

CLEAN ... from the **INSIDE** out

Mark 7:14-23

Pastor Jim Rademaker

Panic. Increased heart rate. Nausea. Shortness of breath. Sweating. What might it be? Mysophobia, also known as verminophobia, bacillophobia, bacteriophobia, germaphobia. The fear of contamination. The fear of germs! We do get dirty, don't we? Think of all that's out there ... dirt, mud, dust, various oils, bugs, germs, bacteria, viruses. It's a pretty dirty world out there! And so, we're constantly doing what? Washing our hands. Applying hand sanitizer. Trying to stay clean.

If there was anybody who kept clean, it was the Scribes and Pharisees. The religious leaders of Jesus' day. They were super dedicated to cleanliness, following all the latest cleaning practices of the day, many passed down from their elders – what you could touch and couldn't touch, what you could eat and couldn't eat, how to wash properly. The Scribes and Pharisees always carried around their buckets of spiritual cleaning supplies to make sure they stayed clean! (James Douthwaite)

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," [defiled] that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) So the Pharisees and 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?"

Who were the health inspectors of the day? Who did they follow? What was the standard of cleanliness? The tradition of the elders. That was the standard to follow. That's what they lived by - whatever the elders said. And the elders, of course, knew how to keep everything neat and clean; knew how to stay clean before God.

And how did Jesus respond? *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 rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."*

What's a hypocrite? Someone who's *one* way on the *outside*, and *another* way on the *inside*. In a sense, we're all hypocrites, aren't we? None of us is what we appear. All it takes is what? Getting cut off in traffic, and we find out what's really on the inside. Or when we don't get what we think we deserve. Or when we feel slighted or insulted by someone.

Our inside isn't as clean as it might *appear* from the outside. We're not as clean as we *think* we are. The thoughts that shouldn't be there. The murder of someone's reputation. The pride that wants others to change for me, instead of me changing or helping them. The jealousy. It's all in there.

How often do we hear about another shooting that took place - in a movie theatre or school or college or shopping center? Sometimes there were signs that something was wrong. But often times the news is filled with interviews about how the person seemed so normal, so good, so clean, and how shocking and surprising that such an awful thing could come out of such a good, clean-cut person, who smiles and is so friendly, who loves animals and helps little old ladies cross the street. (Douthwaite)

How could so much evil come from what seemed so good? Where did it come from? Someone who's *one* way on the outside, and *another* way on the inside. None of us is what we appear.

So the Pharisees and 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?" Because the dirt goes a lot deeper than you can ever imagine! The sickness is a lot worse than you know. The germs have already spread their infection. The outcome is certain. The disease is fatal.

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. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'"

What gets us dirty? What defiles us spiritually? We might think of bad influences, peer pressure, violence, our culture of greed, selfishness, hyper-sexuality. How can we keep from getting spiritually dirty? The negative influences all around us certainly don't help us spiritually. Avoiding certain influences and situations is certainly to our advantage. *Flee the evil desires of youth ...* (2 Tim. 2:22) *Flee from sexual immorality.* (1 Cor 6:18) *Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.* (1 Peter 2:11)

The negative influences all around us certainly don't help us spiritually. Avoiding certain influences and situations is certainly to our advantage. Certainly, they are not helpful to us and tempt us into sin; tempt us away from God. But *why?* Why are these so dangerous to us? Why are we so attracted to them?

After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the 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.")

The OT law had a dietary chapter. Chapter 11, to be exact, in what else but the book of Leviticus, God's big Book of Holiness for his holy people. The forbidden foods list went like this: no mice, bats, or crawling critters. Mammals that both ruminated and had split hooves were OK, but not one or the other. The would exclude the camel, the rabbit, and of course the pig. Seafood was OK, provided it had fins and scales, but shellfish was out. A handful of birds you probably wouldn't want to eat anyway. And insects, though "winged swarming insects" were fine on the menu, as exemplified by John the Baptizer.

So to put it in terms we would appreciate: No bacon, spareribs, bratwurst, lobster, shrimp, crap, and all that other good stuff you like to eat. And the reason for this in the book of Leviticus is simply, "Be holy, for I the Lord, your God, am holy." Did not eating make you holy, while eating made you unholy? Not exactly. Holy means set apart, consecrated, devoted. The Israelites of the OT were unique among the nations and peoples of the earth. They were the only nation that could be called "God's nation."

He invented them. Brought them out of Egypt. Formed them into a people. Gave them a law with lots of rules and even a peculiar diet to follow to separate them from the rest of the nations. They were God's Israel. Holy, consecrated, set apart for one purpose and only one purpose. To bring forth the Christ in the fulness of time.

So before you start planning your life and your diet around Leviticus 11, remind yourself that Christ has come in the flesh. The OT laws have served their purpose. Israel has delivered the promised Messiah to the world. And so, in a very real sense, Israel's fasting has ended, and the feast of salvation has begun, and what was once considered unclean for God's people is now clean for this simple reason: Christ has come in the flesh. (William Cwirla)

(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.") He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' [unrighteous] 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.'"

Why do certain outside influences tempt us away from God? Because of what's *inside*. Evil thoughts. Ever have one? Sexual immorality. Dare I ask? Theft, murder, adultery, coveting (no problems there, right?) ... envy, slander, pride, foolishness. Inside. They're all there, aren't they? The presumption of guilt when it comes to others, but the presumption of innocence when it comes to me. The impatience, the condescending, the get out of my way. It's all in there and more, isn't it? And while it might surprise the person next to you, if they knew all that was percolating in your heart - sometimes it even surprises us what comes out - the shameful sins and impulses deep down.

But Jesus isn't surprised by any of it. It's why He came into this messy world, stained black with sin. And He came, not with gloves on, to protect Himself; but He came to get dirty with your sin. To take on your sin. To take it away from you and bear it Himself.

For on the cross, the One who was completely clean and pure on the inside, the One who knew no sin, the One whose heart percolated only love and life, not only looked like sin, looked like the criminal we are, He became sin. For you. On the cross, all that's inside you - is put on Jesus.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ... the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Is. 53)

Sometimes we may wish God didn't know all our sins. But if He didn't, how could we know they are all forgiven? But if He knows them, He died for them. If He knows them, He took them upon Himself and paid for them. If He knows them, He forgives them. From the smallest of them to the most shameful of them. All of them.

Just as we're surprised by the news and the evil that comes out of clean-looking people, including ourselves, so we're surprised at the Good News of what God did for us, so that even though we die, yet shall we live. For we are His, bought with a price; bought and cleansed by His blood! (Douthwaite)

... when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! (Romans 5:6) As the hymn says, "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know. Nothing but the blood of Jesus!"

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. (Ps 51) Words from another hypocrite - who appeared clean on the outside, but not so much on the inside. King David prayed this prayer after what? After he *lusted* after his neighbor's wife Bathsheba; after he *committed adultery* with her; after he *murdered* her husband to cover it up; and after he *lied* about it by taking Bathsheba to be his wife and pretending that everything was on the up and up.

In fact, even more than that - pretending that he was the *good* guy, taking care of this poor little lamb after her husband had been killed in such an awful way. David needed forgiveness yes, but also a new heart. And so, what does David pray? *Create in me a clean heart, O God.* The life of a child of God is a life of *constant* repentance. Which is to say, a life of constant *reliance*, not on what we do, but on the life-giving forgiveness and cleansing of Jesus. *Create in me, O God.* It's all from You.

But David not only prayed: *Create in me a clean heart, O God* - but also: *and renew a right spirit within me.* A right spirit. That believes right, that thinks right, that desires right, that speaks right and acts right - in faith toward God and love toward one another. Only He can do that. Not that we'll do it perfectly. That will never happen this side of eternity. But that we will, in faith, always turn to Jesus in every need, trusting in His Word, His love, and His forgiveness, no matter what things look like on the outside or the inside. (Douthwaite)

Panic? Nausea? Sweating? Maybe you should go see a doctor. Or maybe it's germaphobia. The fear of contamination. It's a messy world out there, so try and stay as clean as you can. But it's also messy *in here*. It's easy to clean the outside, but how are you going to clean the inside? You can't. That, *Another* must do. That, He has done.

Create in me a clean heart, O God: and renew a right spirit within me. And so, God's Word and His Spirit point us to the cross. *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2 Cor. 5:21) Go to Him. Go to the cross regularly, confessing your sins and being cleansed. And then, go. Go cleansed and free. Lightened and unburdened, with a renewed heart and spirit, with Jesus' spirit, to love God and your neighbor.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ... wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. CLEAN ... from the INSIDE out!

Let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ... Restore to me the joy of your salvation. ... Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise! (Ps 51)