

How to be clean

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Date: 15 March 2020

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, well, coronavirus has swept our world, and the latest I heard from news today was that in the UK, 1,140 cases of coronavirus and 21 deaths.

And so the government, NHS Scotland, they advise is to wash your hands with soap and water for as often as you can. And they suggest doing it to happy birthday, saying happy birthday twice while you wash your hands.

As a family, we've decided that we're going to do the Lord's Prayer. Instead, because it's nobody's birthday anyway, and it's good for us to focus on God at such times as these. Also, if you catch up, if you've got a cough or sneeze, then do it in a tissue and put it in a bin, and then wash your hands.

That's also the advice. And besides this, the coronavirus continues to spread, and more and more people are looking for ways to keep spaces clean. And so the advice is that cleaning of visibly dirty surfaces, not in here, you'll see, but cleaning of dirty surfaces followed by disinfection is the best practice to prevent COVID-19.

And I guess that's why shops are running out of cleaning materials. Why there's demand for cleaning services, and why many schools and businesses have closed for deep cleaning, or are likely to close.

[1 : 2 2] And it seems that isolation and lockdown are going to be the norm in the weeks and possibly months to come. Well, in our Bible reading, you'll see from Mark chapter 7 that Jesus speaks about what makes us, you and me, what makes us unclean.

And it's got nothing to do, according to Jesus, with what comes at us from the outside, because Jesus is talking about what defiles us on the inside.

And it's far more serious, because what Jesus is saying is that every single one of us has got a heart condition. And it's not a rare condition, it's a condition that affects every single person.

And so Jesus gets to the very heart of the human problem, which is the problem of the human heart. And what he's saying here is that we need deep cleaning.

We need deep cleansing within our hearts. We are to be right with God. And so there are three things that this text teaches us. First of all, the problem.

[2 : 2 6] Second, the diagnosis. And third, the cure. So first, the problem. We are unclean. Second, the diagnosis. We can't clean ourselves. And third, the cure.

Only Jesus can clean us. So we'll look at these points as we work through this passage. First of all, the problem. We are unclean. Jesus, just to set the context, has been criticising the religious leaders of his day.

They were challenging Jesus because Jesus' disciples were eating food with what they regarded as being unclean hands. Chapter 5.

Sorry, chapter 7, verse 5. Now, these teachers, religious teachers, were concerned about ritual purity. So about being clean on the outside. Whereas Jesus, what he does is he goes deeper because God cares more about what is happening on the inside of our lives than he does about what we do on the outside.

Because it's our hearts that made us unclean before God. And that's the real issue here in these verses. So verse 14. Again, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

[3 : 36] Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them. So Jesus is now talking to everybody.

Before it was just the religious teachers. Here it is everybody. And before we think, this has got nothing to do with me. Because most of us, I'm guessing, are in trouble with ritual purity laws.

We don't kind of wake up and think about washing and cleansing and so on. We don't worry so much about food laws. There are all kinds of religious rules and regulations.

They don't seem to bother us. I guess for some people, it is a big deal whether food is kosher or whether certain kinds of meat are halal. That is an issue. But Jesus is saying here that there's nothing on the outside that can defile us.

Because it's what's on the inside that defiles us. And so Jesus moves on from ritual uncleanness, which was the beef of the religious leaders of his day, to what really makes a person unclean before God.

[4 : 39] And this is why what Jesus is saying here applies to us today and to people in every single generation. Because Jesus gets to the heart of the matter, which of course is the matter of the human heart.

And so the problem is that we are unclean. And we've got to grasp this if we are to get what Jesus is saying. And of course the religious leaders wouldn't have disagreed with Jesus on this because they knew that they were unclean.

They were so obsessed with all this ritual washing because they knew they were unclean. They knew they were unfit for God. They knew that as human beings they weren't basically good.

So they all agreed with Jesus that as human beings we are unclean. That was undisputed. But I guess that isn't undisputed today. Because many modern people tend to think as human beings we're actually basically quite good.

Yes we have our flaws, but as a human race we tend to believe we're good. Now of course there is lots of good in human beings. There is lots of love and care and compassion and that's fantastic.

[5 : 47] But to say that we are basically good flies in the face of all the evidence. Just I guess the evidence of world history is one thing. So World War II, the Holocaust, genocide and totalitarian states and so on and so on would say to us we aren't basically good as a human race.

But then there is also the evidence of our own lives, our own human personalities. We're proud, we're selfish, we're greedy. There's all sorts of things going on inside our hearts that nobody else sees that would sum up what we are really like as a person.

So what Jesus and religious leaders disagreed on was not the fact of our uncleanness, but the source. The source. Because the Pharisees who followed all these traditions and rules thought that the source was the unclean food or the unclean hands.

But Jesus is saying here, they are not the things that defile you, they are not the things that make you unclean. And because they disagreed with the source of the uncleanness, the religious leaders, then they also disagreed as to the solution, what could be done about being unclean.

In other words, what are we supposed to do about the fact that we are unclean before God? Well the Pharisees and those who followed their traditions thought that if the source was on the outside, that's how uncleanness came, then the solution was also on the outside.

[7 : 22] And that's why they would do these things, washing your hands, rules, regulations, all outward things as a sign that they wanted to be clean. But Jesus is saying we are unclean on the inside, and nothing we do on the outside can ever help us, can ever clean us up.

And there is a great example of this in Shakespeare's Macbeth. I studied Shakespeare's Macbeth at school, never paid any attention at all to that particular English class.

But then I saw Macbeth at the Globe Theatre in London a couple of years ago, and absolutely loved it. And I forgot just how sinister a character Lady Macbeth actually is.

She's ambitious, she's ruthless, she persuades Macbeth to murder in pursuit of power. But later on she suffers this guilt-ridden conscience because of her evil crime.

And it culminates, if you know Macbeth, it culminates with a sleepwalking scene where she cries, Out! Damn spot! Because the guilt she feels is expressed in terms of being unclean.

[8 : 31] What she's done on the outside makes her feel unclean on the inside. So she thinks she's got blood on her hands and she can't wash it out, she can't get rid of it. And it's Shakespeare's way of saying that she can't wash away her guilty conscience.

She can't do it. She knows she's unclean, but she can't make herself clean. Even Macbeth, her husband, wants her to get some relief.

And so he calls in the doctor and he says, Cure her of that. Can't stone that minister to a mind diseased. Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow. Raise out the written troubles of the brain.

And with some sweet oblivious antidote, cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart. He wants her to be cleansed.

She wants to be cleansed. But nothing on the outside can cleanse how she's really feeling on the inside. And so we may not have orchestrated murder like Lady Macbeth.

[9 : 35] Although you never know this is Glasgow after all. But we're conscious that the problem is in our hearts, aren't we? We're conscious that every desire and every inclination of our hearts isn't always towards what is good and noble and true and right.

So just imagine if what was in our hearts somehow was able to be presented to the public. Say, Kelvin Grove, Art Gallery, a museum just down the road.

Just imagine there was to be a wall on display for your life or my life. Imagine how you would feel if every desire of your heart, every inclination, was to be projected onto that wall for everybody to see.

Well, of course, there would be lots of good stuff there. But we would probably die of embarrassment. Why? Because we're unclean on the inside. And that's the very problem that Jesus is addressing here.

So let's secondly look at his diagnosis. First of all, the problem. Let's get the problem. We are unclean. Second, the diagnosis. We can't clean ourselves. So after Jesus has made a point to the crowd, he then, as it were, speaks to his disciples and he explains to them privately what he means.

[10 : 55] So look at verse 17 to 19. After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. Are you so dull? He asked. Don't you see that nothing that can enter a person from the outside can defile them?

For it doesn't go into their heart, but into their stomach and then out of the body. And say this, Jesus declared all foods clean. So the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was talking about.

So Jesus gives them a quite simple, basic, first year biology lesson on how the digestive system works. And he's actually quite graphic in what he says. Literally, he's saying the food goes into your stomach and then down the latrine, down the toilet.

So food from the outside can't make you unclean because it doesn't go into your heart. Basically it goes in one end and then it comes out the other. That's what he's saying. That's why eating unclean food with unclean hands can't make you unclean.

So Jesus is saying to the religious leaders as well as to us that our uncleanness is an inward thing. And so it isn't affected by all the outside stuff that we do.

[12 : 07] God sees past all of the outward show deep down inside of our hearts. And so God's not worried about what goes into our stomachs. He's far more concerned about what comes out of our hearts.

And that's why Mark makes this really interesting editorial comment in verse 19, just at the end there, in brackets, in saying this. Jesus declared all foods clean.

Now Mark, as we've looked at Mark's Gospel, Mark hardly ever makes comments like this. So when he does, it's important. Because Jesus is saying something really significant here.

He's saying, right here and right now, I declare all foods clean. So what you eat no longer makes you unclean before God.

Jesus was saying that now God's people can eat whatever they want to eat without any restrictions. So yes, there were restrictions in the Old Testament, in the law.

[13 : 08] It did clearly state that certain foods could not be eaten. But with the coming of Jesus, all of this changed. And this law had to be reinterpreted because Jesus had fulfilled it in himself.

And so while the law maintained purity, it was no longer to be found in keeping the rules about food. Cleanliness didn't come through food observance.

But Jesus is saying cleanliness, purity, washing only comes through him. And so Jesus smashes all these rules out of the way because they're not needed anymore.

So all Christians are free to eat any food. Beef, steak, chicken, plants, whatever. Jesus is pressing home the fact that it's the heart that determines whether we are clean or unclean before God.

And that's why he repeats himself in verse 20. He went on, what comes out of a person is what defiles them. So the problem is the heart. The heart defiles us. So we know that the heart is not just an organ that pumps blood through our body.

[14 : 17] The heart is the center and source of the human personality. So it determines our feelings. It determines our impulses, our affections, and our desires.

And so Jesus says in verse 21, For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.

All these evils come from inside and defile a person. See what he's saying? What comes out of your heart is what makes you unclean.

All the sin and all the evil comes from deep inside of us. And so it's like Jesus performs a cardiogram. It's a big word for you doctors.

I don't know what a cardiogram does, but it assesses how well your heart is doing, the state of your heart. And so what Jesus does here is he highlights everything that makes us unclean by saying it comes from your heart.

[15 : 22] So there are evil thoughts. Evil thoughts are what is behind every single evil action, every wrong thing that we do. Then sexual immorality.

The word there is pornea, where we get our word pornography from. It's a broad term that covers all wrong sexual activity or practice. Then theft, basically stealing.

Murder, basically killing. Adultery, breaking the marriage covenant. Failing to keep the promises that you've made. Greed, wanting more.

Malice, that's deliberate wickedness. Deceit, deception of others. Lewnness, debauchery or excessively outrageous behaviour.

Envy would be jealousy of what others have. Slander would be malicious talk towards others or blasphemy against God. Arrogance or pride.

[16 : 22] Folly would be foolishness and just a lack of sense. Being an idiot. So Jesus says all of this defiles a person. And all of it has its source in our hearts.

And yet I don't think that we take what Jesus says seriously enough. Either because we don't see our heart as the real problem of our lives. Or because we try and blame other people or other things for the wrong that we do.

So we might say, well it's not my fault. It's somebody else's fault. Or I only behave in that way because of the circumstances that I'm living in. Do you know what I've got to cope with?

That's why I do what I do. And yet Jesus here doesn't let any of us off the hook. So whether our sin makes it to the front page of the tabloid newspapers.

Or whether our sin is confined to our family circle. Or whether our sin is deep down within our own heart. And nobody else knows about it. Jesus is saying it's all evil in God's sight.

[17 : 32] And it is what defiles us before God. And so that's why it's a problem. It's what makes us dirty. And means we need cleansing.

There's so much fear about the coronavirus and being clean. If only we were to have so much fear about our filthy and cleanliness before God.

Because God sees us as we really are. He sees that we have this serious problem. And Jesus is saying no amount of religious activity.

No amount of good works. Your religious performance will never put you right with God. Because we can't be cleansed from the outside in.

We need to be cleansed from the inside out. And it's actually the human heart that explains why the world is in such a mess. And why there is so much evil and sin and suffering.

[18 : 31] Because it's all a consequence of what we find in our hearts. And so if we trace everything that's wrong back to the source. Where do we end up? We end up in the human heart.

Jesus is essentially saying we are what's wrong. You are what's wrong. G.K. Chesterton. He captured this well in a letter to the Times newspaper.

When the newspaper posed the question what is wrong with the world. G.K. Chesterton reportedly wrote in a brief letter in response. He said, Dear sirs, I am.

Sincerely yours, G.K. Chesterton. You see, he grasped what Jesus is saying here. Jesus' diagnosis is that we're all unclean because of our heart.

And so there's nothing that we can do on the outside that goes deep enough to clean us on the inside. And so trying to cure our unclean hearts, ourselves, is like sticking on a sticking plaster when what we need is open heart surgery.

[19 : 36] So there's the problem. We are unclean. There's the diagnosis. We can't clean ourselves. And thirdly, there's the cure. Only Jesus can clean us.

So our hearts, according to Jesus, are filthy when sinned. We're defiled before God because of what's on the inside. And so we need to be clean.

We need to be sorted or else we'll be separated from God forever. And what the Bible describes as hell. And so we can't clean ourselves no matter what we do.

All our outward attempts are going to fail, whether they be religious observance or good works. They'll never be able to feel of a sin on the inside. We need a deep clean.

And only Jesus can give it. He's the only cure. And that's why he came into this world. Earlier in Mark's Gospel, in Mark chapter 1, Jesus cleanses a leper.

[20 : 33] Now the leper was unclean, according to the Old Testament law. But the leper begged Jesus to be made clean. And so Jesus reaches out and deliberately touches the leper.

And by touching him, Jesus was saying to him, I'm prepared to become unclean so that you can be clean. Jesus cured him.

But Mark gives his readers this fantastic preview of what Jesus came to do for us. Because Jesus was prepared to become unclean so that we can be clean.

He took the deadly virus of sin so that we can be saved from it. And that's why Jesus here is moving towards his death. He came to cleanse our sinful hearts by taking our sin upon himself on the cross.

So Jesus chose to identify with you and with me in his life so that he could take on our sin in his death so that we could be clean. He willingly became unclean and was forsaken by his Father God so that we may never be.

[21 : 44] Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians. He says, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So God clothed Jesus in our sin. And God exchanges us so that we can be clothed with Jesus' righteousness.

So our devastating diagnosis is met by the cause to cure of Jesus' death. Because that's the only thing that can deal with the problem of your sin and mine.

That's the only thing that can cleanse our hearts. So we can be free from the guilt of our sin and the punishment it deserves. We need to turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and to believe in him.

Because God in his grace and in his mercy purifies our hearts through his son so we can be fit for his presence. And every single one of us here today needs that cleansing.

[22 : 53] We are well aware of all the evils that come from within our own hearts and make us unclean. The evil thoughts, the sexual immorality, the theft, the murder, the adultery, the greed, the malice, the deceit, loonness, envy, slather, arrogance and folly.

We're guilty as charged by Jesus. And yet the beauty says that Jesus came to make us clean. And so if you're here today and you profess to be a Christian, then you should be far more concerned about what is going on on the inside in your heart than about what's happening on the outside.

We need to, if we profess to follow Jesus, take care of our hearts. Because the battle against sin and against evil has got to be fought in our heart.

Or else sin will work itself out into our lives and in our actions. And sin finds different outlets in different people. So that everybody sins in the same way.

But sin has its origin in our hearts and it works itself out in our lives. And so we actually have the potential for every possible sin. Every heart has the potential to do anything.

[24 : 16] So as Christians we need to guard our hearts. But if you're here today and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, then you need to let Jesus do that deep clean of your heart.

Because don't ever think that you can clean yourself or that the costly cure of Jesus' death could never be enough for what you've done. Don't ever think, my sin is so bad, my heart is so twisted and filthy that Jesus can never forgive.

That's nonsense. Jesus came to forgive every sin when he died on the cross. And Jesus longs to forgive every sin. That's why Christianity offers this hope and this grace that no other religion can possibly offer.

So don't delay in going to Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only saviour who if you receive him will fulfil you completely. And if you fail him, he'll forgive you eternally.

So go to Jesus and be clean. Don't run away looking to be washed and cleansed in anyone or anything else but Jesus Christ.