

Good morning, we're continuing our series in Matthew and today we come to Chapter 15 to the passage talking about "being clean and unclean".

Now this is a pretty difficult passage, because although "what it says" is fairly straight-forward, "how it applies" is not all that obvious.

On the surface it is about 'the dietary laws of the Jews', it's about 'ritual purity', And therefore, on the surface, it all seems pretty arcane and irrelevant.

However, if we dig a little deeper, we discover how profoundly relevant it is to **our** life and to our culture, indeed to **any** life and any culture.

This text teaches us 3 things:
that we all have a sense of inner uncleanness that is deep rooted and all pervasive;
that, however hard we try, we cannot cleanse ourselves from this; and
that it is **only** Jesus (only God) who can do for us what we need.

So that's what I want to talk about, this morning:
our sense of uncleanness;
our inability to cleanse ourselves,
Jesus as the only one who can.

So if you would turn with me to page 982, Matthew chapter 15.
let's jump straight in,

1) We all have a sense of uncleanness.

v10, says that

*Jesus called the crowd to him and said,
"Listen and understand.*

*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.'"*

and
*v19, For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, lies and slander.
These are what make a man 'unclean' – but eating with unwashed hands doesn't.*

What Jesus is referring to is The Mosaic Clean Laws

They said that

if a person they touched anything that was dead,
had an infectious skin disease, came into contact with mildew,
had any bodily discharges (*like the runs*), or
ate food which came from any non-Kosher animals, like pigs

Then they were to consider themselves to be "ritually impure and unclean".

which meant that "they could not go into the temple and worship God with the community"

They had to get themselves clean before they could do that.

Now, what is this all about?

Why did God give the Jewish people these laws?

Well, it's not as weird as it may seem

We often use physical rituals to symbolise spiritual truths

People **fast** as a way of reminding themselves that they need spiritual food.

People '**kneel in prayer**' as a way of reminding themselves to be humble before the Creator of the Universe

So, washing your hands, is a way of reminding ourselves that we need to be pure and clean before we come before the Beautifully Holy and Pure God.

When we go to meet someone really important, do we not wash and floss and comb?

Can you remember how long you spent in the bathroom before your first date? (I needed a calendar not a watch to measure it for my girls!)

Why?

Because it would mortify you

if you kissed with Broccoli stuck between your teeth (not that you would ever kiss on a first date of course!)

You would die of embarrassment if you had tomato ketchup down your front!

It's important to be clean, when you meet someone important!

Well Moses is saying to the people

What is physically important for precious human relationships

is even more important for when you come before God.

Spiritually, morally, **if you have no relationship with God** – and **you are not clean** then – then you won't even be allowed to enter, let alone live, in his presence!

Let me just emphasise that: Spiritually, morally, **if you have no relationship with God** – and **you are not clean** then – then you won't even be allowed to enter, let alone live, in his presence!

So we need a way of ensuring that we are spiritually/morally clean.

In this both Jesus and the Pharisees agree!

from what they knew of God, from what they knew of humanity - it was obvious.

They need to get clean...

But it isn't so obvious today!

In our 21st Century, post-Christian, secular culture

We often don't recognise the need to be pure **before we can even have a hope** of coming before God.

Our assumptions are

that we're pretty much good enough for God; and that if we aren't

that God will overlook our errors, mistakes and deliberately bad choices.

Both assumptions are wrong.

We aren't good enough for God

We aren't pure

Our hearts are basically broken and selfish.

We only need read the papers to see that there is something wrong with our society.

Our own Prime Minister calls us (rightly) a Broken Society.

And what is wrong with Society?

*G.K. Chesterton famously wrote into The Times with this 4 word answer
"Dear sirs, I am".*

What is written large in Tabloid Headlines is written small in all our hearts.

*Alexander Solzhenitsyn, said, "The line separating good and evil passes,
not through states, nor through class systems, nor between political parties... but right through every human
heart and through all human hearts"*

There is something wrong with society

There is something wrong with people

There is something wrong with me

*For Jesus says v19 - "out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, lies
and slander.*

You know and I know that if our thought life, if our true heart motives, if our inner fantasies were published
in colour photographs in our newspapers we would all die of embarrassment.

*C.S. Lewis put it this way "For the first time I examined myself with a serious practical purpose. And there I
found what appalled me: a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears and a harem of fondled
hatreds. My name was Legion."*

we may pretend there is nothing wrong with us,
we may pretend that we're good enough to enter into the presence of a beautifully holy God
we may wish to think that God will just ignore our selfishness and lack of love
but we know in our heart or hearts that simply isn't true.

Jesus knew it, the Pharisees knew it, and it is the starting point of any real relationship with God
we are, in our soul, spiritually, morally, broken.
That's the first thing this passage says.

The second thing is: and

2) We are all trying to cleanse (to justify) OURSELVES.

And Jesus says, "it'll never work"

We are all trying to justify ourselves and Jesus says, "it'll never work"

What really got up the Pharisee's nose, was not that Jesus said they were unclean, they agreed with that!
What really offended them was Jesus' statement that Moses Purity Rituals,
and their own embellished "Super Pumped Up, 'Let's take it to the Extreme' Purity Rituals on Steroids"
were a complete waste of time.

The rituals were symbolic, they didn't actually DO anything

And that really upset them!

v12 *The disciples came to Jesus and said,*

"Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when you said that?"

No Kidding!

*These were fine upstanding, educated, respectable men
they had developed the most sophisticated set of religious practices
They had argued about them in smoke-filled rooms,
they had refined them in academic papers,
they had invested their life and their traditions in them
They were Black Belt, Third Dan Religious Professionals.
And Jesus says “you’re wasting your time”.*

*What you’re saying doesn’t work, it’s wrong, it makes no difference!
Of course they were offended!*

The reality is this, that nothing we can do from the outside will change what’s going on in the inside!
“Outside in” doesn’t work!

*v17 "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?
Don't you see that what you eat goes into the mouth, into the stomach and then down the toilet!
It never touches your heart.*

And the heart is the heart of the problem!

Now that may seem obvious

But I want to suggest that what the Pharisees were trying – everybody tries. This is what the passage means for our culture, that :

no matter how hard we try

no matter what degree of sophistication we achieve

no matter how clean and sparkly and successful we may look to others on the outside

we are still JUST as spiritually unclean on the inside.

We try to Justify ourselves and it doesn’t work

Let me give you 3 examples (and I hope to include everyone, including myself in this)

The first example, is that:

2.1) All Religions use this inadequate “Outside in” method.

All World religions do this and many people who go to Church (futilely, ineffectually) do this.

Here is the way religion works.

Religion says

if I do these things:

if I stay away from morally dirty movies,

if I keep myself pure from corrupt activities,

if I stay away from bad people and

if I pray and read my bible and go to church and try to be good –

Then God will see that I am worthy (that I am not all that bad) and

he will bless me and accept me.

If I DO THIS on the outside then God will see:

be pleased with me, give me the benefit of the doubt and bless me.

But it doesn’t work, and here’s why!

How do you know that you will ever be good enough?

What assurance will you have that you have passed some imaginary pass-mark that you believe God has set which is less than perfect?

How do you know that you are really good enough to enter into the presence of a holy God and begin a relationship with him.

Exactly how good is good enough

Exactly how many compromises will God have to make to let you into a perfect heaven

And if heaven is perfect don't you think you may just be out of place?

It seems to me the more I know of the beauty of God, the more I understand what selflessness actually is, the more I know I can never be good enough for God!

The more I know the further away I realise I am –

The harder I try – the further away it get!

Religion does this!

it doesn't change the heart.

It doesn't get rid of my attempts at self-justification!

It doesn't make me less self-absorbed –

if anything it makes me **more** self-absorbed, more self-justifying and more judging!

Religion is an “outside-in” model and it doesn't work.

But then

2.2 So is Politics too.

And it doesn't work either!

The problem with our Politicians is that they are trying to change society by trying to change its behaviour.

And that won't work!

Having abandoned “Godly Spirituality” (the very thing that formed the best of our nation)

They say “we'll create economic security, that'll change society”.

Well our standard of living has never been better

Have people's hearts changed?

Outside in doesn't work

They say we'll “create social progress”, that'll change society

Lord David Cecil after discovering the horrors of the holocaust in WW2 said our philosophy of progress had led us to believe that the savage and the primitive was behind us - but now we discover it is within us.

Social progress: “Outside in” doesn't work

They say better education will change society

Dorothy Sayers (writer, poet, playwright, essayist) said

we were given to believe that human beings were basically evolving higher with each generation

but the appalling outbursts of bestial ferocity in the totalitarian states and the stupid endless greed of our capitalist society is inexplicable –

not just shocking – not just alarming –

but actually the utter negation of everything we were led to believe.

Education, “Outside in” doesn't work

Politics will not reform our country
it will not produce model citizens
it will not make us clean
because it will not change the heart.

2.3. And thirdly, neither will outward Success.

The Holy Grail of our society is for everyone to be a success in what they do. Our women's magazines, leisure magazines, sports magazines, business magazines portray images of beauty, success, acclaim and popularity

They show people who have dedicated their body, their time, their energy, their life to attaining the best possible image, status, education and wealth.

They have looked for the applause of the world and many have achieved it
But it doesn't make them clean, it doesn't make them happy,
it doesn't make them any more acceptable to God
because it doesn't change their heart,

We try to justify ourselves and it doesn't work.

And ministers are not immune from this!

Spurgeon – said “don't preach the gospel to validate your soul” –

So let me tell you,

that when the congregation here at Southover is full, when things are going well, when people are coming to faith, when everyone thinks what we're doing is wonderful

I am disproportionately pleased.

Conversely, when the congregation are small, when things are tough, when no-one is coming to faith, when everyone thinks what we're doing is rubbish

I am disproportionately devastated

The reason is – that my instincts are to validate myself on “outward success”.

I am tempted to think

that if things are going well, then perhaps God is more pleased with me, perhaps he likes me more, perhaps my life is worth something

and if things are going badly, then perhaps God is displeased with me, perhaps he likes me less, perhaps I am just a complete waste of space.

We all try to justify ourselves, hope that outward things makes us more acceptable to God.

But “outside in doesn't work”.

Well what's the solution?

Well – you already know

3. Only Jesus can do it.

You know when Jesus says

v13, that

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

He was drawing attention to the fact that God is his Heavenly Father

If, spiritually, morally, **WE have no relationship with God** – because we're not clean –

If we can't even enter, let alone live, in God's presence!
Then Jesus was saying
"Look, I have a relationship with God – he is my Father.

To the Jewish mind this is incredible.

God is remote, awesome, unapproachable, beyond understanding, completely other to any human being
Yet here, for the first time in recorded history Jesus is saying God is near, God is loving, God is intimate,
God can be known because "he and I are of the very same essence". We are one: Father and Son.

And what's more "If God roots you into him" you can be too.

Do you see – he is saying – you can't do anything – you can't plant yourself into God's love
But God can.

God can take you and plant you into him.

Do you believe that?

So that when he says v14

Leave them; they are blind guides and if you follow them you will fall with them into a trap

He is saying, they are blind, but I can see
they will lead you into a trap
but I know the way through!

if we follow the model of everyone who teaches us that "outside in" is the way to encounter God
if we follow Religion, Politics or the Pop Culture of Success to try to justify who we are we will fall into a trap

What needs to be done is not an 'outside in' job

Its an "inside out" job

v19 – the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

Deal with the heart and what comes out it will change too.

So how does that happen?

Let me show you:

In Auschwitz, on the 31st August 1941, a prisoner escaped.

As a reprisal, it was declared that ten of prisoners would die in the starvation bunker.

*As the men waited in fear, the Nazi commandant walked between the ranks to select,
quite arbitrarily, the chosen ten.*

*When he pointed to one man, Francis Gajowniczek, Francis cried out,
"Oh my dear wife and children".*

*Then, just as he did that, an unimpressive figure of a man with sunken eyes and round glasses
stepped out of line and took off his cap.*

Holding it to his chest he said: "I am a Catholic priest;

I want to die instead of this man.

I am old, he has a wife and children....I have no one"

His name was Father Maximilian Kolbe.

*His offer was accepted and that night nine men and one priest went to the starvation bunker.
While they had strength, and lying naked on the floor, the men prayed and sang hymns
After 2 weeks, 3 of the men and Father Maximilian were still alive.
And so on the 14th August at 12:50pm, after 2 weeks in the starvation bunker, and still conscious, the Polish
priest and the men were given a lethal injection of phenol.
Maximilian Kolbe died aged 47.*

*A few years ago on the 10th of October in St. Peter's Square,
His death was commemorated.
150,000 people gathered.
And present there were Francis Gajowniczek, his wife, his children and his children's children.*

*He writes that knelt down that day in quiet thankfulness for the sacrifice of this one man for him and his
family.*

*He said, "looking back on that fateful day, when our places were exchanged, my heart changed".
I was a Jew, he was a Jewish Christian – I saw in Father Gajowniczek's sacrifice and love, someone who
pointed to a greater sacrifice and a greater love.*

He saw a symbolism in one act that pointed to a greater act with a deeper meaning.

He had seen the Sacrifice of the Son of God
Someone who was absolutely clean, and pure and beautiful,
whose heart held no malice or insecurity or petty selfishness

Someone who had a perfect relationship with his heavenly Father
lay it all down and give it all up so that we might be forgiven.

That is the way our hearts changes.

The ritual washings of the Old Testament required
hands to be held out are a sign of us recognising our need
it required hands to be held out are a sign of receiving free, cleansing water outpoured

It is symbolism,
it doesn't do anything except when the symbolism means something!

It is Symbolic of you me
giving up trying to justify ourselves
giving up trying to cleanse ourselves
giving up trying to earn God's love
and coming with empty hands held out.

Hands held out
as a sign of us recognising our need
as a sign of us receiving, freely,
a sacrifice poured out on the cross
a love proved on a cross
an innocent life poured out on the cross and flowing freely all over us

You don't need to earn God's approval – he already loves you!
You don't need to impress him – he already **likes** you!
You don't need to prove yourself to him - he already believes in you!

You don't need to be good enough for God because Jesus has already been perfect for us
You don't need to ever to stay away from him because of your failings because his forgiveness is for (past present and future).

Therefore
to the girl who sleeps around looking for acceptance
to the teenager wanting to find love to be loved
to the business man competing to win to prove himself
to the woman who is overwhelmed by her sense of failure
to the man whose faith is lukewarm
Give up the "Outside in".

Let your heart be changed!
Look at the cross, hold the bread, receive the wine
symbols of God's healing forgiveness for you.

Useless in themselves
Until you let the symbolism sink deep into your heart
and this will change you and cleanse you
from inside out.