

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 43: "CLEANSED FROM THE INSIDE OUT"
LUKE 11:37-44
Ps. Jeffrey Susila

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, I'm Jeff. I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to be preaching the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 43 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Cleansed from the Inside Out."

Sermon Introduction

So for those of you who don't know me, I'm originally from America. So my family and I are from a small town in California.

And growing up, I like to keep my room clean. And not to compare myself to my siblings but I think my room was the cleanest - or at least that's what it appears to be on the outside.

But on the inside, I've actually just been randomly putting things into my closet and into my drawers.

And you guys know what I'm talking about right? I feel like we have at least one drawer where we just put random things in there - cables, batteries, receipts, Ikea instruction manuals - just random things.

That's what I did. And I was ok with that, my thinking was: as long as my room *looks* "clean" then it's "clean."

But guess what? When it was time to move to Indonesia, we had to sell the house and I had to clean every drawer, every closet. And it was a nightmare.

I realized that my room might've appeared to be clean on the outside, but inside it was actually filthy.

And it can be the same with our lives... Everything on the outside may appear to be clean and good, while on the inside - inside our hearts - it's actually not.

The One Thing

Be clean from the inside out by giving God all of your heart.

Scripture Introduction

If you have your Bibles with you or if you have the Bible app, please turn to Luke chapter 11. Today, we'll be reading from Luke 11:37-44.

In the passages immediately before this, Jesus had just cast out a demon (that was mute) from a man. And the crowd that saw what Jesus did were left marveled. But some of the people in the crowd (particularly, the Pharisees and the Scribes) - they did not marvel, but instead they accused Jesus of casting out demons

by the power of Satan. And then others in the crowd were also cynical and didn't believe Jesus, and they kept asking him for more signs.

So in the previous passages, Jesus addressed both the "slandering accusers" and also the "insatiable cynics".

And that's where we are in the text, as Jesus is addressing and speaking to this crowd...

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 11:37-44.

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

⁴² "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

- I. Be clean from the inside out (vv. 37-41)
- II. Be warned of only outward devotion (vv. 42-44)

I. Be clean from the inside out (vv. 37-41)

Verse 37 says this:

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table.

Now, we know from the previous passages that Jesus had just cast out a demon from a man. And that must've attracted a lot of attention. People started to gather to see what all the fuss was about. So imagine Jesus amidst a large crowd.

And then as Jesus was speaking to this group of people, one Pharisee came through the crowd, approached Jesus, and asked him to have dinner with him.

Now this may be a bit surprising for us because the Pharisees (who were the religious leaders at the time) - they weren't known to be big fans of Jesus. In fact, they had just accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan.

So Scripture doesn't say specifically why this Pharisee invited Jesus for a meal - we can speculate that perhaps he wanted to have a spiritual discussion with Jesus. But the more important thing to note is how Jesus responded - he graciously accepted this Pharisee's invitation.

Even though the Pharisees had just wrongly accused him of being a part of Satan's kingdom, Jesus held no ill will against them. And he willingly went to this Pharisee's home, and "reclined at table" - so he took his place at the dining table.

And as Jesus took his place, imagine a room full of people. This was not a 1-on-1 meal. From the verses following this passage, we know that there were actually other Pharisees and other Lawyers that were also present.

So imagine Jesus at the dining table with other Pharisees and Lawyers (and then perhaps there were also others who were standing or leaning along the wall).

But amidst all of the people in the room, the Pharisee who invited Jesus doesn't seem to be too focused on everyone else, but he's closely observing one person in particular - Jesus - at everything that he's doing...

Verse 38 then says this:

³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner.

So what surprised the Pharisee wasn't something that Jesus did, but what he didn't do. And perhaps we can relate - if one of our guests didn't wash their hands before dinner, we'd also be astonished (especially during the pandemic).

But what the Pharisee was referring to wasn't hand washing for the sake of good hygiene. What he's referring to was ceremonial hand washing.

So the Pharisees - they've developed this elaborate hand washing ritual in order to ensure their ceremonial cleanness. So for them, it wasn't enough to properly clean your hands. But then you'd also need to perform this hand washing ritual to make your hands ceremonially clean.

So the Pharisee wasn't astonished because Jesus' hands were visibly dirty. But he was surprised that Jesus would eat with ceremonially unclean hands. Or at least that's what the Pharisee thinks.

But here's the thing - their elaborate hand washing ritual was not commanded in the laws of God (it wasn't commanded in Scripture). But it was actually a command from oral traditions that were verbally passed down from their Jewish elders - from one generation to the next. So this means that Jesus was not disobeying God's Word by not ceremonially washing his hands, he's just not following the man-made traditions that the Pharisees were doing.

But that astonished this Pharisee. And Jesus knew what this Pharisee was thinking...

In verse 39, this is how Jesus responded:

³⁹ And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

Imagine Jesus picking up the cup that's in front of him and showing it to all of the Pharisees in the room - saying, "now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish [imagine Jesus pointing to the outside of the cup, and then pointing inside...] but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." The mood in the room must've changed completely.

If we think of a cup. And it's clean on the outside, but then it's filthy on the inside. Would you call that a clean cup, and drink from it? Or would you call it a dirty cup? Dirty, right? It's not usable.

So what's Jesus saying here? He's basically calling the Pharisees unclean. Not on the basis of how clean they appear to be on the outside, but on the basis of how unclean they are on the inside.

Jesus is essentially calling out the Pharisees as hypocrites - they may act "righteous" and "upright" on the outside (following all of the laws and the traditions very closely), but inside... their hearts are full of darkness - full of greed and wickedness.

Yet others can't see this. The Pharisees successfully fooled everyone. All of the Jewish people thought of the Pharisees as the wisest and most godly, holy, and righteous men. And the Pharisees would agree with

that - that's also how they thought of themselves. They've memorized the laws and they kept the laws very strictly.

But that's not what Jesus thinks of them. He sees them for who they truly are on the inside - full of greed and wickedness.

In verse 40, Jesus continues his rebuke. He says this:

⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?

"You fools." Jesus is saying... Do you realize how foolish you are? You may be able to fool everyone, but did you really think that you can fool God?

Didn't the potter who created the outside of the cup, also create the inside of the cup? And didn't God who created you, who made your outside, also make your inside? Because didn't God who created your body, also create your heart and your mind?

God is our creator. He knows not only how we appear to be on the outside, but He also knows what's truly on the inside - our internal thoughts and our heart's true posture.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees that they can't fool him. While no one else can see them for who they truly are, God can. God sees what's truly in their hearts. And the Pharisees' outward-only appearance of cleanness is no good to Jesus.

And we'd agree with that. In fact, it may seem so obvious to us - "of course the Pharisees were bad people" - and it's easy for us to pass judgment on them. But instead of judging others, like how the Pharisees judged Jesus, let's take time to reflect on our own hearts.

Because isn't that also our tendency? Our heart's desire is to always want to look good in front of others. In fact, we work so hard, we put so much effort (and sacrifice so much) for the sake of looking good in front of other people. We work so hard...

- To appear like our lives are so well put together.
- To appear like we're so good and capable at everything we do, and that we have everything we need.

We want others to see that we have it all: beauty, success, intelligence, capability (everything).

We work so hard to clean the outside of our cups. Polishing our appearance over and over again. And we may be able to fool others, maybe even ourselves. But God is not fooled.

So why do we keep doing that? Why is that our tendency? It's because of sin. Our hearts are sinful.

And our sinful hearts desire approval from others because we feel that others' recognition determines our worth and our value. And maybe we think that if others think highly of us then we're of higher worth, but then on the flip-side, when others think less of us then we think we're of lesser value. So out of our sinful hearts, we keep cleaning the outside of our cups, wanting to look good and worthy.

But then guess what? The people you're trying to impress are probably trying to impress other people too. Everyone's just trying to look good in front of one another. Because we all have sinful tendencies, and we're all being deceived by the devil. Satan actually knows that it's what's inside the heart that matters most. So he's more than happy when we're stuck cleaning only the outside of our cups.

And maybe that makes us more like modern-day Pharisees than we'd like to think (we're both greedy for approval). So let's not simply dismiss Jesus' rebuke as something that's only for the Pharisees. Because our outward-appearance of cleanness is also not good enough for Jesus. God created our hearts and what he desires is clean hearts. And Jesus clarifies this further...

In verse 41, Jesus says this:

⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

So Jesus continues to correct the Pharisees. He's saying - you Pharisees want to show that you're truly clean? Then "give as alms those things that are within."

"Give as alms" - so to give alms is to give to the poor.

So we may be asking: why is Jesus specifically highlighting the poor and needy here?

- It's because the poor and needy represent those people who cannot earn our giving and they cannot give in return, so then our giving would need to be genuine and sacrificial, not merely transactional (so without expecting something in return).
- And such gracious and genuine giving would then be evidence of someone who's not greedy, but truly generous.

But then the next question is: what are we supposed to give to others? - Jesus says, "give as alms those things that are within" - "those things that are within" - those things that are in your heart.

- So give our hearts to others (our love, compassion, and sympathy). Give love to others generously and without expecting any in return (just like how you'd give to the poor and needy without expecting anything in return).
- And such sacrificial love for others would then be evidence of someone who's not wicked, but truly loving.

So then how do you show that you have clean hearts that are not greedy and wicked? By showcasing grace and sacrificial love to others. Then your outward action would be evidence of the cleanness of your hearts. And when your heart is clean, then everything will be clean.

But then here comes a big problem - actually, a huge problem. We're sinful. We're naturally selfish and we desire to look good for our own sake (we don't naturally care for others; not more than we care about ourselves).

And even when we love or give to others, maybe a part of us is doing it out of selfish reasons - in order to look good, to gain recognition from others, or to gain something else in return. So even when we have the best intentions, we still have mixed motives (it's never 100% clean).

But God's standard is perfect cleanness of the heart. And Scripture says that we've all fallen short of His glorious standard. And so the bad news is that because of our sin - because of our greed and wickedness - what we deserve is eternal punishment in Hell. That's what we justly deserve - that's the bad news.

But then here's the Good News - our God deeply loves us. And God the Father sent Jesus - His one and only Son - from heaven to Earth to save us. Jesus - the Son of God - has a perfectly clean heart and he loves us truly. And that's showcased on the cross when he died for our sins - he graciously and sacrificially gave his life for us - us, who are sinners and do not deserve and cannot earn his love. Yet he still willingly gave his life for us. He took on the punishment that we deserved.

And for those of us who repent of our sins and put our faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven. The blood of Jesus on the cross washes us clean. So then when God looks at us, instead of seeing our unclean hearts, he sees Jesus' perfectly clean heart and deems us as righteous - as perfectly clean - because of what Jesus did for us. Not because of our own good works; not because of our outer appearance of cleanness. But because of what Jesus already did for us.

The blood of Christ has washed us clean from the inside out. And because of Jesus, we're justified - Jesus has made us right in the sight of God. And those who believe in him will not perish, but have eternal life with God in Heaven.

So if you're here today and you haven't put your faith in Christ yet, then we invite you to talk to anyone around you or to the pastors at the end of our service. We'd love to talk to you about Jesus, and about what he's done to save sinners and to cleanse the hearts of all those who repent of their sins and believe in him as Lord and Savior.

And for those of us who have already received Christ, be reminded that God has cleansed our hearts from the inside out through the blood of Christ. And to God the Father, that's how much we're valued - we're worth the precious blood of His one and only Son. So our worth is not based on other's approval or how others see us. But it's based on the ransom that was paid to free us from sin and death. We now belong to God. And how does He see us? He sees us as clean and pure because of Jesus. And that's only by His grace because He loves us as His beloved children.

So the only appropriate response for us is to continue to be fully devoted to Him and to praise Him for who He is and what He's done for us.

So, again, be clean from the inside out. And then next, be warned of only outward devotion...

II. Be warned of only outward devotion (vv. 42-44)

Verse 42 says this:

⁴² "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

So as Jesus continues to address the Pharisees, he's saying "woe to you Pharisees."

And "woe" here means "grief" or "anguish" - so in this context, it's used as a warning. Jesus is warning the Pharisees that they'll experience grief or anguish if they continue to do what they're doing. Jesus is warning them that what they're currently doing is not right in the sight of God.

And so in verses 42-44, Jesus gives three warnings to the Pharisees (and all three warnings relate to their false devotion to God - they show the outer appearance of worship, but it's not true worship).

So this first warning - against the Pharisees - is about how they've completely missed the heart of God's laws - they're so careful to tithe, yet they neglect justice and the love of God.

To "tithe" means to give a tenth of what you have to God. So the Pharisees were so careful in their tithing that they're even giving a tenth from their herb gardens.

Now mint and rue are small plants with small leaves. So imagine the Pharisees meticulously counting their mint and rue leaves - and carefully giving a tenth to God.

And that's not necessarily wrong. Jesus didn't say that they shouldn't have tithed. He said, "these" things - (like giving offering to God) - these things should be done. But do those things "without neglecting the others" - without ignoring justice and the love of God.

So while the Pharisees were so careful and so strict in following the laws and traditions, they ignored the weightier - more important - matters of God's laws.

That's why Jesus is giving them this warning. True devotion does not ignore the heart behind God's Laws.

And we can also see the heart behind God's laws in the Gospel of Matthew. In Matthew chapter 22, a Pharisee asked Jesus: "which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

And Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV):

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

Now Jesus didn't say, "the greatest commandment is to tithe very carefully," or "make sure your hands are always ceremonially clean." No.

Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to “love God.” And the second is like it, and it’s to “love others.” And he said, “all the law and prophets hang on these two commandments” - so all of the commandments in the Old Testament and all that the Prophets have spoken about can be summarized as “love God” and “love others” - “love God, love others.”

And we can even see this in the ten commandments. The first four are:

- You shall have no other gods before me
- You shall make no idols
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain
- Keep the Sabbath day holy

These are not just random rules to be followed. God is saying, “love me, honor my name, treasure your time with me by keeping the Sabbath day holy.” So the first four commandments can be summarized as “love God.”

And then the next six commandments:

- Honor your father and mother
- You shall not murder
- You shall not commit adultery
- You shall not steal
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
- You shall not covet

Again, not random rules. God is saying, “honor one another, care for each other.” So the final six can be summarized as “love others.”

So the weightier matter of God’s laws - including justice and the love of God - can be summarized more simply as “love God and love others”. And so Jesus is warning the Pharisees that they should not ignore these more important matters as they worship God (and as they follow His Laws) - don’t strictly follow the Laws while neglecting love for God and others.

Then Jesus continues to warn the Pharisees...

Verse 43 says this:

⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

Jesus’ second warning - against the Pharisees - goes further into their false devotion, and their neglect of loving God and others.

Jesus is warning them that they’re not glorifying God, but they’re actually glorifying themselves.

And Jesus is highlighting two specific instances.

The first instance is that the Pharisees loved “the best seat in the synagogues.”

- So the synagogue is a place of gathering - it’s a place for the reading of Scripture, for prayer, teaching, and fellowship (it’s like our Sunday Celebration gathering).
- The purpose is to worship God corporately (it’s a context for loving God and others).

Yet what the Pharisees loved the most about it was to sit in the best seats. Not so they could glorify God, but so that others could see them and give them recognition. So they’re not glorifying God, they’re the ones seeking to be glorified. They’re glorifying themselves.

And then Jesus mentions a second instance - that the Pharisees loved “greetings in the marketplaces.”

- So the marketplace is a public area where many people gather and interact with one another (it’s another context to love God by loving others).

Yet what the Pharisees loved the most about it was to walk around in their long robes, and to be greeted with respect and to be honored by the people who pass them as they walk. So they weren't there to show love and honor to others, but they were there so that others can show honor to them. Again, they're honoring themselves.

So whether they're sitting or walking - basically, in all that they do, they just want to receive the admiration of others and to be glorified. And thus, they failed to truly glorify God - from the outside, it may seem like they're honoring God (by keeping all of His Laws, looking clean and sitting in the best seats), but in reality, they've failed to love God and to love others - they've neglected the more important matters of God's Laws.

And Jesus is not fooled. He sees what's truly in their hearts, and who they're really glorifying.

And it's the same for us. So let these first two warnings also be a warning to us. Because in our daily devotion to God, we all can forget about the more important matters of loving God and loving others.

Like the Pharisees, perhaps we can also lose sight of the big picture - we neglect to love God and others:

- We can speed through our quiet time - just quickly reading through the Word - just so we can say that we've read the Bible for the day. But then we forget to really be with God and to enjoy His presence.
- Or we faithfully give offering every Sunday, but then after church ends, on our way home, we can be disrespectful or unloving to others.

And like the Pharisees, we forget that true devotion to God is about loving Him.

- Perhaps even as we're gathered as a church, our focus is on ourselves - on our "performance" - on how well we're praying or singing.
- But then that's Jesus' warning. Don't let worship be a performance (don't let it be an outward-only appearance of devotion), but let it be true worship.

So how can we do that? How can we practice true devotion to God? By giving him all of our heart and all of our mind by focusing on God as we worship Him. And it doesn't have to be perfect.

- God knows that we're not perfect. So when you pray to God, your words don't have to be so eloquent. And when you sing Him praise, your singing doesn't have to sound professional.
- The more important matter is the heart of worship - about consciously remembering who God is, what He's done, and what He'll continue to do for us.
- And then after we give him our full heart and our full attention, then we can intentionally give him all the praise and all the glory.

So let's not focus on merely outward-performance, but let's give God all of our hearts. Because our outward devotion is only meaningful when there's an inward devotion to God - only when our hearts are wholly given to God.

So let's not be like the Pharisees who only glorified themselves. Their worship was heartless and empty.

And so Jesus has one final warning for them.

In verse 44, Jesus says this:

⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."

Jesus' final warning - to the Pharisees - is that they're doing the opposite of what they're supposed to do. They're the religious leaders (who were supposed to be leading and helping others follow God), but instead they're leading people away from God.

And thus, Jesus is comparing the Pharisees to "unmarked graves."

- Because during that time, the Jews would clearly mark their graves. They would whitewash their tombs all in white so that they would be easily seen.

- The purpose is so that others won't accidentally touch these tombs and be defiled and be ceremonially unclean (because that would mean that they're not able to worship at the temple until they're ceremonially clean again).
- So then if someone saw an unknown structure all in white, they could assume that it's a tomb and walk away from it.

But Jesus is comparing the Pharisees to unmarked graves. So just like how people can come in contact unknowingly with unmarked graves and become unclean, those who come in contact with the Pharisees are also unknowingly being fooled and being led astray.

So Jesus is warning the Pharisees that they've become a defiling influence on others. They're teaching people to focus on the wrong things - on their particular practices and traditions instead of focusing on loving and worshiping God.

So may this also be a warning to all of us. Let's not be a defiling influence on others, but let's be a purifying one. Because being a purifying influence in others' lives is how we can show love to others. And the best way that we can do that is by pointing them to Jesus. Not to anyone or anything else, but to Jesus - the only one who can cleanse our hearts from the inside out.

Jesus purifies those who he comes in contact with (including those deemed unclean, like the demon-possessed and the lepers). When Jesus comes in contact with them, they didn't make Jesus unclean, but instead Jesus made them clean.

Jesus is the perfect purifying influence on others around him.

And now, as followers of Jesus, we're also to be a purifying influence on others around us. We're to be distinct from the rest of the world - we're to spread his light to the darkness around us.

So as a community, let us not be like the Pharisees - who collectively became a symbol of hypocrisy.

- For all of their outward devotion and clean outer appearance, Jesus saw the Pharisees for who they truly were based on their hearts - they were greedy and wicked. They gave the appearance of worshiping God when they're only worshiping themselves, and became a defiling influence on others.

But instead, may we be a gospel-revealing community (filled with people whose hearts have been cleansed by the blood of Christ) - who genuinely love God and others, as we point those around us to Jesus. And may we share truth to one another, and help and encourage one another to remain steadfast in living godly lives that honor God.

And as we continue to live godly lives, remember that we're not alone. Not only are our brothers and sisters with us, God is always with us. The Holy Spirit is in us, empowering us to live God-honoring lives. The Spirit is continuously working in our hearts, continuously purifying us from the inside out - sanctifying us - so we may be more like Christ in character.

So may we be reminded that God alone is worthy of our praise and honor. He cleansed us from the inside out. So may we give Him all the glory and point others to Jesus - so that more and more people will come to know Christ and be cleansed from the inside out.

Now, to help us with our next steps, here are three life applications that we can do in order to give God all of our heart and live God-honoring lives...

Life Application

1. Examine our hearts - before we make decisions, examine our heart posture by asking ourselves, "am I doing this to love God and others?"

- And involve God in the process. Pray to Him and ask for help.
- And involve other brothers and sisters for wise counsel and as accountability partners.

2. Focus on the heart of worship - when we worship God, instead of focusing on our “performance,” consciously think of who God is and what He’s done for us, and allow that to fuel our praise.

3. Help brothers and sisters to love God and love others – remind one another of the more important matters of God’s Laws to love Him and others.

The One Thing

Be clean from the inside out by giving God all of your heart.

Conclusion

If you’re able, can we all stand as we respond to God’s Word together?