meditate on verses 21-28.*

*Prepare.*

1. What was so “great” about this woman’s faith?
2. What was this woman seeking from Jesus?

*Meditate.*

Here is one of the many lessons on true faith which we find in the gospel of Matthew. Of course, Jesus intended this as a lesson with diverse applications. So, to begin with, He took Himself and His little band of disciples to a region of the Gentiles – Tyre and Sidon (v. 21).

The disciples must have wondered to themselves, “What are we doing here?” They needed to understand what Matthew has been telling us since the genealogy in chapter 1, that Gentiles are to be incorporated into the family of God. So, naturally, Jesus set the stage for this lesson on Gentile turf. We can also be sure, that, as He arranged for the coin to be in the mouth of the fish (Matt. 17.27), Jesus arranged for this woman to come and meet with them. He does all things well.

Matthew specifically tells us that she was “a woman of Canaan” – that is, a Canaanite. Israel had taken the land of the Canaanites. Now Jesus would give this Canaanite the land of promise forever (cf. Is. 54.1ff).

The woman pled with Jesus to deliver her daughter from a demon (v. 22). In approaching Jesus, she acknowledged Him as Lord and David’s Son, and she worshiped Him (v. 25). She knew Him for Who He is, and that He was the One to approach with this dire situation.

Jesus shows us that true faith entails persistence – a lesson He frequently taught His disciples (cf. Matt. 7.7 ff). He was not making the woman “earn” her request; rather, He was teaching her to trust Him even more, as we see her request intensifying with each subsequent step (vv. 24-27). Jesus builds faith in us by not answering our prayers immediately, but by drawing out more of true faith from us. He leads us to focus, summon up our reserves of resolve, and keep knocking, seeking, and asking.

In her mind, the woman deserved only the “crumbs” of Jesus’ kindness, and that not for herself. As her faith grew, so did her humility and sense of unworthiness, as well as her hope. Finally, Jesus

commended the woman for her “great” faith, and granted her request. (v. 28) The healing was instantaneous, though the supplication was prolonged.

Meanwhile, the disciples...yeah. They didn’t see any faith in this woman. They were irritated by her, not least, of course, because she was a Canaanite (v. 23). So they came to Jesus with a “prayer request” as well: “Send her away...” Not much faith there, eh? No doubt as to whom they were thinking about. But that’s precisely why Jesus brought them to Tyre and Sidon, to teach them about true faith, so they could increase in it, and would be ready for their assignment of making all the nations disciples (Matt. 28.18-20).

With Jesus, school’s always open, class is always in session. Let’s make sure we’re paying attention, and that we learn as much as we can about true faith.

*Reflect.*

1. What would you say is the main lesson about faith from this story?
2. How does this story lead you to increase in faith?
3. Is Jesus trying to strengthen your faith in any way at this time? How can that happen?

*For it was for this reason that he postponed giving a reply: that the woman might cry aloud with this word. Thereby he would show her to be worthy of a thousand crowns. For it was not because he did not want to give her the gift that he delayed but because he sought and took care beforehand to reveal her faith. Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), Fragment 83*

*Lord, increase my faith today as I...*

*Pray Psalm 29.3-11.*

Praise the Lord for His sovereign power and might. Commit your day into His care, to follow in obedience however He leads.

*Sing Psalm 29.3-11.*

**Psalm 29.3-11** (Toulon: [\*I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Art\*](#))

Over the waters, over thunder’s roll,  
God’s voice creation’s mighty pow’rs controls!  
Cedars collapse at His majestic Word.  
Nations are shaken by our mighty Lord!

God speaks and lightning streaks across the sky.  
By His decree He shakes the desert dry.  
Speak, Lord, and life to beasts and men is giv’n.  
Forests dissolve, and glory rings in heav’n.

Sovereign, the Lord sat o’er the raging flood.  
Sovereign forever rules our gracious God!  
God will His people bless with strength and peace:  
Lord, may Your holy Word to us increase!

## 5 The Goal of All Healings

*Pray Psalm 138.7, 8.*

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me;  
You will stretch out Your hand  
Against the wrath of my enemies,  
And Your right hand will save me.  
The LORD will perfect *that which* concerns me;  
Your mercy, O LORD, *endures* forever;  
Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

*Sing Psalm 138.7, 8.*

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

Your Right Hand will save and keep me; all I need You will supply.  
For Your love is everlasting, reaching from beyond the sky.  
You will not forsake or leave me; You will save me when I cry.

*Read Matthew 15.1-31; meditate on verses 29-31.*

*Prepare.*

1. Where did Jesus conduct these healings?
2. How did the people respond?

*Meditate.*

Remember that we said true faith is persistent? Doesn't give up easily? Stays the course?

Jesus gave the multitude another opportunity to exercise true faith by hiking up the mountain (v. 29). Would they make the trek, carrying or helping their sick and lame, blind and mute neighbors and friends?

Of course they did. And Jesus healed them all (v. 30). Jesus was not being cruel by making the people work a little harder to get to Him. He was providing an opportunity for them to strengthen their faith and resolve, and to show their neighbors and friends just how much they loved them.

The people show what the true end of all these healings was: marvel at Jesus, glorify God (v. 31). That's what the good works we are called to do should always aim at – showing the greatness and beauty of Jesus, so that people will give glory to God for sending Him for our salvation.

God is doing amazing and abounding good works for us throughout the day. Do we take the time to notice? To marvel at Jesus and His awesome power and love? To praise, thank, and glorify the Father for His unfailing faithfulness and love?

We fulfill the purpose of God's good works – whether we are the doers or the beneficiaries – when we marvel at Jesus and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5.13-16).

*Reflect.*

1. How might you pay more attention to the good works Jesus does for you each day? Do you think doing so might strengthen your own faith? Explain.

2. What makes Jesus so uniquely marvelous? Have you told Him how marvelous you think He is?
3. How can we glorify the Father for the many good works He does in, for, and through us each day?

*Now he goes to the mountain awaiting those who are diseased. The lame are brought up the mountain. They are no longer merely touching the edge of his garment. They have advanced a higher step. They are being brought to his feet! Therein they are showing their faith doubly, first by struggling up the mountain even though lame, then by wanting nothing else but only to be cast at his feet. John Chrysostom (344-407), *The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 52.4**

*Strengthen my faith today, O Lord, that I might marvel at You and glorify the Father as I...*

*Pray Psalm 138.1-6.*

Looking ahead, what opportunities for glorifying the Father will you have this day? Commit them to Him now.

*Sing Psalm 138.1-6.*

**Psalm 138.1-6** (Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

I will give You thanks and praise You, God of gods, with all my heart.

I will bow before Your temple, grateful praise to You impart.

For Your Name and for Your glory, You have magnified Your Word!

On the day I called You answered, made me bold within my soul.

When I walk in troubled places, You revive and make me whole.

For Your hand will gently shield me, and my fearsome foes control.

All the kings of earth will praise You when Your words of truth they hear.

Of Your ways, of Your great glory gladly they will loudly cheer.

For the proud shall not approach You, yet You hold the lowly dear.

## 6 Feeding the Multitudes

*Pray Psalm 5.11, 12.*

But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You;  
Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;  
Let those also who love Your name  
Be joyful in You.  
For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous;  
With favor You will surround him as *with* a shield.

*Sing Psalm 5.11, 12.*

(Angel's Story: [\*O Jesus, I Have Promised\*](#))

Let those rejoice who seek You and shelter 'neath Your wing.  
Their tongues shall rise to speak to Your praise; Your grace they sing.  
Your people You will bless, Lord, all those who to You yield.  
Preserve them with Your best Word, and guard them like a shield.

*Read Matthew 15.1-39; meditate on verses 32-39.*

*Prepare.*

1. How did the disciples respond to Jesus' desire to feed the multitude?
2. In what ways was this feeding like the previous one (Matt. 14.13-21)?

*Meditate.*

We might have expected a different response from the disciples. After all, it hadn't been that long since Jesus fed a greater multitude than this, with even fewer resources (Matt.14.13-21). But the disciples had not yet learned to think with the mind of Christ. Rather than operate out of the possibilities latent in Jesus, they were stuck in a materialist worldview where all they could see were limitations and restrictions. Where Jesus is at work, material circumstances are subject to Kingdom power, not the other way around.

The multitude had been with Jesus for three days (v. 32). What food they might have had was gone, and they were getting hungry. And maybe a little cranky? To their credit, they set their hunger aside to continue with Jesus. Not even growling tummies could turn them away from the One they'd come to worship.

I can't help but wonder if at least some of the disciples might have slapped their foreheads, saying to themselves, "Duh!", as Jesus asked about available resources. They failed the test again – a second time – but still, they were ready to do whatever Jesus asked. He again took the meager resources in hand, and through a miracle Matthew didn't even try to explain, fed the multitude, with food to spare (v. 37).

We note that Jesus sent the people away "filled" (v. 37). Jesus is always ready to fill us, to meet our needs, whether for daily bread or a refreshed soul or power to serve Him in what look like impossible circumstances.

*Reflect.*

1. The disciples did not learn from their previous experience with Jesus. Are we ever like that?

2. When we're faced with a difficult situation or challenge, where should we look first – to Jesus? Or to our own abilities? Explain.

3. How do you need Jesus to fill you today?

*Why had he earlier said to his disciples, "Send away the multitude," but now he does not send them away, even though three days had passed? It may be that they themselves had changed and improved by this time. Or it may be that since the people were glorifying God for what had been done, they had no great sense of hunger. John Chrysostom (344-407), Gospel of Matthew, Homily 53.1*

*Fill me with Your Word and Spirit, O Lord Jesus, so that today I may...*

*Pray Psalm 5.1-8.*

Mention all that is ahead of you this day, and ask the Lord to fill you with Himself for each activity.

*Sing Psalm 5.1-8.*

**Psalm 5.1-8** (Angel's Story: [\*O Jesus, I Have Promised\*](#))

O Lord, attend and hear me, consider how I groan.

Receive my cries and near be, and love me as Your own.

By morning, Lord I seek You, for You will hear my voice.

My every need You speak to, and make my soul rejoice!

In sin You take no pleasure; no evil dwells with You.

Vain boasts You will not treasure, nor those who boasting do.

Sin kindles Your hot anger, You crush all those who lie.

The violent live in danger of Your all-searching eye.

O Lord, Your lovingkindness escorts me in this place.

I bow before Your highness and praise Your glorious grace!

In righteous ways You guide me; Your pathway I will know.

No good will be denied me as I with Jesus go.

## 7 Faith and Its Fruit

*Pray Psalm 132.6, 7.*

Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah;  
We found it in the fields of the woods.  
Let us go into His tabernacle;  
Let us worship at His footstool.

*Sing Psalm 132.6, 7.*

(Finlandia: [\*Be Still My Soul\*](#))

The word throughout the chosen nation spread,  
to Ephrata, and in the fields of Jaar:  
“Now let us go,” the faithful people said,  
“and worship where our Savior’s dwellings are!  
Around His footstool let our worship spread.  
Come, gather to Him, all from near and far!”

*Read and meditate on Matthew 15.1-39.*

*Prepare.*

1. In this chapter, who demonstrates false faith? What makes their faith false?
2. Who demonstrates true faith? What makes their faith true?

*Meditate.*

In Matthew 15 we’re in the middle of Jesus’ earthly ministry, and Matthew uses this chapter to clarify the matter of faith – what it is, and what it isn’t.

The scribes and Pharisees believed in God – they had faith – but theirs was a false faith because it was admixed and corrupted by traditions and objectives that have no basis in the Word of God and His covenant. The religious leaders used faith as a weapon to control the people, rather than as a means to shepherd and edify them, and to lead them into the fellowship of the Lord. They set aside the Word of God – even as they gave lip-service to trusting it – so that their traditions and programs could go forward. They had faith in their programs and their goals, and they were misguided in believing that this was what God wanted for His people.

But their false faith did not sneak up on God, Who called them out long ago, and warned us to beware of those who draw near to Him with their mouths, but whose hearts are far from Him. They may seem very holy; they may be running very efficient programs; and many people may be following their lead. But false faith is false faith, and wherever men depart from the Word for their own projects, programs, and prowess, their true believers will turn away.

True faith is a matter of the heart, of what we earnestly long for and desire. If our heart is pure in seeking the Lord and His Kingdom, what we allow into our souls – heart, mind, and conscience – will only edify us and bless others. We must guard what comes into our soul, lest we, like the Pharisees of old, drift from our proper moorings and set aside the Word of God.

True faith persists, not so much for one’s own sake, but for what is right and good and loving – what is according to the good and upright plan of God. This is the lesson of the Gentile woman who

pestered Jesus to heal her daughter, pleading only for crumbs of grace, and that not for herself.

True faith results in worship, as we see from the crowds who surrounded Jesus as He healed them and their friends. True faith sharpens our focus on Jesus, so that we marvel at His greatness, and by seeing Him more clearly, give glory and honor to God.

And true faith grows – sometimes slowly, like the disciples who hesitated when Jesus expressed His desire to feed the multitudes. They did not remember the lesson from the feeding of the 5,000; but Jesus gave them a second opportunity to trust in His Word explicitly, and to obey and serve Him regardless of how impossible the task seemed.

How does our faith measure up to the examples of true faith Matthew presents in this chapter? Let it be our earnest prayer every day that the Lord Jesus might increase and purify our faith, for then we will be His disciples indeed.

*Reflect.*

1. How can you know when you are practicing true faith?
2. How can you guard against lapsing into or following false faith?
3. What are some areas of your faith in the Lord where you most need to grow?

*Be it unto thee as thou desirest. This latter clause contains a useful doctrine, that faith will obtain anything from the Lord; for so highly does he value it, that he is always prepared to comply with our wishes, so far as it may be for our advantage.* John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Matthew 15.28*

*Lead me ever more deeply into Your Word, O Lord, and increase my faith, so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 132.11-18.*

Praise God for King Jesus, Who is advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven; and commit your day to seeking and serving Him in all your ways.

*Sing Psalm 132.11-18.*

**Psalm 132.11-18** (Finlandia: [\*Be Still My Soul\*](#))

Remember, Lord, the oath You swore to David;  
do not turn back, do not deny Your Word:

“One of your sons, with your throne I will favor,  
and He shall keep My cov’nant evermore,  
and walk within My testimonies ever;  
thus He shall ever rule as Israel’s Lord.”

God dwells among us, and He will forever,  
to meet our needs and clothe us with His grace.

He has to us sent Jesus Christ, our Savior,  
and made us His eternal resting-place.

His foes are banished from His presence ever,  
but we shall reign with Him before His face.

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. What are some differences between false faith and true faith?
2. Why is true faith first of all a matter of the heart, rather than, say, of the mind?
3. How can we know when we are drifting into false faith? What should we do then?
4. How can believers encourage one another to increase in true faith?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Matthew 15.1-39? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.