

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter from Lifestream Teaching Ministries

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 KJV)

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Vain Worship

Art Nelson

[I consider this message to be one of the most important that I have ever taught. I know that this is a long teaching letter, but it was necessary in order to lay a proper foundation for the conclusions. Please read all of it and don't jump to any conclusions until you have finished the letter. I believe the Lord is saying something to us that we need to hear.---Art]

Introduction

A few days ago I was studying some scriptures that speak to us about traditions and their impact on us as it relates to the commands of God. In particular, I was contemplating this set of scriptures in Matthew:

Matthew 15:6-9 NKJV

- (6) then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.
- (7) Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:
- (8) 'THESE PEOPLE DRAW NEAR TO ME WITH THEIR MOUTH, AND HONOR 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.' "

I was thinking about how powerful our traditions are if they can make the commandment of God ineffective. Then I realized that this leads to vain worship, which started a new train of thoughts that I want to share with you.

First, I wanted to make sure that I understood the meaning of “vain” so I looked it up in the dictionary. Webster's electronic dictionary defines “vain” in this manner:

VAIN, a. [L. vanus; Eng. wan, wane, want.] -- Empty; worthless; having no substance, value or importance; unsatisfying; false; deceitful; not genuine; spurious; not effectual.

The two key words that stuck me were “worthless” and “false”. I am old enough (second half of my 50's) that I don't have time for anything that is “worthless” and I certainly want to eliminate everything from my life that is “false”. So, I decided that this is an important subject that should be explored.

Second, I checked the quote from Isaiah because sometimes Jesus would only quote part of a scripture that was being fulfilled and I found that there is a difference in the last part of verse 13 of Isaiah 29: “... And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men”.

Where Jesus had said, “in vain they worship Me”, Isaiah had said, “their fear toward Me”. It would seem to me then, that part of what would make worship vain is when our fear of the Lord is learned by traditions rather than by our experience with the Lord. In other words, traditions don't teach us a proper, real, effectual fear of the Lord but instead teach us an ineffectual, worthless, false fear, which results in vain worship.

True and False Worshipers

As I thought about this, I remembered what Jesus had said to the woman at the well when she asked the question about where to worship.

John 4:19-24 NKJV

- (19) The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.
- (20) Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you *Jews* say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."
- (21) Jesus said to her, "**Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.**
- (22) **You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.**
- (23) **But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.**
- (24) **God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."**

There is a lot in this set of scriptures.

1. When the woman realized that Jesus was a prophet, she immediately asked a question that apparently bothered her. This question dealt with the proper *place* to worship. She presented the two places that were part of the source of contention between the Samaritans and the Jews: “on this mountain” or “in Jerusalem”.
2. Jesus told her that the time is coming when neither place would be appropriate.
3. Jesus then said that she and the Samaritans did not know what they worshiped. At least, the Jews knew what they worshiped because salvation is of the Jews. He, basically, told her that the worship of the Samaritans was false or vain.
4. Then, Jesus told her that *now* the place of worship was changing. It was no longer “on the mountain” nor “in Jerusalem” but was *now* to be “*in spirit and truth*”.
5. True worshipers now worship in the new place—in spirit and truth.
6. The Father is seeking true worshipers.

What did Jesus mean when He said that they did not know what they worshiped? The Samaritans had some Jewish blood in them. They were mixed gentile and Jew, which is why the Jews detested them so much. Surely then some knowledge of God remained with them. So, I began to look at some of the history of the Samaritans, particularly the spiritual history.

The Decline of a Kingdom

The people of God had cried out to God for a king so that they would be like the nations that were around them. As a result, they received Saul as king; but, Saul was disobedient to God with the result that the kingdom was taken from him and the throne of David was established in place of the house of Saul.

2 Samuel 3:10 NKJV

(10) to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba."

1 Kings 2:12 NKJV

(12) Then Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

However, God's promise to Solomon did not nullify God's requirements to walk in His ways and keep His commandments.

1 Kings 9:4-7 NKJV

- (4) Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, *and* if you keep My statutes and My judgments,
- (5) then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'
- (6) *But* if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments *and* My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them,
- (7) then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

Solomon sinned against the Lord and honored other gods because of his wives. He built altars for these idols, which the Lord had commanded that he not do. He set an example for the people that was not righteous and caused the people to think that idol worship could be mixed with the worship of the Lord God.

1 Kings 11:11-13 NKJV

(11) Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.

- (12) Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son.
- (13) However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

When Solomon died, the kingdom was split between Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and Solomon's servant, Jeroboam. This was done by the hand of the Lord.

Israel and Judah

God gave Jeroboam ten tribes and he became king over Israel. God gave Rehoboam the tribe of Judah and he became king over Judah. This was done *"that My servant David may always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen for Myself, to put My name there."* (I Kings 11:36)

The result of all of this is a divided people—the kingdom is split between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. However, in doing this, God did not change nor make allowance for any change in worship procedures. Neither did He change the place, method, ritual, or order of worship.

Even though the people were divided, His requirements for worship were not divided nor modified. Jerusalem was the place that the Lord had put His Name. The required feasts were to be eaten before the Lord in Jerusalem. The priests served in the Temple, which was in Jerusalem and they served according to the ordinances established by Moses, which he had received from God. This presented a problem to Jeroboam.

1 Kings 12:26-29 NKJV

- (26) And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David:
- (27) If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah."
- (28) Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!"
- (29) And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.

Jeroboam's solution was to create two new places to worship, Bethel and Dan. He made two golden calf idols and put them with his new altars and told the people of Israel that these were the gods who had brought them out of Egypt. In other words, he called the golden calves Jehovah. But, he didn't stop there. He made a complete system of worship for Israel

1 Kings 12:31-33 NKJV

- (31) He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.
- (32) Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the

feast that *was* in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made.

- (33) So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.

All that Jeroboam did was patterned after the real thing in Jerusalem. He didn't re-invent the wheel but duplicated what he knew of the worship of Jehovah and, probably, what he knew of the idols that Solomon worshiped with his many wives.

Jeroboam created and established:

1. a false god that he called Jehovah;
2. a false altar of worship;
3. false places of worship;
4. false priests;
5. false feasts; and
6. false rituals and methods of worship.

He did all of this for the *convenience* of the people and *to maintain his own power and position*.

Samaria

These conditions continued as new kings arose in both Israel and Judah.

2 Kings 17:1 NKJV

- (1) In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, *and he reigned* nine years.

2 Kings 17:5-6 NKJV

- (5) Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years.
- (6) In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Samaria was part of the territory of Israel. The king of Assyria captured Samaria and took captive the Israelites that were living there. The only ones left would have been those that hid in the bushes and hills. This was at the hand of the Lord for He judged their idolatry.

2 Kings 17:21-23 NKJV

- (21) For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD, and made them commit a great sin.
- (22) For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them,

- (23) until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.

[Keep in mind that Jesus, by His natural lineage, came through the house of David, that He was from the tribe of Judah. He is the fulfillment of the promise to David that his descendant would be established on the throne of the Kingdom forever. This scripture says that God tore Israel from the house of David. What does that mean in terms of God's promises? To Israel? To us?]

2 Kings 17:24-29 NKJV

- (24) Then the king of Assyria brought *people* from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities.
- (25) And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, *that* they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed *some* of them.
- (26) So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land."
- (27) Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land."
- (28) Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD.
- (29) However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put *them* in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, *every* nation in the cities where they dwelt.

The king of Assyria imported people from Babylon and other places to occupy the land of Samaria. The Lord sent lions that killed many of the pagan immigrants because they had no fear of the Lord God. However, the imported people decided that they didn't know the "rituals of the God of the land", because they thought of the Lord God as a territorial god like those of the other lands (1 Kings 20:28). They requested from the king of Assyria a priest that could teach them the "rituals of the God of the land". So, the king sent them a priest to dwell in Bethel. This was one of those that had been taken from the area.

Now, consider for a moment, what kind of priest was this? The false priests established by Jeroboam had perpetuated themselves along with the false worship system that they served. These were concentrated in Bethel and Dan. So, the priests taken from the area by the king of Assyria were the false priests created by Jeroboam. Therefore, when the king of Assyria sent the imported people of Samaria a priest, he sent them back one of the *false* priests.

The purpose of this *false* priest was to teach the immigrants to the land "how they should fear the Lord". Can a *false* priest teach anyone the *real* fear of the Lord? I don't think so.

2 Kings 17:33-34 NKJV

- (33) They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.
- (34) To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel,

They feared the Lord with a *false fear* taught to them by a *false priest*, which did not cause them to leave their idols. The result is given in verse 34. In reality, they do not fear the Lord. They merely perform “the rituals of the God of the land”. Remember that when we began this lesson, we were comparing the scripture in Isaiah with the verse that Jesus quoted and found there to be a difference in the last part of verse 13 of Isaiah 29: “... And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men”. Now we know what that means. False priests can only teach the fear of the Lord by the teaching, doctrine, and commandment of men.

This is why the Samaritans did not know what they worshiped. Their worship was empty, false, vain even though it was similar to Jewish worship, because it had been patterned after the real thing by Jeroboam.

Applied to Us

This has tremendous application to us. Constantine was our Jeroboam. When he made Christianity an official religion of Rome, he created the same type of false worship system that Jeroboam had created. Constantine established false altars serving false gods, false holy places, false priests, false feasts, and false rituals and methods of worship just like Jeroboam. The pagans came into the false system bringing their gods and rituals until real believers became a minority, which became more and more diluted by the false system with succeeding generations.

But what about the Protestant Reformation, didn't that restore the real thing? If you have a fully false system and you remove part of it, what is left is still false. Martin Luther curbed some of the excesses of the Catholic Church by proclaiming the truth of salvation by grace and not by works, but the other aspects of the false system created by Constantine remained and have continued to this day.

One of the principles of the Lord is that when man begins to unite in a common purpose apart from the purpose of God, He will divinely divide the false unity. This is what happened with the Protestant Reformation and is still what is happening with our various denominational splits. The false is continually divided by the Lord until the season when He will allow the false to come forth as Mystery Babylon. (For more on this principle see “*The Captivity of the Church Series: Lesson 3 The False Thing—Divine Divisions*” available on the website.)

However, God has always maintained His Remnant—He has not forsaken the house of David. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has always had a people. We are the hidden servants who have given ourselves as a living sacrifice to the Lord Jesus. This remnant is being purified and prepared for the last days work of proclaiming the Kingdom of the Lord.

God is Spirit and we must worship Him in spirit and truth. The Father is seeking this type of worshiper. Let us put off false vain worship and bow down to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us worship the Lord God and no other.

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For comments or questions contact Art Nelson at this address:

artnelson@lifestreamteaching.com

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