

Msg #16 of Scripture Beneath The Surface

“Are You All Talk But Little Walk?”

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to take a look at Matthew 15:8, which says, "These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."

At the time Jesus spoke these words, he was referring to the scribes and Pharisees of his day. They were considered to be the spiritual leaders of God's people, and they generally looked at themselves as the elite. But Jesus saw very little genuine righteousness in them, and condemned them for what was in their hearts, in spite of what came from their mouths. If we use the same scripture to evaluate current day Christians, it gives us something to think about, something that could be quite devastating to many people. Now, in conjunction with this, let me give you something else to go along with it. I've put together a short narrative as an example. So, imagine if you will, a scene in a church foyer where people are chatting to one another just prior to the start of the morning service. It goes something like this.

"Hey, Becky. Can you believe what happened to Roberta?"

"Oh, yeah, you mean when she found out that Ryan was having an affair with his secretary?" "Yeah! And not just his secretary, but apparently a couple of others at the same time. I couldn't believe it. If I were Roberta I would divorce him so fast it would make his head spin." "I would, too, Evelyn. And to think he's doing that to her when she is so sick." "Yes, isn't it awful? And to think, she might even die if the surgery can't be done soon." "Oh, I know. But they don't have good insurance, and the surgery is so expensive. I just hope Ryan gets what he's got coming!" "Me too. And I don't want to miss a day of that TV program until I find out what happens. I'm not even going to ladies group on Tuesday because I don't want to miss any of it." "Me either. I'm going to stay glued to my

TV set until Roberta is able to get past this. Oh, oh! The service is about to start. We'd better get in there."

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Well, let's take a look at the same situation, in church just before the morning service, with a different set of people.

"Hi, Tony!"

"Hey, Bart! What's up?"

"Nothing much. Same-o, same-o. Hey, did you see to that Michigan game?"

"Sure did. Wouldn't have missed that game for the world. Did you see it, too?"

"Yeah, I saw it. 16 seconds to go and he makes a three-pointer. It was almost like the ball was in slow motion. I think everybody was holding their breath, because you could hear the ball swish through the net. Man, there's nothing more exciting than that."

"Nope, nothing, except maybe going into overtime. You know, I thought the game was gone when the ref made that bad call."

"Oh, so did I. The crowd wanted to kill him. And I wouldn't have minded getting my hands on him myself. He's lucky we made that three-pointer and pulled it out."

"Yeah, if we hadn't made that shot, that ref would have been dead meat. Hey, are you going to the playoffs on Saturday?"

"Are you kidding? Heaven and hell couldn't keep me away."

"Me either. Hey, they're about to start the service. We better get in there."

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Well, let's go back and listen in to another conversation in the same place.

"Oh, Monica, what a cute jacket. And I just love those pendant earrings. What are those, little Teddy bears?"

"No, not Teddy bears. They're Pooh Bears. See the little jars of honey?"

"Oh, yeah. That's really cute. Where do you get all those neat things. I just can't believe it. You always find such great stuff."

"Oh, that's because I'm always looking for those little out of the way shops which sell the unusual. I like things that you can't usually find in the larger stores. But then I like what the larger stores have, too."

"Hah, hah. Me too. The problem is that those stores want money for their stuff, and I never seem to have enough of it."

"Me either. But I like it when it comes around to Christmas every year. Then I can go crazy and shop till my knees buckle. Jesus said that it was better to give than to receive, so I can shop all I want and Jim doesn't get mad at me, at least as long as he gets most of the presents I buy."

"Oh, I understand completely. I always make sure that Tom gets what he wants, and that it's expensive, and then he never says anything. Besides, when I spend a lot on him, then he has to spend a lot on me."

"Uh huh, exactly! You've got it, girl."

“Oh, oh, they’re about to start the service. I guess we’ve got to stop having fun and go in there like nice girls.”

“Well, I guess. If we have to.”

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Well, let’s take a look at another situation. The scene opens on Sunday morning, and Rose comes into the livingroom where Bill is reading the Sunday paper.

“Bill? It’s almost 10 o’clock. Aren’t you going to get dressed? We’ll be late for church.” “Yeah, sure. Soon as I finish here.” “Oh, sure. You’re reading the sports section. What do you mean, ‘as soon as you finish’? You never finish reading the sports section. You never quit.” “OK, Rose, OK. You don’t have to rub it in.” “Well, are you going to get dressed?” “Oh, I don’t know. I think I’ll just stay home and watch church on TV. I don’t feel like going out today. Besides, I like that preacher on the tube that tells all those jokes. Why don’t you stay home and watch it with me?”

“Because I don’t feel like staying home and watching the boob tube. It’s too nice of a day to stay inside. The sun is shining.” “Yeah, it is kind of a nice morning. Say, why don’t we go for a ride? We could go up by Traverse City and stop by that little restaurant you like. We haven’t been there in a while.” “Oh, Bill, that would be fun. And there’s a place up there where I bought those sandals I like so well. I’d like to get another pair of them in a different color. But then, we really should go to church. They’ll think we are back sliders if we miss too many Sunday’s.” “They won’t miss us. On a nice day like this, we won’t be the only ones who don’t show up. On nice days there’s only about half the people there anyway. Besides, we can listen to a church program on the radio. What do you say?” “Alright, you’ve convinced me. Let me change into something more comfortable, and you get dressed, and we’ll go.”

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Do you realize that out of all the people in the world, there’s only a few who are genuine Christians? About 75 to 80 % of all people in America, claim to be Christians. But far fewer of them really are. The rest of them are just playing a game, and it’s a game that they will end up losing. Most of the people of Earth will go to hell. No, I’m not predicting. That’s what the Bible says. In Matthew 7:13-14, it tells us that many will go through a gate and along a path which is very broad, and which leads to destruction, and that only a few will go through the narrow gate, taking the narrow path which leads to eternal life.

When it says ‘few’, that means less than the majority. In fact, if you ask people to consider the number 10, and then ask them how many out of 10 would be a few, the general average reply is two or three. This means most people will take the other gate and the other path. Also, we can refer once again to Matthew 7:21-23, which tells us about those people who claim to be children of God, but who are rejected by him because he never knew them. They just think they’re saved. John 4:24, says, “God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” When it says we must worship him in truth, it means that we must worship him according to his word, and not according to how we want to do it. When God called the children of Israel into a covenant, he gave them the Law of Commandments. He also gave them specific instruction of how

he was to be worshiped. The requirements were very strict, and the punishment for disobedience was also very unyielding. Yet the difficulty of keeping the Law was significantly diminished when the person had a true heart for God.

Jesus Christ fulfilled the purpose of the Law of Commandments, and brought that covenant to its rightful end. In its place, the Law of Grace was instituted. Now, instead of having a law which was written and engraved in stone, the law of God would now be written and engraved in the fleshly tables of our hearts. However, in order to recognize what God is requiring of you now, you must do more than go through a ritualistic process of obedience. First of all, you must be able to tell when God is speaking to you. Anyone can read laws which are written in stone, but only those who listen for God's Holy Spirit, can comprehend what is written in their heart. We must worship God in truth, but how can we worship him in truth if we cannot recognize the truth that is being given to us?

We must be moved to worship God when God gives us direction, but we cannot be moved if we have no spirit for it. Again, anyone can read engraved tables of stone, but only the spirit that is in us can search our heart and find what is there, and only the spirit in us can then move us to respond in kind. Just as the Holy Spirit searches the deep things of God and reveals them unto men, the spirit within us searches the deep things of our heart and brings them out, revealing them by moving our flesh into action. This completes the process of worshiping in truth and also in spirit. When our actions and words do not conform to the specific direction for worshiping God that he has placed in our heart, then we are neither worshiping him in truth nor worshiping him in spirit.

To go through the motions of religion without any feeling is not what true worship is all about. Many people go to church as a duty, fearing the consequences of hell, but not really loving the idea of serving God. To them, they are trying to abstain from evil, and go through the motions of church, but don't really have a heart for it. They don't get emotionally involved in their relationship with Jesus, but they still think he is accepting them as part of his bride. But they are like the five virgins in Matthew 25 who run out of oil for their lamps just before the bridegroom comes. Oil is what puts the fire in the religious lamp. Without oil, there is no burning, and without burning there is no light to see by. The lamps of the virgins represent the written word of God, and the oil represents the revealed word of God. If you try to worship God in truth without also worshiping him in spirit, you will not recognize the word when he puts it in your heart, and you will have no light shed on it. Without a light to see by, you will lose your way and fall off the narrow path. This path isn't easy to travel on, for the way is narrow and the path is steep. But anyone can follow a broad path which leads downward.

People who attend church but have no spirit for it are a dime-a-dozen in today's church society. Many churches are based on just the Bible, and does not include any spirit. Of course, there are many churches that are based on just spirit, and mostly make up their own doctrine as they go along. Neither of these two kinds of churches are going to make God happy. And when you're dealing with the most powerful entity in the universe, you need to think about making him happy.

When God says, "These people draw near to me with their mouths, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me," he makes it very clear that it is important to have a heart that is in accord with the testimony of their mouths and lips. Can you imagine what kind of a marriage you would have if your vows were only something you said, but that you didn't feel? Just tell me of one meaningful relationship you've ever had that didn't stir your emotions. Emotions are at the heart of

every relationship. Without emotions, the heart is not involved. If you're not being moved in your relationship with Jesus Christ, if you don't get excited about being around him, and talking to him, then you have a dead relationship.

Now, here's something else to think about. A spirit moves things. It stirs things. It exhibits a force which causes the body to react. When the spirit rises up in a man, he gets excited, or he gets angry, or he laughs, etc. What is happening is that the spirit of a person will seek the deep hidden things within the soul of a person and will then move that person's body to act or speak accordingly. If you try to worship God without being moved on the outside, God will automatically know what you're feeling about him on the inside. Proverbs 20:27 says that the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, which searches the inward man. If you have no spirit for him, he will know you have no feeling for him in your heart because he will see what emotions are exhibited for him. When he sees an unfeeling ritualistic approach to Christianity, he knows that what your heart really cares for is not him, but the things which surround you in your worldly environment. People who love Jesus with all their heart, all their soul, and all their strength, don't occupy themselves with things that would take away from their time with him. If you really love someone, you aren't content to see them only once in a while, and only at arms length. People like this may be fooling themselves, and they may be fooling some of the people around them, but they aren't fooling God.

As well as having a heart for God to the extent that his Holy Spirit moves you to strong feelings of love for him, you must worship him in truth. Many people think that this means you believe in him and go to church. But it means more than that. It means you must worship him in the way he determines you should, and not in the way the world tells you that you can. Just like the Children of Israel were given very specific instruction on how to worship God, Christians are also given very specific instructions on how to worship him. The only difference is that if you have no spirit for him, you can't fake it just by showing up for church. If you have no spirit for him, then your spirit will not be in tune with his Holy Spirit, and when his Holy Spirit speaks to your heart, you'll think it is just some stray thoughts of your own. You will ignore it because you can't recognize the still small voice, and you will miss God's instruction. But you will continue to just show up for church until the day you die and then you will find out what it means to worship him in spirit, but it will be too late.

God doesn't want that to happen to you. That's why he has given you not only his word, but has also come to earth in the form of a man so that he could openly show what God was really like, and has also given us his Holy Spirit so that we could be complete in him. His spirit within us reveals him to us in a different way than Jesus did while on earth. By God's spirit we know him and are led by him. It is through the Holy Spirit that we have the still small voice which guides us into all truth. And once again I will remind you of Romans 8:14, which says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God."

If you see a similarity between yourself and any of the narratives you heard at the beginning of today's message, I would encourage you to find out for certain whether or not you truly are in right standing with God. In these last days the hindrance to Satan has been removed, and he has been able to create a social system in the world which no longer follows the concepts of God's word. We live in an environment where a mad rush for things which stimulate the flesh are the norm. We think nothing of trying to be cool, even though it is pride of life. We think nothing of surrounding

ourselves with things of the world which enhance our visual enjoyment, even though it is lust of the eye. We think nothing of watching sensual images in movies and on TV, as well as in most magazines and newspapers, not to mention the Internet, even though these things are based in the lust of the flesh.

We have forgotten our first love, and have turned to other loves which are not pure. We have forgotten the reason we were put here on this earth. It was not for our enjoyment of the flesh, but for the purpose of God. The warfare between good and evil is based in a warfare between flesh and spirit, but up to this point Satan has been gaining most of the ground. Even Christians have forgotten what it means to worship God in spirit with their whole heart, and have turned to the God of flesh in order to stimulate their animal nature rather than their spirit nature. Christians have lost most of the force of their testimony, because although their lips and their mouths testify of God, their every day lives testify that the flesh is more important. And the world gladly accepts that testimony, because then they think they can serve God and still serve the flesh.

Now, let's go back once more to the church foyer scene and look at one more example. Here goes!

"Hey, Tom. How's it going?"

"Oh, Hi, Rick. Just Great. I mean, really great. The Lord is so good. How's your week been, Rickey?"

"It's been great. The Lord's really working with me. I have to admit that at the beginning of the week I was getting beat up by Satan quite a bit, but God really showed me some things through it. There was some things I needed to get straight. I'm not saying I'm perfect, but the Lord is sure helping me a lot."

"Oh, Rick, I know what you mean about not being perfect. That's me in a nutshell. But God is helping me so much, and I feel like I'm really growing in him. It's just awesome what Jesus Christ can do for someone once he gets a hold of them."

"You're not kidding, Tom. I never would have thought I'd ever be a Christian. I didn't think God could ever stand having me around. But he's done a work in me, and I love him for it. I've never been so happy in my whole life."

"Yeah, Rick. I know what you mean. And speaking of 'happy', let's get in there. They're about to start the service, and I don't want to miss any of it."

"You bet. Let's go see what God's got for us."

Well, there's definitely a difference between this last narrative and the former ones. This last one is centered on the business that is most important, instead of the busyness of the world. What makes the real difference is what the heart is occupied with. God knows if he is the center of your world, or if the world is at the center of you.

As Christians, we have been called to testify, but our reward will be based on what that testimony really is. If we want to be rewarded with eternal things, than our testimony during our time on Earth must be a testimony of an eternal God. If our testimony is a testimony of Earth's amusements, than our reward will be the same as the Earth, in that just like the Earth which in that day will pass away, so will we. It is better to live unto God now than to lift up your eyes in hell and wish you had.