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Sermon Notes

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What Can Make Me Pure Within?

Matthew 15:1-20

Three thousand years ago, King David made a profound statement of what God expects from those who will come to worship Him:

Psalm 24:3-4 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart

Clean hands and an pure heart?? How can we get those?

It's a lot easier to clean then hands than it is to purify the heart

Some surgeons set a timer and wash their hands for a full ten minutes as they begin their day, and five minutes after each patient. A surgical website describes the process of correct handwashing for average people who aren't going to be performing surgery:

Start with soap and running water at a comfortable temperature. (Antimicrobial soaps are unnecessary and they may help spawn bacteria resistant to antibiotics.) As soon as the soap hits your skin, islands of grease will begin to dissolve, exposing dormant viruses and living bacteria. E. coli and other intestinal transients will get caught up in the tide of soapy water during the first five seconds of the wash. Plain soap tears off the outer coating of flu viruses, rendering them inert. Hand-washing also flushes away yeast and other fungi, and the grapelike clusters of staph will soon slide away as well. Keep rubbing your soapy hands—in glee, if you like, at this microbial rout—for at least 15 seconds before rinsing. Admittedly, that is likely to seem like a long time. To be sure you don't give up too soon, hygienists recommend washing for as long as it takes to sing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

If you do all this, you will wipe out as much as 95 percent of the organisms that were there before you picked up the soap

Of course, bacteria dwelling below the surface of the skin will re-emerge within some minutes from hair follicles, sweat glands, fingernails and folds of skin. The battle for truly clean hands is never ending.

BUT what can wash away our sin? What can make us pure within? What can actually purify the wickedness from our hearts? Washing hands can NEVER do this!

James 4:8 Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

BUT HOW? Matthew 15 tells us how NOT to purify the heart... religious rituals, ceremonies, man-made rules and regulations may make your hands clean, but they do nothing to purify the heart. In fact, the answer to this deep question is not even found in our text today... but scripture tells us plainly how the human heart can be made pure

I. The Legalists' Charge Against Jesus: Ceremonial Defilement

- A. The Pharisees and Scribes: Professional Legalists
- B. Their Highest Value: Conformity to Legal Tradition
- C. Their Accusation of Christ: Ceremonial Defilement

II. Jesus' First Charge Against the Legalists: Arrogance Over God's Word

- A. A Serious Attack on the Word of God
- B. Fundamental Issue: Sufficiency and Clarity of Scripture
- C. Christ Perfectly Upholds the Law: Honor Your Father and Mother

III. Jesus' Deeper Charge: Hypocrisy in Worship

- A. Isaiah's Prophecy: Exposing an Ancient Problem Still With Us Today
- B. Hypocrisy: Acting Righteous When You're Not
- C. Hypocrisy in Worship: Acting Reverent When You're Not

IV. True Worship Versus Traditionalism

- A. What Is Traditionalism?
- B. What Is True Worship?

V. The True Defilement: Sins of the Heart

Matthew 15:10-11 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. ¹¹ What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'"

- A. Christ's Clear Teaching: True Defilement Comes from Within, Not from Outside
 - 1. Very significant: Declared all foods clean
 - a. The Jews had a whole list of foods they couldn't eat

Leviticus 20:25 *"You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground-- those which I have set apart as unclean for you.*

- b. So also most man-made religions have food regulations
- c. But here, Jesus declared ALL FOODS clean

Mark 7:19 *(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")*

- d. The time for ceremonial food, clean and unclean was over
- 2. True issue: we are ALREADY defiled by what comes OUT of our hearts
- 3. Jesus made this very plain to His disciples

Matthew 15:12-20 *Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" ¹³ He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." ¹⁵ Peter said, "Explain the parable to us." ¹⁶ "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. ¹⁷ "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸ But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"*

B. God's Central Concern: The Human Heart

- 1. Prime example: the search for a true king for Israel
- 2. Saul was NOT the man

1 Samuel 13:14 *the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart*

- 3. Neither were David's older brothers

1 Samuel 16:7 *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

- 4. David's heart was FIXED on a genuine relationship with God

Psalm 9:1-2 I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. ² I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

Psalm 13:5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.

Psalm 16:7 I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.

Psalm 17:3 Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin.

Psalm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 24:3-4 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart

Psalm 27:8 My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

A heart after God... delighting in God inwardly, searching out God's wisdom, keeping purity within one's private thoughts and life, exposing his heart to the searching out the holy God, seeking to make the heart AND the hands clean, seeking God's face from an internal DRIVE... this is the HEART religion King David taught

5. Jesus was EVEN MORE this way than David

a. Jesus spoke the ultimate blessing for INTERNAL PURITY

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

b. He said it wasn't enough just to refrain from adultery... judgment day will probe the motives of the HEART

Matthew 5:28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

c. Jesus said it mattered what your HEART was set upon

Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

6. How different is this from the PROFESSIONAL RELIGIOUS ACTORS that Jesus was rebuking here

a. They delighted in traditionalism and ceremonies

- b. They lusted after the praise of other people
- c. They HATED the Son of God
- d. AND rejected the concept of a genuine heart relationship with God

C. God's Assessment of the Natural Heart

- 1. In the time of Noah

Genesis 6:5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

- 2. In the time of Jeremiah

ESV Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

- 3. In the time of Paul

Ephesians 4:17-19 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

- 4. In our time

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God-- ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power.

D. The True Defilement: Sins of the Heart

- 1. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks
- 2. Jesus lists HEART sins... issues ALREADY LURKING in the heart
- 3. OUT OF the Heart COME a river of defilements

Vs. 17-20 "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸ But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰

These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

4. The defiled human heart is the source of all the evils on this planet
5. That is what makes us filthy in God's sight

VI. The Only Remedy: Salvation by Grace

Illus. in 1991. During the Persian Gulf War, the Iraqi army dumped hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil from a loading dock in Kuwait into the Persian gulf. They also dumped contents of several supertankers into the gulf. Apparently their goal was to hinder a U.S. Marine amphibious landing. The **Gulf War oil spill** is regarded as the worst [oil spill](#) in history. It caused considerable damage to wildlife in the [Persian Gulf](#). Estimates on the volume spilled range from 42 to 462 million gallons; the slick reached a maximum size of 100 by 40 miles and was 4 inches thick

It is still adversely affecting life all along the Persian Gulf shores. The cleanup efforts continue, but it may take decades before the full effects have been removed

I have seen pictures of gooey, slick black birds suffocated by the crude oil... or unable to fly

Even more striking are the pictures of the cleanup efforts... white-suited experts with gas masks on, their legs fouled by mucking around for hours on the sludge-covered rocks of the shoreline, using high-pressured hot water hoses to hose off one shiny slick rock after another

A disgusting picture of the outward effects of human sin

The huge oil slick was easily visible from outer space... it made me wonder what our hearts look like spiritual from God

Furthermore... I've seen footage of an oil covered cormorant, a large sea bird, trying to clean itself off

It made me think of human efforts to CLEAN OURSELVES UP from the defilements of our own hearts

A. Central Question of Our Existence: How Can I Purify My Heart?

1. Answer not found in our text... not directly, anyway
2. False answers are exposed and rebuked... the true answer is found elsewhere

B. False "Remedies" for Heart Defilement: Religion, Tradition, Legalism

Religiosity: thinking that man-made forms of worship and service to God make one righteous before God

Traditionalism: thinking that keeping man-made traditions precisely in the pattern taught by ancestors is required in order to be righteous before God

Legalism: thinking that obeying laws, rules and regulations will make you righteous before God

1. The Pharisees and Scribes tried to cover their true defilement with outward garments of religion, tradition, legalism
2. They wove elaborate garments of fake righteousness that fooled people but did not fool God
3. Man-made rules and regulations are an enticing counterfeit, and every religion in the world employs it
 - a. Buddhists who make costly pilgrimages to shrines in Tibet do so at great cost and feel very holy and righteous when they have achieved it
 - b. Hindus who do their daily puja, their little acts of religion at the shrines of their millions of gods feel good about themselves when they do it
 - c. Muslims who pray five times a day and keep the fast of Ramadan feel good about themselves... those who follow even stricter rules and regulations laid down by this mullah or that ayatollah feel far more righteous than the other Muslims who don't
 - d. Medieval Catholics followed an elaborate system of penances and pilgrimages in order to wash away their guilty consciences
 - e. Jesus exposes them all as having NO BENEFIT for cleansing the defiled heart

C. Even God's Holy Law Cannot Purify the Sinful Heart

1. In fact, even the holy and pure law of God had NO POWER WHATSOEVER to cleanse a defiled heart

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: Christian at Interpreter's house, being shown things that would help him understand the Christian life

Interpreter showed him a very large living room, full of dust because it had never been swept. After Christian saw this for a while, Interpreter called for a man to come sweep the room; as he began to sweep, the dust flew about so abundantly that Christian began to choke on it. Then Interpreter spoke to a young woman that stood nearby and said "Bring here the water and sprinkle the room. And when she did this, the room was easily swept clean with pleasure.

Christian asked, "What is the meaning of this?"

Interpreter answered: "The living room is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet Grace of the gospel. The dust is his original sin and inward corruptions that have defiled the whole man. The man that came and swept up the room at first is the Law of God; but the woman that brought the water and sprinkled it is the gospel. Now just as you saw that, as soon as the man began to sweep, the dust flew about the room so much that the room could never be cleaned and you began to choke because of it, this is to prove to you that the Law, instead of cleansing the heart from sin by its power, actually revives sin and makes it even stronger in the soul, even as it uncovers sin and forbids it. For the Law has no power to kill sin, only to expose it and stir it up.

Again, just as you saw the young woman sprinkle the room with water, after which it was cleaned with pleasure, this is to show you that, when the Gospel comes with its sweet and precious influences into the heart, then I say, even as you saw the young woman sweep up the dust by sprinkling the floor with water, so is sin conquered and subdued and the soul made clean through faith, and as a result fit for the King of Glory to inhabit."

So... I agree with Bunyan... even the holy and pure law of God has no power to purify the defiled heart of a man, woman or child

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Romans 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son

Galatians 3:10-11 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." ¹¹ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

Galatians 3:21 For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

D. Leaving the Blind Guides

Matthew 15:12-14 Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" ¹³ He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

1. The disciples were afraid of the Pharisees' and Scribes reactions
2. Jesus had deeply offended them (the Greek word is like scandalized)
3. Every system of religiosity, traditionalism and legalism has its intimidating leaders who scare you into a lifestyle of judgmentalism and fear

4. Jesus boldly broke with them and called them blind guides... the danger of the blind leading the blind is both will fall into a pit

Illus. Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Maui, there is a terrifying volcanic pit crater called the Devil's Throat. It is 165 feet deep and 150 feet in diameter. It is a short, level, 50 foot walk from the trail. The website had some striking warnings:

- If you have children **do not under any conditions** allow them to run or walk ahead of you. Always keep them right next to you. There is a 165 foot drop at the end of the trail.
- Most of the trail is easy walking, but as you near Devil's Throat the trail is a bit more broken and there are small fissures in the ground. Walk carefully through this area.
- Under no conditions should you do this trail if it is dark, or if vision is obscured due to fog or other conditions.
- **Please note** there is absolutely zero protection from falling into the pit crater and there is absolutely NO indication that the pit crater is ahead of you until you are within a few feet of it. **Keep your eyes ahead of you on the path at all times until you see the pit crater.** You can not survive the 165 foot fall into the crater.

Would you go for a nighttime walk to see this crater?

Imagine a blind guide leading a tour of blind people to hear the sounds of the wind in the crater.

I think it's aptly named "The Devil's Throat"... because that's spiritually where false teachers like the Pharisees lead their unwitting disciples:

Matthew 23:15-16 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. ¹⁶ "Woe to you, blind guides!

5. Thankfully, Jesus also made a beautiful promise

Vs. 17 "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.

- a. There will come a day when all false religions, all traditionalism, all legalism and everyone who has taught them will be pulled up **by the roots**
- b. By the roots means they will never return again!!
- c. The time for that is judgment day, when the blind guides, the false prophets, the false teachers, the mullahs and ayatollahs and imams and pagan priests cult leaders and

E. The Only True Remedy: Salvation by Grace

Titus 3:3-7 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Acts 15:9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

1. God's grace alone has the power to cleanse and transform the defiled human heart
2. Christ's blood alone can cover our sin... not the filthy robe of our efforts through religious rules and regulations
3. God's power can purify even the most defiled heart
4. God's power alone can transform the heart and heal it from evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony and slander
5. We do those things because we're enslaved to them
6. God's grace alone has the power to break that enslavement and make us new

VII. Application

A. Stop Trusting in Religion, Tradition, and Legalism

1. We are constantly tempted to think of ourselves as better or worse based on how we're doing compared to a set of do's and don'ts
2. If we're doing well, we tend to become arrogant; if poorly we tend to become depressed
3. If we do well long enough, we can become judgmental of others

B. Understand Grace Completely

1. Grace is a mighty transforming power
2. It is a mighty cleanser
3. It is not a free ride to do as much evil as you want
4. It is a teacher... let it teach you how to say NO to ungodliness

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

C. Resist the Temptation to Judge Others