

**Matt 15.1-20**

Clint Le Page

Main Point – Turn to Jesus for cleansing then obey God from your heart

If I ask you, What makes you unclean? What comes to mind?-----

Is it touching things with germs; or getting dirty?-----

One of my kids reminded me of Biff, from Back to the Future, **(SLIDE)** who gets covered with manure :-D

That'd make you feel pretty unclean, n' horrible, don't you think? 😊

But what about before God, what would make you unclean n' unacceptable to him?---

Would it be, by not going to church enough, or praying enough, being nice enough?----

Or is it certain swear words, or sins, like stealing and murdering that make you unclean?-----

Or is the problem deeper than that?-----

Are you unclean before God?-----

And if we are, how can we get clean and be accepted?-----

And if we've been made clean, then how should it change how we live?-----

Today's passage is relevant for all of us.-----

**(SLIDE)** In Matthew 14 Jesus had been performing great deeds – healing the sick, walking on water, feeding the 5,000 plus.

Jesus is the Great Saviour of those with little faith.-----

And the opposition n' hostility from the Jewish leaders towards Jesus has been increasing.

In **ch12** after Jesus healed on the Sabbath, the Pharisees went out and plotted how to kill him (12.14), and accused him of being evil (12.24).And now they come to Jesus, **v2** and say, your disciples don't wash their hands, obeying the tradition of the elders.-----**(SLIDE) This is our first point, They Don't.**-----But to understand this, it's important to know some **historical background**.-----

Remember the Pharisees were looked up-to by everyone.

They were the 'set-apart' superior ones. The super-godly, n' religious ones.

They studied the law carefully and were dedicated to obeying God.

And most scribes, who were experts in the law, were Pharisees too.-----

In the Intertestamental period, the centuries before Jesus was born, very pious Jews wanted to be really careful about obeying God's laws.

They wanted to treasure it, and practice it. Obey all of it, in every way.

So they established the '**tradition of the elders**'.

They were more like rules, not, we have turkey every Christmas, traditions.-----

The traditions were like a fence designed to keep from you disobeying God.----

So they added on lots of rules, to try keep you far away from disobeying God.-----

So, God said in the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, Do no work on the Sabbath.

And the elders then defined what work was and wasn't.

Their tradition was designed to supplement and expand on God's law.-----

But actually, it had replaced it.-----

According to **Leviticus 11**, if you touch pigs, prawns or most bugs you get unclean.If you touched any bodily fluids, you'd need to wash your clothes, bathe with water, and you'd be ceremonially unclean until evening too – **Lev 17.15**.

You could easily get 'unclean'.-----

In **Exodus 30**(v19-20) the priests were to wash their hands & feet before offering sacrifices in the tabernacle.And the tradition of the elders seemed to apply this washing and expand it to all people, **(SLIDE)** in all of life.-----

But washing before you eat meals was never commanded by God.-----

And it wasn't about hygiene, or avoiding sickness.

It was about avoiding ceremonial, ritual uncleanness.-----

But for the Pharisees, the traditions were religious rules.

You break the tradition, you break God's law.-----

It's important to understand that when the Pharisees come and question Jesus.-----

And notice they've come from Jerusalem.

They've travelled about 65 kms (and not in a car) – that's days of travel, to the Sea of Galilee – to come n' question Jesus.

They're clearly here with hidden motives.-----

And saying, 'Jesus, your disciples, THEY DON'T obey the tradition', is having a go at Jesus, their teacher-----

And they're implying the disciples and their teacher, are unclean before God.-----

The Pharisees had accused Jesus' disciples of effectively not obeying God, and he comes back with, **You don't,(SLIDE) You don't obey God, our next point.**-----

Jesus answered them, **v3**, "Why do you break God's commandment because of your tradition?"

And he shows them how, with an example.---

The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment in **Ex 20v12** says,(**SLIDE**) Honour your father and your mother.----

And **Ex 21v17** says (**SLIDE**) whoever speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death.--

**Kids** I reckon you and we should be thankful that that isn't carried out.-----

Cos as a child I would have been put to death 100 times, for speaking bad words to my parents.

And how many of you dishonour your parents with disobeying, eye-rolling, shouting, screaming, ignoring.-----

Hasn't every one of us, dishonoured our parents, at some point?-----

So Jesus has quoted God's word, and now he tells the Pharisees how they disobey it & sin.

'But you say, 'Whoever tells his father or mother, "Whatever benefit you might have received from me is a gift committed to the temple," <sup>6</sup> he does not have to honor his father.'

People were saying, "Mum and Dad, I've got some money, but I've committed to give it to God, so sorry, I can't help you."

"Mum n' Dad, I know you're in need, but sorry I've got nothing left".-----

This reveals their hard hearts.

The Pharisees were all legalism and no love, not for their parents or for God.-----

They have looked for loopholes to avoid doing what God says.

**v6** 'you have nullified the word of God because of your tradition'.-----

They have prioritized human rules over God's commands, and actually disobeyed God.

Jesus is saying, You're unclean. You've sinned.

Before God You're the dirty & defiled ones.-----

You're fake hypocrites!-----

Jesus quotes **Isaiah 29**.

This people<sup>[g]</sup> honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

<sup>9</sup>They worship me in vain

As the NIV puts it, 'teaching merely human rules'.-----

Jesus is saying, you have outward religion but no heart devotion for God.

Outward religion but no repentance and faith.

You worship God with empty words.-----

And the word 'worship' in **v9** can refer to what you do with your body.

Your gestures, ceremonies; bowing heads or raising hands.-----

I wonder if we are guilty too?-----

Worshipping God with empty words, in singing or praying, for you don't really mean it?-----

Or do you worship God by coming to church, or watching church online, giving your money, or being nice, all while your heart is far from God?

Is that you?-----

Ceremony and outward actions are no substitute for inward devotion and love for God, are they?-----

Jesus then returns in **v11** to the issue of what defiles, what makes someone unclean.

**(SLIDE)** "It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth—this defiles a person."

In **Mark ch7** the focus is also on what foods make you unclean, but Matthew keeps focused on the issue of not washing.

And Jesus' clarifies in **v20**, 'eating with unwashed hands does not defile a person'.

He rebukes their human tradition.-----

And they are offended, **v12**.-----

Jesus is willing to offend the Pharisees here.-----

There's lots of talk about words that don't **offend**, in our culture today.

And now people, Christians too, can be guilty of breaking the law, the Equal Opportunity legislation, when it comes to speaking words that offend.-----

We should not harass, harm or bully people with our words or actions.

But sometimes, even when the truth is spoken in love, for someone's good, the other person might feel offended by your words.-----

Yet we learn from the example of Jesus here, that if someone gets offended, it doesn't automatically mean we'd sinned.-----

Sometimes we need to accept people will get offended when we speak the truth about Jesus, the truths he taught.-----

Be careful and prayerful, but like with Jesus, not everyone is happy with the truth.-----

And Jesus doesn't hold back.

He goes harder with the Pharisees, saying they're like plants that will be pulled up by the roots, **v13**.**(SLIDE)**

And that'll mean death.-----

For the Pharisees are blind.

They think they see the truth and can guide others, but they are blind guides who will only lead people to fall into a pit with them.

Jesus is saying, if you look to n' listen to them, follow them, it'll result in disaster and judgement.-----

For they don't see truly, they don't know the truth.

Their hearts are far from God, they don't obey God's word.

They're the unclean ones.-----

But let's not get proud and think we're better than the Pharisees.

For they don't obey God. But neither do we.

**We don't obey God – next point**.-----

What you eat, even if it's with unclean hands, goes in the mouth, **v17** and is eliminated. In one end and out the other.

'But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a person'.

What comes from the heart comes out in your words, and makes you unclean.

What comes from your heart, seen in your words and actions, makes you unclean before God.-----

Jesus gives some examples of from-the-heart, offensive-to-God things.

**V19**, evil thoughts – thoughts that displease the holy God of perfect love n' purity.

But evil and impure thoughts also result in and connect to what follows.

We might think, I'm not guilty of murder. But what about those thoughts where you wish someone was dead, or you verbally "murder" them?-----

Adulteries and sexual immoralities– includes not only doing those things with your body, but what you do in your heart n' mind - imagining, fantasizing about a sexual relationship with someone you're not married to.-----

Stealing, or wanting what others have, and lying, often to protect ourselves.----

And slander, is where you seriously insult, or tear down others, or God, with your words.-----

All these things dishonour God.-----

Along with failing to honour our parents.-----

Which of us has not sinned in one or more of these ways?-----

All of us have.

We don't obey God from the heart consistently and perfectly.

We don't honour God with our words & actions all the time.-----

What makes you and I unclean and defiled?-----

Selfish n' sinful things that flow from our hearts.

So we're all like this before God (**SLIDE – Biff**)

Guilty. Dirty!----- Covered with offensive Sin.

So what hope is there?

Well, while defiling words n' actions have flowed from our defiled hearts, that wasn't true of Jesus.

**Jesus did, obey God.---(SLIDE)-----**

Last year in **1 Pet 2** we read these words about Christ (**SLIDE**)

He did not commit sin, **and no deceit was found in his mouth** (2.22)

Not a day goes by when sin doesn't rise up from our hearts and bear fruit in selfish words and deeds.

We don't obey God all time.

But Jesus did.

He never sinned, and he obeyed God's commands from his heart, all day, every day.----

He loved God completely, and others truly.

Jesus did what we should have done – obey God.-----

And then he died the death that we deserved, in our place.-----

As **1 Peter 2v24** goes on to say (**SLIDE**)– 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds<sup>[5]</sup> you have been healed.'

And we'll remember that in the Lord's Supper shortly.-----

Through trusting in Jesus and his death for us, we get forgiven.----

So Come to Jesus in dependent trust.

Only he can make you clean, clean from sin's stains; spiritually clean n' forgiven in God's sight.-----

Yet Jesus also died & rose again so that we could be born again & get **new hearts**.

1 Peter ch1 says, (**SLIDE**) because of God's mercy 'he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'.-----

When we put our faith in Christ we are born again and become new people.

The old has gone the new has come.-----

What God promised in Ezekiel 36 to do in the New Covenant, he does in Jesus.

In **Ezek 36.26** we read (**SLIDE**) that God promises that he'll not only cleanse his people from their impurities but.

'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone<sup>[f]</sup> and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.'

Jesus, by his sinless life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection, obtains our salvation.

When we trust in him, the Spirit changes and renews our hearts, so that we want to and are caused to, n' empowered to carefully obey God's commands.

That's why, final point, **We can.**-----**(SLIDE)**-----

As followers of Jesus, saved by him, people with new hearts, we can obey God.

It will not be perfect, but we can now obey God genuinely, from the heart.-----

We can turn away from those unclean things that offend God.-----

Not by our own strength or effort, but by the Spirit we can live God's way.-----

We can look at **v19**, and by God's grace do the opposite.**(SLIDE)**

We can have godly thoughts, hearts that want to love with our words and actions.

Not hurt and kill, but bless and build up.

Not selfishly seek my own sexual pleasure, but show self-control, n' seek other's good.-----

Not steal, but work and be content; give and be generous.-----

Not lie but speak truth, in love.

Not tear down with our words but encourage.-----

And not disobey n' disrespect your parents but honour them.

All for glory of God who has saved us.-----

And when you feel you cannot, that it is just too hard; take the focus off yourself.

Look to Jesus. Rely on him.

Cry to him, pray to him, ask for the Spirit's help, again and again.-----

Admit your need, that you cannot obey God, but by the grace of God, and the Spirit of God you can.-----

A number of you came to the Marriage & Parenting Courses last year by Paul Tripp.

And he's a co-author of a helpful book called, '**How people change**'.

And there a very helpful concept, is in this **diagram**.**(SLIDE)**

It describes daily life for us.

The heat is the person's life, with difficulties, blessings, temptations.

And people respond to that in one of two ways.

The thorns are the person's ungodly response to a situation.

It includes their behaviour, with the heart driving their behaviour.

And from the thorny bush bad fruit comes as a consequence.-----

But we have the cross – and through Christ, God brings comfort and cleansing and the power to change.

And the fruit tree has a good root, where the person is seeking God in repentance and faith.

And the good fruit which comes from the fruit tree is the person's new godly response to the situation, which comes from God's power at work in the heart.-----

The fruit tree is the person who has a heart renewed by grace, and a harvest of consequences n' godly fruit follows.-----

When the heat and trials come in your life, it will show itself.-----

In thorns, or good fruit.

In your life lately, which are you displaying?-----

Instead of reacting to a situation or temptation, we can, in Christ, respond with love.

For **example**, **Jerry's** teenage son is verbally confrontational – that's the HEAT.

This disrespect drives Jerry crazy -Thorns in his heart.

Jerry gets into his son's face and yells at him, telling him he's not going to take this disrespect any longer – Thorns in his behaviour.

This results in a distant and angry relationship with his son – consequences.-----

But Christ is the spiritual food and drink and strength that Jerry, and we all, need.

Christ sustains me so that I can live with him and for him, even when I struggle.

His grace not only forgives and cleanses, but it enables and delivers.-----

He gives us wisdom, character and strength.

With the new heart we embrace Christ and resolve to resist temptation, with repentance and faith.-----

And for Jerry or for us, the Heat may not go away, in fact it may get hotter.-----

Yet we are never alone, God is with us to provide the grace we need to face what he calls us to face.-----

Jerry wants his son to 'respect' him, and this desire had become more important to him than God.

He confesses that he treasures and cherishes respect more than the Redeemer.---

His son is not perfect but he is not the 'cause' of Jerry's anger, his own sinful heart is.

A child honouring their parent is a good thing, but it had become a 'god thing'.

Jerry needs to turn away from the God-replacement, and not believe the lie that respect is more valuable than God.-----

Jerry turns to the hope and comfort and cleansing found in the Gospel.

He trusts again in Jesus.

He tells himself – **Gal 2.20 (SLIDE)**.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live.

But Christ lives in me.

The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the SoG

who loved me and gave himself for me.-----

Jerry preaches the truth to himself, that I am new man in Christ.

And he goes to his son, sits beside him.

He apologises and seeks forgiveness for his sinful responses.

He speaks of how he longs for them to have a good relationship, but also that God would be honoured in the way he responds, and they both respond.

He prays for patience, self-control, love and respect to flow from him, and from his son from now on.-----

Each day for the weeks that follow, Jerry prays for God to bear the fruit of the Spirit in him.

He relies on God's presence and power and provision, in a new way.-----

He remembers that Jesus has cleansed him of all his sins, and he's been saved to live his way.-----

I hope you can apply Jerry's story to your own life; and your sin.-----

We've all offended God.

It's not being unwashed but sin which makes us dirty in God's sight.-----

But through faith in Christ we've been cleansed, and given new hearts.

And we can now live God's way, following Jesus.-----

If you've been cleansed and forgiven, then obey God from your heart.-----

Christian, 'cause you have a new heart, go and bear good fruit.

Not in your own strength, but by relying on Christ.-----

Let's pray.