

Mark - Soiled Hearts Are Not Cleansed by Washing Hands

by J. Glyn Owen

J. Glyn Owen's sermon highlights the danger of prioritizing human traditions over the true commands of God, emphasizing the need for genuine worship from the heart.

Duration: 49:11

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 15:11, Matthew 15:18-20, Mark 7:1-23

Topics: "Sin"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Mark 7:1-23 and the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes. The chapter begins with the Pharisees questioning Jesus about why his disciples do not follow the tradition of the elders regarding handwashing before eating. Jesus responds by criticizing the Pharisees for prioritizing human traditions over God's commandments. He emphasizes that true defilement comes from within a person's heart, not from external actions. The sermon highlights the importance of prioritizing a genuine relationship with God over religious rituals and traditions.

Transcript

Now, for the benefit of those who may not have been attending Knox until recently, may I say that we are currently going through Mark's Gospel in our morning worship, and we have come to this particular point. There are occasions when we leave the prescribed diet, but we come back to it again. And so we come this morning to chapter 7 in Mark's Gospel, verses 1 to 23, which really forms a unit.

And though, in a sense, there are very many different facets of truth in this passage that well deserve attention, we are going to take the passage as a whole this morning, and are trying to, and are going to try to see what is the thrust of the whole passage, as far as it relates to us. I'm not going to read it again. I take it that having it before you, you'll be able to follow with me as we come and look at the teaching of our Lord.

Now, the first thing that is obvious to a reader of the Gospel is this. Something, something big has happened since the end of the previous chapter. You will notice a change of mood here.

The previous chapter concludes with a record of an incredible welcome given to our Lord in the region round about Gennesaret. He and his disciples are welcomed, and folk are clamoring, worried only to touch

the hem of his garment in order to be healed. It's a scene of tremendous triumph, and it's the scene of the outgoings of God's grace through his Son.

And then you come to the beginning of chapter seven, and you find that the mood is completely changed. Here, the chapter depicts an entirely different mood. That of hostility has now overtaken the hope that was so evident in the hearts of the populace in the end of chapter six.

Hostility now takes over, and criticism dulls the atmosphere. Now, there are three things that I would like us to focus upon this morning, and I'll tell you what they are so that you'll know the tack we are going to take. We're going to look at the question with which the chapter begins.

Then we're going to look at the charge which the critics elicited from the Lord Jesus Christ. And lastly, we're going to look at the correction with which the confrontation ended. Everything begins with a question, and you have it there in verse five, if you'd like to take a glimpse at it.

So the Pharisees and the teachers of the law asked Jesus, why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating their food with unclean hands? We need to say a word about the questioners, and we need to say a word about the question. Distant Jerusalem has heard of the success of Jesus and his disciples in this far-off region, and they send a deputation to see what's really going on, and probably with a view of countering the success of Jesus. And it was quite an imposing delegation, comprising of Pharisees and scribes, or as the New International Version refers to them, teachers of the law.

Now, the Pharisees were the descendants of people that were called purists. I suppose we could well speak of them as the Puritans of the Maccabean Age, in between the two testaments, the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. They came into existence by way of a reaction against Greek principles and Greek paganism, pagan ideas, being brought in and inculcated and taught to the Jewish people.

They believed that the Old Testament religion, comprising the law that God gave through Moses and the other writings that we have in the Old Testament, especially the prophets, the Pharisees, or the purists as they were first called, they believed that we should not add anything to that. And so these Puritans of that age became known as such, because they stood foursquare against all the incursions and the intrusions that were now invading their land and their thought and their religion. It's strange, isn't it? You may start off very well.

And in the process of time, you may become something quite different from what you were at the beginning. And right here, in this context, believe it or not, those Puritans of the Maccabean period are as much sticklers for a tradition which is contrary to Moses and the prophets, as in their origins they were for the clear, unambiguous teachings of the scripture. The Pharisees.

The scribes are precisely what the New International Version says they were--teachers of the law. Their origin, as a group, goes back to the fourth and fifth centuries B.C., and they became the recognized exponents of all of Old Testament religion, its law and its prophets, especially the law. And they would tell the people, they would teach the people the implications of the law to life.

Many people don't know how to interpret scripture. And these people came into existence because they said to folk, now, the first commandment means this, this, this, this, this, and this. And they had a whole

multitude of applications.

And so the same happened for all the commandments and, indeed, all the teachings of the Old Testament. They were the teachers of the law, and they had authority, thus, to teach. This combined effort, then, faced our Lord with quite a challenge, speaking on the plane of the human.

The scribes and the Pharisees had come together in order to face him and challenge him, and, if possible, to frustrate him in the ministry in which he was engaged. Now, having arrived, having come physically near and overheard what was going on, and seen, likewise, how Jesus and his disciples lived, they begin the whole process of confrontation with this word. Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating their food with unclean hands? We need to say a word here about the Jewish practice of washing hands.

This is something that is not as obvious as it appears to be. Before meals and in between courses, the Jews regularly washed their hands, even in between courses. Not only when they came from the marketplace, as the King James Version puts it, but they regularly did it, irrespective of whether their hands were already clean or not.

This was not a hygienic business. It had nothing to do with hygiene, nothing to do with physical cleanliness. They might have washed their hands just a couple of moments ago, but when they came to the table and in between courses, they would still wash them.

This was a ceremonial thing. They believed that if their hands had touched anything that was unclean, and matter to them could be unclean, if their hands have touched anything unclean, then if they ate with those unclean hands, as they thought, they would become spiritually contaminated. So they had ceremonial water.

Something very similar to what some denominations speak of as holy water. Ceremonial water. And they washed their hands in a particular way.

You had to do it in the right way and you had to do it with the right water. For example, it began with pouring water on their hands, cupped like this, and the water had to run down at least to the wrist. And then when they poured ceremonial water into the cup of the hand in that way, then they pour it on the back of the hand and it has to start on the wrist and it has to flow down over the backs of the fingers and the water has to drip off so that every drop of water takes every spot of defilement and it goes off.

It's symbolical. And the Pharisees and the scribes were at this particular point in history undergoing this kind of thing many, many times during the day. Now the complaint against the disciples then is this.

Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their hands with unwashed hands? The complaint is not that the disciples were eating with dirty hands, hygienically speaking. The complaint is that they were eating without indulging in this ceremonial involvement. Behind the complaint, of course, was the belief that nature and spirit were so related that impurity could pass from the one to the other.

Hence their many hand washings and their sheer dismay at the spectacle before them. Now, let's pause for a moment. You say that's all very, very, very far away from us.

It's got very little to do with us. We don't wash our hands in that way at all. We don't have any such ceremonial.

Well, all right. There is a principle here at the back of this which is as relevant this morning as ever it was. And I don't want us to miss it.

I can't deal with it at length, but I want to bring it out. It's this. Part of the tragedy of pharisaic religion and scribal teaching at this time resides in the fact, you see, that they have become more absorbed with this tradition of the elders that you must wash your hands in this particular way than with anything that the clear word of God taught.

This is something that can creep into our lives almost unobtrusively. An emphasis upon the purely traditional, which makes us forget that which is scriptural and has divine warrant. You know, there are many things that we do as Christian people, and they're purely traditional.

The unfortunate thing is this, that we can come to think of them as if they were taught in the word of God. Now, I know it would almost be a revolution in some churches. I don't know whether it would be in Knox at all, but it would be almost a revolution if we were to suggest that we should start the morning service half an hour earlier or half an hour later.

See, it's the tradition. The fathers did it, and because the fathers did it, well, now we ought to do it. Now, there may be a good reason for doing it or not doing it.

I'm not agitating for either or other. But what I'm saying is this, that kind of thing is not taught in Scripture. And if it's not taught in Scripture, then no tradition is sacrosanct.

But come to something else. You may have a mode of discipline in your life. You go to bed at a certain hour, and you get up at a certain hour.

Or you may believe in holy days, as some parts of the church speak of them, holy festivals of the church. Other people do not. You do.

If they're taught in Scripture, they are mandatory. We should obey them. We should listen to them.

We should obey them. If they're not taught in Scripture, they may be either right or wrong. But we should never press them upon other people.

I find it very disconcerting in some areas in North America that there is a certain program of eschatology, teaching about the second coming. And if you don't believe it from A to Z, you're under suspicion, as if it were taught in the word of God without any question whatsoever. Now, that's traditional.

It's the view of men. It's the teaching of man or men. There may be good men, there may be wise men, but my dear friends, it is only what God's word clearly teaches that is mandatory upon the Christian.

We could, as you see, dwell upon this for some considerable time. I don't want to pursue it, but let me throw it out. It's really important how much of your life and mine is governed entirely by tradition.

Now, we come to the second thing here, the charge which the critics unexpectedly elicited. They thought they were blameless. It was characteristic of the scribes and the Pharisees.

They really couldn't envisage anybody making a case against themselves. Let's beware of that spirit. Jesus exposed the folly of so much in Jewish religion, and here he accused the critics of his disciples of having surrendered the clear commands of God whilst clinging tenaciously to what was of purely human origins.

And you notice our Lord doesn't pull his punches. I really would like to revise that hymn which speaks of him as the gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Oh, he was meek, but he was not always mild.

And there were times when he spoke most vehemently with evident anger and rage, a holy anger. Doesn't say that he was thus here, but he certainly didn't mince his words. Listen to what he says.

First of all, he refers to a prophesied condemnation of these people. He replied, and I'm quoting now, he replied, Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites. As it is written, these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

They worship me in vain. Their teachings are but the rules taught by men. You, he says directly to them, not quoting Isaiah now, you have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.

You've let go of the thing that is important and you're holding on to the thing that is only of secondary importance at best. Now, this is a prophesied condemnation. Mark those words in verse six.

He replied, Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you. Some people have interpreted those words as saying that Isaiah had them in mind when he prophesied or God had them in mind when he put these words into the lips of Isaiah, the prophet. Now that may be going too far.

I don't know. At any rate, Jesus says that the words apply to them. Jesus' main charge is this, you see, zealous for God, though they appear to be, these critics were essentially different from what they appear.

The word for hypocrite simply means an actor. And an actor is a person who is taking the part of someone whilst he's not that someone. I say, you may be on the stage involved in a dramatic performance on the theater, in the theater, and you're taking someone's part and you try to fit yourself into that part.

And you think, how would he or she behave in such and such circumstances? And you try to speak and do things just as he or she would. You become an actor, you put on an act. It may not be true of you at all.

But you put on the act as best you can. Now, our Lord's criticism against these folk is this. Look, men, he says, you're putting on an act.

You are, you are appearing as the champions of God and of godly religion and of biblical religion. Look, men, he says, you're nothing of the kind. They were not champions of God's will or of God's word, but of a tradition which they had so elevated that it had come to assume an importance only properly given to the word of God.

Now, Jesus, Jesus really chose the right passage. Oh, how our Lord must have known the Old Testament. I want to say three things about that quote without, without adding much, just simply noticing some of the things he said here.

First of all, he said that they were giving a heartless lip service only to God. This people, all these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. As to the profession of the scribes and the

Pharisees, what they professed with their lips, it's evident.

They believe that God's honor is at stake when they see these disciples of Jesus apparently aided and abetted by their master coming to food, coming to the table, and they're not going through the ceremonial washing. God's honor is at stake. They said, and that's why they intervened.

They didn't just like to make a fuss. They believe that God's honor was at stake. That was the reason they did it.

Oh, their lips had much to say about the honor of God, but says, Jesus, look, men, you're talking a lot as if you were good men, but your hearts are far from the God you profess to honor. Their hearts were not set on God's glory at all. Theirs was all a heartless lip service.

Could it be that some of us this morning in this very lovely church on this lovely morning, can it be that some of us are really involved as far as our religious exercises are concerned, really and merely involved in lip service? Is your heart in it? In the hymns we've sung, in the prayers we've offered, is your heart in church this morning, my friend? A heartless lip service, a pointless worship. They worship me in vain, says Jesus. Quoting from Isaiah, the worship they ostensibly gave to God, albeit punctuated with regular washing of hands, was literally empty.

That's what the word vain means, empty. It's like a bubble. Now, of course, they were washing their hands, they were going through all the rigmarole and all the ceremonial, they were doing everything just right according to the tradition of the elders.

But Jesus says it's empty as far as God is concerned. Oh, what a nutter tragedy. But some of us should be ostensibly saying the right things, mouthing the right words, singing the right hymns, going to the right places.

And externally, everything is impeccably perfect. But have the verdict of the Son of God upon us. Look, it's all like a bubble.

It's empty. Because the heart's not in it. We're not doing what God asks of us.

We're doing what we have traditionally done, and only because it's a part of our tradition. Jesus goes on, also basing this likewise on the prophecy of Isaiah, speaks of it all almost as a graceless arrogance. Their teachings, he says, are but the rules of men.

And that's not what religion in the Old Testament or the New is. Their whole zest and zeal was actually taken up with cluttering their religious practices with what men deemed necessary. So Jesus added his own condemnation to that of the prophets.

And he said, you, he says, have let go of the commands of God, and you're holding on to the traditions of men. Now, I can imagine somebody saying, that's pretty strong stuff. Was that a legitimate? Assessment of Pharisee conscribal religion.

They were a very religious people. And they were a sincere people. Were they not? I wonder whether someone here this morning feels that our Lord Jesus Christ was exaggerating a little when he said all that, and called them hypocrites, and then culled this word from Isaiah and said, it all applies to you.

Jesus turns to a particular confirmation of what he's been saying. It's a dangerous thing to argue with the Son of God. He's always got proof of what he says.

I find that. And he'll put his finger on the spot and he'll make you very uncomfortable the moment you begin to argue with him. And he did it here.

Jesus does not exaggerate, my friends. His judgments are accurate and true. Unless, however, there be any semblance of doubt about the serious implications of elevating human traditions above God's clear command.

Jesus challenged this august deputation with its ultimate effect upon their morals and their human relationships. And that's what we have in verses 9 to 13. Jesus now gets hold of one thing, one thing they teach.

And he shows them from this one incident, this one illustration of the kind of thing that can happen in their lives when they elevate the traditions of men over above the teachings of God. But what's that? It's this. Moses in the Old Testament had a lot to say about honoring father and mother, parents.

Now, I've no time this morning to go into all that. I'm taking it as axiomatic that we all know that. It's true.

You just search the scriptures and you will see it. Moses had an awful lot to say about children honoring their parents. And really, it is something that young people today who bear the name of Jesus ought seriously to study.

Moses taught that. And the Pharisees at best, when the movement, the Pharisaic movement began, would have stressed that. But in process of time, you see, they've changed and they're now elevating the traditions of men.

And believe it or not, they have a tradition ongoing at this particular point in history, whereby they will excuse you from doing anything to help your father and mother. And he gives an illustration. It relates to this thing that the word karban.

Let me put it to you. Let me clothe it with a little flesh. Assuming now that there is a father and mother on in years, and the children are living with them or a child is living with them.

According to the Old Testament, the child should be sensitive to the needs of the parent and do anything he can or she can in order to help alleviate the needs of the parents in old age. And they have the wherewithal to do it. This is necessary to the argument.

They have the wherewithal, but they don't want to do it. Their heart doesn't want to do it. They don't want to obey the Old Testament injunctions and get too involved with the old folk.

You see. But how can they get out of it? Well, you know, the Pharisees have taught here so much money that I can spend to help my people, my parents, but I don't want to do it. But I can say this.

I can say concerning this money that I could use to help my parents. It is karban. What does that mean? It means this.

It's dedicated to God. And I dedicate it to God and I say, well, now, because it's dedicated to God, I haven't got it to use on my father and mother. And this had become a tradition.

And so there were fellows and girls and there were men and women married, some of them opulent, who did nothing whatsoever to help their aged parents simply because of this human tradition. It is karban, they said. We've dedicated the money to God, so we can't use it.

It's God's. We can't use it to help our father and mother. God have mercy on us.

You see, the point that Jesus wants to get across is this. When once you elevate human tradition, the traditions of men, men who were good in their origins, movements that were good in their origins, when once you elevate the best that man teaches over above the word of God, sooner or later you will degenerate and do only the things that are traditional. Now, that brings me to the last thing, the correction with which the confrontation ended.

I'm always thrilled at this. Jesus always comes back to the starting point and he never lets you get off. You might have thought he's got away from the subject, but he hasn't.

The subject that introduced the whole issue of this confrontation was this. Why do your disciples not wash their hands when they come to meals? And you might have thought that Jesus was wriggling out of it. He never does.

And he didn't hear. He now comes back to it. And beginning with verse 14, right on to the very end, this is what we have.

Now, I want to summarize it this morning. And this brings us to something which is exceedingly illuminating, but at the same time challenging. Jesus corrects the false views of the Pharisees and of the scribes and of the tradition that they champion.

Now, if you notice in everything that is said here, I think we can summarize it in this way. Jesus says certain things that are negative and he says certain things that are positive. First of all, to the scribes and the Pharisees and to the crowd that had gathered, he makes a negative statement.

Then to his own disciples, when they go apart and ask him a question, he repeats that negative statement and adds to it, elucidates it further. Then he also says something positive in both contexts. I want to take the negatives and the positives from both conversations together now.

Let me read verses 14 to the beginning of verse 15. Again, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, listen to me, everyone. And understand this, nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him.

Then verses 17 to 19, after he had left the crowd and entered the house, the disciples asked him about this parable. Are you so dull? He asked. Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from outside can make him unclean? For it doesn't go into his heart, but into his stomach and then out of his body.

In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean. Now, what Jesus is saying here negatively is this. Spiritual defilement, spiritual defilement, spiritual defilement does not enter into a man from outside of him in the same way as a person may become physically contaminated by eating with germ-ridden hands.

You and I know that we can convey germs to the physical body, to the stomach by touching something that's unclean. Jesus says that does not happen spiritually. I may touch something that is materially unclean, but I cannot from that inject into my spiritual being moral uncleanness.

A person's stomach, however important, is not the determining factor in the matter of defilement before God. Now, that was revolutionary to the deputation from Jerusalem as well as to the crowd. A crowd had been gathered.

The crowd had been taught that this was so. Touch anything unclean, physically unclean, and you become morally defiled. They had been taught in that way.

They had been encouraged to believe that their inner spirit could be contaminated by physical contact with material things, and this traditional belief had been elevated far above God's clear word. The statement of Jesus, if true, put the stress on hand-washing on the level of the ridiculous. Washing your hands physically by any kind of water cannot make your heart and your spirit clean.

But now look at Jesus' positive statement, and this is what makes it complete. The second part of verse 15, in the first place, this was to the crowd. Rather, he says, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean.

So they've completely misunderstood things. It is what comes out of a man, not what goes into a man, what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. Come on to verses 20 to 23.

He went on, what comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. And when Jesus repeats things like this, you can be sure it's important. For from within, out of men's hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.

All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean. Now this teaching is revolutionary indeed, whereas the scribes and the Pharisees thought that a man was basically clean, contrary to the teaching of the Old Testament. They thought that the man's heart and spirit was basically clean, and all the uncleanness he imbibed was from his atmosphere, from his environment, from touching this or that.

No, says Jesus, it's not so at all. Your heart is impure. And insofar as you become further contaminated, it comes from within your own being.

Jesus says that the real defilement does not enter anyone from outside, but actually comes from within. Now you see, the point that Jesus is making is that already stressed in many, many, many Old Testament places. Jeremiah, for example, put it in a nutshell when he said the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

In coming into our worship as it were this morning, we read from Psalm 51, the same truth is found there. In sin did my mother conceive me. I was shapen in iniquity.

If you think of the human heart as a well, heart in the biblical sense, of course, involving mind, emotion, will, and conscience, then it is not defiled by anything which may seep into the surrounding area of the body, into the mouth, or in through the ears, or in through the eyes, something we see. Its defilement emerges from the fact that right in the bottom of the well, there is a deep sediment of mud. And you see, my friends, this is where we have the realism as well as the revelation of the Bible concerning human nature.

It says that in your heart and mind, there is a deep sediment of dirt, moral filth. In so far as outside things affect it at all, they only rake up the mud and upset it so that the whole thing is discolored and it becomes active. Oh yes, we've got to be careful what we look at.

Not because evil comes in through the eye, but because what I see can arouse the deep dirt in my soul. We've got to be careful what we eat and what we drink. Not because there's anything wrong with the food or with the drink in and of itself, but because it can arouse our passions and all the hidden dirt lying dormant within us comes into the open.

John Stott says that modern psychoanalysis has tended only to confirm this teaching of the Old Testament, which Jesus here endorsed, because it has further uncovered the horrid secrets of the human heart. Psychology and experience tell us that the subconscious mind, which is roughly the equivalent to what the Bible means by heart, namely the center of our personality, the source of our thoughts and emotions, is like a deep well with a thick deposit of mud at the bottom. Normally, being at the bottom, the mud is safely out of sight, says Stott, but when the well waters are stirred, especially by the winds of violent emotion, the most evil looking and evil smelling filth breaks the surface.

Rage, spite, greed, lust, jealousy, malice, cruelty, revenge. Now what's the application of all this as we close? The application of this view of the source of human defilement was and is essentially radical and far-reaching as the teaching itself. As far as this context in Mark is concerned, it involved the inevitable conclusion that no amount of hand-washing could really change the human condition.

It was all in vain, this washing of hands constantly. It couldn't touch the real heart of the matter. It couldn't touch the filth of the Pharisees that lay in their hearts.

They were the same however much they washed their hands and however many times. Here we can envisage what Luke had in mind when he said at a later stage that the good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good, a miracle must take place. That evil heart of man has got to be changed.

That residual sickness of the soul has got somehow or other to be dealt with. Now this of course is precisely what the Old Testament had announced and what Jesus said was present in himself. The Old Testament prophets and others may have experienced this as they experienced other aspects of God's grace.

Before the fullness of the times, before Christ had come in all his glory, the coming day casts something of its light before it. But the Old Testament said that there was a day coming when, if I may quote Ezekiel only just now, God says I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. And I will remove from you your hearts of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will save you from all your uncleanness. Brothers and sisters, let's just get that for a moment. God was promising in the Old Testament that there was a day coming when he would give man that which would deal with the filth of the heart and the defilement of it.

He'd take away the uncleanness and he'd give us a heart, according to Ezekiel, that would be bent on pleasing God. Jesus often uses the metaphor of a tree to describe this. Do you remember these words of Jesus? By their fruit you will recognize them.

He's got the thought of a tree in his mind. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes? Well, you know the answer to that. Or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit he shall know them.

The tree of the human heart, the root of the tree in the human heart is evil. Something's got to happen to change the nature of the tree, to change the nature of the human heart. If good fruit is to emerge where once there was nothing but evil.

Make a tree good, says Jesus in Matthew 13, and its fruit will be good. Or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad. I conclude.

Did you know, my friend, that the trouble, the heart of your trouble and mine is the trouble of our heart? That we have defilement, uncleanness, impurity lodged in our spiritual souls, in our inner beings. And the whole principle of biblical religion is not just to titivate the outside, but it is to change the heart. And this is why Jesus, you see, told a very religious man like Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus, he says, you must be born again.

And then he put it more generally, universally, don't marvel, he says, that I say to you, a man must be born again, not you alone, but any man, every man, a man must be born again. It's necessary for every man to be born again. No amount of hand washing will work the miracle.

We need something that goes deeper and something that has more potency. And the washing of the hands. I conclude with this.

I felt the thrill of it as I was preparing this week when I was reminded of the way in which John the Baptist introduced Jesus to his friends and to his followers. You remember it? You remember how John introduced Jesus? In a twofold way. He introduced him first as the sin bearing lamb.

Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And then he introduced him as the spirit baptizing Lord. He is the one who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, says John.

My baptism of water is incapable of actually doing and fulfilling anything. It hasn't a potency. It's just symbolic.

But when he comes, he will baptize you with the spirit, even with fire. His baptism is a baptism of power. It changes men and it changes things.

Here's the message. You see, brother here this morning and sister, you and I have to get the filth taken out of us. You and I have got to get this sediment in the soil of our souls dealt with.

And there is only one way. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins. And sinners plunge beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.

The blood of Jesus Christ, says John the Apostle, cleanseth us from all sin. But ours is not a negative experience. The Christian experience is a positive one.

We want the new heart. We want new desires. How do we get it? We only get it because being rightly related to Jesus Christ, he gives us the spirit.

When he takes away our sin, he sends into our hearts the spirit of sonship, the Holy Spirit, his own spirit, that we may begin to like what he likes, to do what he does, to please the father as he pleased him and to walk in his ways. Here's the answer. May I ask then, my friend, is Jesus Christ your Savior today? Did you come to church this morning just to wash your hands metaphorically? Why did you come? Why did you come? What was in your mind? Was it to earn a little merit with God, to make yourself a little better? Or

was it to let God in his grace reveal the hideous realities of your soul and by his mighty power, purge with his cathartic instruments, purge by the blood of his Son, the inner defilement, and impregnate your spirit with his? That's what he wants to do.

Will you let him? Have you ever asked him? James said some of you have not because you've never asked. I would hate this service to end this morning with anyone not knowing the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus and the changing properties of the spirit of Christ. Just because you've never asked in penitence and with faith.

We are going to conclude then with a short word of prayer. Shall we bow our heads? As we bow our heads for this closing but crucial time, there may be those here this morning who are aware that they need Jesus Christ to take away the defilement and to impart purity. You may want to be included very especially in our closing prayer.

Whilst others are involved in prayer with their heads bowed, would you like to stand for a moment, indicate that you really desire the Lord Jesus to be your Savior in this sense. Just stand quietly where you are and then be seated again. God bless you.

Please be seated. Lord bless you. Is there anyone else? Thank you.

God bless you. Thank you, brother. Now, let us pray.

Lord, you know our need this morning, a need acknowledged by quite a number by physically standing. Dear Lord, come to us in the power of your Holy Spirit, with grace that forgives and cleanses. And with power that transforms.

Bless each one of these, dear ones, who would call upon your name in this way today and bless each of us as we leave examining our hearts and making sure that we have peace with you in Christ our Lord. We ask it in his name. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26538.mp3>

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