

The Lord Who Makes You Clean

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[0:00] Hope y'all are doing well today. Thank you so much for being with us. There are so many great churches, as Elliot was referring to earlier, that are proclaiming the good news, and we don't take that lightly that you chose to be with us.

So thank you for doing that. We're gonna jump back into Mark this morning. We've been going through Mark for the last 18 weeks, and we're actually gonna be in it through mid-September. So just an incredible story of the life of Jesus and what it looks like to follow him through the eyes of Peter, as written down by Mark. And so we definitely have seen two major themes come out so far, and that's who is this Jesus, and then what does it mean to actually follow him?

What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? You know, what happened last week, we saw this crazy thing where Jesus walks on the water, which is really cool because I'm a surfer, and, you know, he was the first surfer known in history.

And then we're about to see in today's story, Jesus getting fired up. I mean, we're gonna see a side of Jesus where, yeah, he brings the heat kind of thing.

[1:04] I'm going to warn you, though, when I'm reading this passage, you may think that it seems kind of irrelevant to us today, but I'm gonna tell you, it's incredibly relevant to us today. So we're out of Mark 7, and it's the first 23 verses of Mark chapter 7.

I'm gonna read it, and it should be on the screen behind me as well. So, now when the Pharisees gathered to him, that's Jesus, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.

For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash.

And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, why do your disciples not walk around, walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands? And he said to them, well, did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites? That's coming out, firing right there. As it is written, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

[2:21] In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men. And he said to them, you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.

For Moses said, honor your father and your mother, and whoever reviles father or mother must surely die. But you say, if a man tells his father or his mother, whatever you would have gained from me as Corban, that is given to God, then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.

And many such things you do. And he called the people to him again and said to them, hear me all of you and understand. There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him. But the things that come out of a person are what defile him. And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, then are you also without understanding?

Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him since it enters not his heart, but his stomach and is expelled? Thus he declared all foods clean.

[3:37] And he said, what comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.

All these evil things come from within and they defile a person. Yeah, this is the word of God. Yeah.

What's this all about? So, I mean, you can focus on the hypocrisy and there's a lot of it in here and this is absolutely something that Jesus hates and detests. That's pretty easy to see.

However, to do that in this particular passage would, I think, miss the bigger theme. You see the word defiled comes up six times in these 23 verses.

Verse 2 and 5 and 15 and 18, 20 and 23. So, the real context here is around the cleanliness laws and traditions and how the religious leaders of the day miss the point.

[4 : 44] Now, let's see who's involved here. We got the disciples, the followers of Jesus. Their hands are dirty and they get called out for it. Then we see the scribes. They were the recognized interpreters of the law at that day and they, how to apply it with the traditions.

It was something that was extremely complex because a lot of the traditions were passed down orally and they'd gotten away from the original intent. Where the law was silent, then tradition was vocal, one man said.

What they decided was now binding upon all Israel. Whatever they decided was what every Israelite had to do. These scribes, we read earlier in Mark 3, they think that Jesus is actually possessed by Satan, that they don't have a high regard for him.

And then you see the Pharisees. They're already seen in Mark and we'll see a lot of them more as we follow throughout the story of Mark and they're convinced that Jesus isn't taking the law seriously enough.

He's kind of laissez-faire. Whatever will be, will be, you know. This isn't the first time that Jesus has been challenged by the Pharisees. From the beginning of his public ministry as his reputation and influence have grown and as the crowds around him have multiplied, the Pharisees have regarded him.

[5 : 58] First with suspicion, then with concern, and then with alarm and growing hostility. In the beginning, he was kind of like an irritation to them. Then he became a problem that had to be dealt with and finally, he became a threat which had to be eliminated by any means necessary.

Why was that? First of all, he undermined their authority. He undermined their intellectual authority as interpreters of the scriptures by challenging their understanding of the law.

In Matthew 22, 29, Jesus replied, you Pharisees are in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God. That's pretty blunt.

In other words, you don't know what you're talking about. Now, these were men whose knowledge of the Bible or the Old Testament was extensive. They were like seminary professors of that day. They studied the Bible. They memorized it. They debated it. They taught it in the synagogues. They knew their Bible forwards and backwards. But Jesus is openly challenging their authority saying that they have not understood it.

[7 : 04] at the most fundamental level, they have misread and misunderstood and misapplied every single verse of the scriptures. They look into this book and instead of seeing God, they see their own reflection.

I can hear them saying, mirror, mirror, on the wall. Who's the holiest one of all? And they hear, you are. But it's not the voice of God they're hearing.

So what's really going on here? So here, Jesus' disciples are caught between the religious leaders of Israel saying they are dirty and they're a rabbi, Jesus, who people think is possessed.

And what's the argument? What makes a person clean before God? What's being communicated is beyond dirty hands. They're dirty. What could this possibly have to do with us in today's society?

We have hand sanitizer. Right? We can easily wash our hands, take showers, do all those kinds of things all the time. What could this possibly have to do with us? What if I told you this wasn't about chores or hygiene?

[8 : 11] It was about our deepest painful emotions, namely guilt and shame. What if I told you that what Jesus does here is in a moment in history where if we will see it and believe it, it can set us free.

I'm going to need for you to hang with me to the end, but we're going to get there. According to the Bible, sin makes us dirty, not just guilty.

Sin doesn't just make us guilty, it makes us defiled. It leaves a stain. We see this imagery all throughout the Old Testament. Now we may want to push back on that as a society in this moment, however, we all know this to be true.

You sometimes even feel dirty. You know, when you do those kind of things, those little sneaky things, you feel dirty. You feel defiled.

In fact, the harder we try to distance ourselves from the seriousness of our sins, the more we struggle with crippling guilt and shame. We live in a world now where we don't believe in judgment. [9 : 18] We don't believe in sin and yet we still feel there's something wrong with us. Though we've abandoned the original categories, we still have a profound, inescapable sense that if we're examined, we'd be rejected.

We have a deep sense that we have to hide our true self or at least control what people know about us. Secretly, we feel that we aren't acceptable, that we have to prove to ourselves and other people that we're worthy, that we're lovable, that we're valuable.

There's no escaping the fact that we all have a sense we're unclean. That was Tim Keller. Really, the starting point is knowing that you have a sin problem.

That's the starting point. Paul, arguably the greatest apostle of all time, a guy who spent his life trying to keep the rules, said this in 1 Timothy, this saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. Jesus came to save sinners. That's the whole point. And don't miss what Paul says there, of whom I am the foremost. He got it. You won't get him or his message until you know that's you.

[10 : 35] The gospel is good news for sinners. It makes no sense to perfect people. Luke 5, 31 and 32 says, And Jesus answered them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. So before you can really get the gospel and the need of a savior, you'll have to acknowledge that you can't fix it.

For some, that's really easy to do. You know it all too well. For others, and I'm going to say probably most of us in this room, we like to think, I'm not that bad of a guy.

I'm not that bad of a girl. You know, a little white lie here and there. It's not too bad. Did you see the guy down the street, what he did? The traditions were their human attempts to become or to be acceptable to God.

There were all kinds of bad motives, but the point was consecration, making something holy. In the Old Testament, the priests had to wash before going into the tabernacle and they also had to wash before eating.

[11 : 45] By Jesus' day, the zealous Jews, especially the Pharisees, had applied this to everyone. Not just the priests, mandating everyone must wash. They were telling people who weren't priests to keep the same rules that God had instilled for priests.

God hadn't told everyone to do this. He told the priests. Additionally, these oral traditions had gotten really complex. Some things required washing. Some things required sprinkling.

Some things required bathing or dipping your fingers up to your knuckles. Then there was all these rules for dishes, copper vessels, etc. Well, what's wrong with a little cleanliness, pastor?

Or pursuing holiness? What's wrong with that? These weren't just if you guys want to pursue holiness. They weren't those kind of things. Jesus says they were teaching these things as doctrine, the commandments of men.

They were saying, you must do these things or you're defiled and then we're going to judge you accordingly. Man-made religion is always complex, legalistic, and judgmental.

[12 : 53] They had taken it upon themselves to tell people what makes you unclean and how to get clean, not what God has said. And it didn't even work. They were still dirty. All the washings or sacrifices in the world never got to the root.

Jesus said, they honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Jesus calls them hypocrites, which means to wear a mask, to pretend. Same thing as Matthew 23 in the whitewashed tombs analogy.

Outside, everything is perfect, pristine. It looks very attractive, but on the inside, there's death. Enter Jesus, telling his disciples they didn't have to wash.

An accusation that they want to strictly enforce. The Pharisees said, you must do this. He's doing away with it. To Jesus, the religious leaders were too uptight.

They were self-righteous. They think that Jesus is a nobody from nowhere, a counterfeit. But Jesus shows that not to be the case when he perfectly quotes Moses to point out how incongruent their traditions are with the law of God.

[14 : 08] How in this hypothetical example of the son with his parents, they'd made a kind of like a loophole where people could just justify not obeying God's law. And many such things you do, he ended, Jesus says.

He's saying, you want me to keep going? Jesus is saying, I can call out every law that you have twisted to fit what you believe to be truth. Do you really want me to go there?

He's saying. Again and again, Jesus displays an authority like no one else on the law. However, what Jesus does next takes it to a whole other level. Verse 20 and 23, he says, what comes out of a person is what defiles him.

For from within, out of the heart of man comes evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and they defile a person.

Jesus took righteousness more seriously than anyone. Far from coming to relax the law, Jesus came to turn up the volume. The famous sermon on the mountain, Matthew 5, verse 20 says, for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

[15 : 25] It's far from saying righteousness wasn't important or that the Pharisees were too serious. Jesus says, you had to exceed them. He then proceeds to talk about anger and lust and revenge and et cetera.

He says, over and over, you've heard it was said, and he says, but I say to you and raises the bar. Each time he raises the bar from the external to the internal.

He keeps saying that what's in your heart is what matters most. And what's in your heart is the hardest thing to control. People don't see what's in your heart.

They don't see your motives. That is, in large part, what keeps us together as a society. We have a fear of what people will think or what will happen to us. So, in truth, our heart desires are kept in check by consequences of public perception.

Jesus says, that's not the case with God. God sees all your intentions. And just thinking about a woman lustfully is equal to full-blown adultery. I'd say that's raising the bar.

[16 : 35] Jesus' accusation wasn't that everyone was already clean. His issue was that they always missed the point and never got to the root. Jesus says, you focused on the wrong thing. It's inside out.

Well, that's not exactly good news. It's harder to control what comes out of you than what goes in. I mean, we all can control what we eat. I get that.

Cutting out carbs is terrible. But we can do it. Right? We can do that. How about stopping the following from coming out of you?

Evil thoughts. This is what stands behind all the evil actions. Evil actions, obvious and not. You got the obvious ones, you know, the adultery, the theft, the murder, the sexual immorality, the coveting, the wickedness, the deceit, the envy.

All those are obvious. And then he throws in, how about a little pride? How about a little foolishness? I've never done any of those.

[17 : 38] I know you guys haven't. Jesus' point here is no matter how much you're washing your hands and looking pious on the outside, your heart has declared war on God.

Jesus doesn't alleviate the demand for purity, he sharpens it. The capacity for fellowship with God is not destroyed by material uncleanness of food or hands. It is destroyed by personal sin.

So, if God sees our heart motives and counts that as guilty, what hope do we have? If the problem is on the inside, all of us are unclean.

What hope is there for us dirty hypocrites? One of the first miracles we see in Mark is the hope. We're getting clues as to what Jesus would be doing. In Mark 1, 40 and 42, and a leper came to him.

The guy that was forced to say unclean, unclean, unclean, telling people stay away. A leper came to him imploring him and kneeling said to him, if you will, you can make me clean.

[18 : 45] Moved with pity, he, Jesus, stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean. And immediately, the leprosy left him and he was made clean.

The leper didn't just say, you can fix my leprosy. You can fix the superficial thing. He said, make me clean. The leprosy was the outside problem.

Cleanliness was on the inside. Jesus doesn't just fix the outside. He can heal us from the inside. What do you do when you realize it's you who are unclean and you can't fix it yourself? You do what the leper did. Hope isn't found in rule keeping. It's found at the feet of Jesus. We make ourselves feel clean by pointing out the dirt in others.

I'm really good at that, by the way. The leper kneeled at Jesus' feet and begged him to make him clean. What did Jesus do before he even acted? He was moved with pity.

[19 : 45] We are more known by God than we are even known to ourselves. Think about that. God knows you better than you know yourself. We are more guilty than we would dare to dream.

We are more loved than we could ever comprehend. It wasn't just that unclean leper. It's every single one of us who would fall at his feet. He will not turn any of us away.

Moved with pity, he will cleanse us of all our unrighteousness. But we're defiled and he's perfect, right? Jesus intentionally touches defiled people.

In Mark 1, he touches the leper. In Mark 2, he reclines at a meal with a bunch of sinners. Another way to defile him. In Mark 3, he touches the sick and the demon-possessed people.

In Mark 5, the woman with the issue of blood touching his garment. In Mark 6, throngs of sick people touching his clothes. What's Mark showing us? That Jesus is the God who makes the dirty clean.

[20 : 47] Jesus heals us through contact with himself. But how? The clue is hidden in plain sight. Verse 19b, it says, thus he declared all foods clean.

Jesus offers a new and a better way to be clean. Better in that it cleans you from the inside out, not the outside in. But also new. He spoke with authority.

Jesus has authority. He declared. This was the moment. Commentators agree on this. That Jesus was saying cleanliness laws are fulfilled. Not saying this is so Old Testament.

Remember, Jesus said exceeds. He set the bar higher. Matthew 5, 18, for truly I say to you until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Jesus says, you have to have the righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees. that equals your standards aren't too low. They aren't high enough. Then he adds that he's not here to take away anything from the law, not even a dot.

[21 : 55] You're saying, Jesus, this is not sounding like good news. I gotta do what? I gotta be more righteous than these guys? Hold it right there.

That's it. His point wasn't to say what we do. He holds up the law and exposes its purpose to show our hearts the inability to change by us keeping rules.

How will we not be clean and acceptable on our own efforts? He said that. And then he said in Matthew 5, 17, 17 and 18, do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Jesus says the law must be fulfilled. You can't do it. But I can't. That's what Jesus said.

Is this so that he can make us all feel like hopeless losers? No. Because he has a plan to make us clean. Jesus willingly became filthy to make us clean.

[22 : 55] We don't have time to unpack the whole book of Hebrews which is what's going on there. Remember too that the whole Bible is telling one big story. It's telling a big love story. There were hints all along the way that somehow God would do this such and such and such.

Isaiah 1 God sees your worthless sacrifices and your hypocrisy and says verse 18 come now let us reason together says the Lord though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow though they are red like crimson they shall become like wool.

So we've been stained by sin we'll be spotless and how is that? Once a year on the day of atonement in the Old Testament they would send in the high priest to make offerings for his guilt the priest the priest's guilt and the people's guilt.

Every time he would go in he'd have to get clean each time and then make the sacrifices and then come back out and get clean and then go back in and make a sacrifice and then come back out and get clean and make another sacrifice. In Tim Keller's book on Mark he quotes an Old Testament professor named Ray Dillard.

Zechariah 3 is a vision of Joshua the high priest standing before God covered in feces and next to him is Satan accusing him.

[24 : 12] How is that possible that someone so dirty had to be clean? The prophecy goes on to show God removing the filthy garments and clothing Joshua in clean ones.

Then God says this is a picture of what is coming. Zechariah 3:8 it says hear now O Joshua the high priest you and your friends who sit before you for they are men who are assigned behold I will bring my servant the branch I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

God says I see who you are covered in filth but I will make you clean. It won't be by your efforts it won't be by my efforts here's how I'll do it I'll send my servant the branch Jesus Christ and in one day do you know that Jesus' name is translated Joshua in Aramaic Greek and Hebrew?

Keller goes on to show how Jesus the better Joshua states his own day of atonement but he experienced the opposite of Joshua in Zechariah 3 instead of being clothed in rich garments he was stripped of the only garment he had he was beaten and he was killed naked he was bathed too but that was in human spit Hebrews 9:11 and 12 says but when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come then through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands that is not of this creation he entered once for all into the holy places not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption the only spotless one to ever live traded places with you and me 2 Corinthians 5:21 says for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God if you want to be clean and righteous say

Jesus trade places with me remember all of this started because his disciples didn't keep the traditions they didn't have to because they were men's traditions they didn't have to because they were with Jesus they were with Jesus the only righteous clean one and that's enough if he hasn't all the rule keeping in the world won't make you clean the scandal here is that the religious leaders were content washing their dishes and hands not falling at the feet of Jesus and not saying me I need you don't put your hope in morality or focus on others come to Jesus if you're here this morning you're listening and not yet a follower of Jesus there's a reason we say Christ follower and not rule keeper and it's not because righteousness isn't important look at the sermon on the mount it's because to follow Jesus is to acknowledge you have no hope but him

[27 : 25] Galatians 2:21 says I do not nullify the grace of God for if righteousness were through the law then Christ died for no purpose ironically it's often religious people who struggle the most with this if you think you can clean yourself through keeping the rules Jesus in his new and better way will be of no help to you however if you can admit if you can be real if you can admit you're a guilty sinner you're dirty from the inside the gospel is indeed really really good news come to the one who loves to make the dirty clean come like the leper and say Jesus make me clean if you're here listening and already a follower of Jesus as the band comes up the whole dispute started because disciple of Jesus ate bread with dirty hands it what a powerful picture for what we are about to do this is where the rubber meets the road on Sunday mornings this is when you and I as Christians get to step back get to be real and get to examine ourselves we got to do business with God we got to say

God I need you I can't do this on my own efforts I need you to make me clean so let's take a few seconds do business with God and then we'll partake in communion thank