

Title: "Wash your hands"  
Mark 7:14–23

Did you wash your hands today? In the men's room at a local store there was a sign which said "All employees must wash their hands before returning back to work." Ever since Covid19, we are encouraged over and over to "wash our hands." The medical world understands that our hands make contact with all manner of germs from the outside world. And when we touch our mouth with our hands, germs enter our body and potentially cause infection. So, washing our hands is very important.

Interestingly enough, the Bible also encourages us to wash our hand. The Levitical law prescribes the washing of hands. Coincidentally, it also desires cleanliness. But the Levitical law is not interested in personal hygiene. The cleanliness it refers to is not protection from germs. The cleanliness it refers to has to do with our relationship with God. To be clean before God, means to be righteous before God. To be unclean before God, meant you were unworthy to come to the altar of God. It meant He would not hear your prayer. When Mark 7:1, speaks about cleanliness, it speaks about things which defile a person.

*Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup> (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders*

The Levitical law was very clear about washing. Uncleanness, was not things which were un-hygienic. Uncleanness, resulted from things which spiritually defiled you.

Today, we do not use the term, "defile" and "unclean" in our normal conversation. But do not be mistaken. They are real things. They are especially important when applied to our relationships with God. To be "unclean before God," means you are unworthy to come before God. God will not see you. God will not hear your prayers. You are not welcome in the church of God. All this, because you are unclean. There was a sign which hung on the entry to the Second Temple in Jerusalem. It was a warning about death. a warning to non-Jews, a warning to people who were considered "unclean" Stay out of the temple! Or else --- DEATH. The Levitical law took uncleanness before God very seriously. In Mark chap 7:14, Jesus expands upon unclean-ness.

*“Hear me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”*

Jesus gives us an even deeper understanding about uncleanness. It is not what a man eats which defiles him. It is not just the act of “NOT following the letter of the law” which makes a man unclean before God. But rather, what comes out of a man... what comes out of a man’s heart. That is what makes him unclean. It is the reason for his actions. It is his motivations. It is his nature which makes him unclean before God.

And there are serious consequences to being unclean before God. You know what these consequences are. We confess them together at the beginning of our worship service. We just confess that by our nature, we are sinful and unclean. We are unclean, not only because of “the things we’ve done” but also because of “the things we have left undone” which we should have done. It is these actions or even lack of action which make us unclean. Not only are our action unclean but our hearts are sinful as well. We have not loved God. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Indeed by our very nature, we are unclean. Furthermore, we confessed that the consequences of being unclean is His present and eternal punishment, Hell. We are unclean because we are unsuccessful at following God’s law perfectly. We are unclean because it is in our nature. And there are consequences to being unclean.

A few years ago an interviewer polled random people. He asked them if they had heard about the 10 commandments. Pretty much everyone had heard of the 10 commandments. Then he asked them “what happens to people who do not follow the 10 commandments.” The general response was, “I guess they go to Hell.” Then the interviewer asked them. Have you ever broken one of the 10 commandments sometime in your life? Have you ever lied, stolen something cussed using God’s name etc. etc. Most of them said “yes”. Then he asked them. “What does this mean?” “Does this mean, you are going to hell?” After thinking a bit, they all said “I guess so” Then the saddest part of all, he asked them. “What can you do about that?” And the majority simply shrugged their shoulders, saying “I don’t know” How very sad. They don’t know, They know they are unclean. But they don’t know what to do about it.

They don’t know that God has good news for them. There is good news for the unclean. Because of Jesus, we have been shown grace. God has not changed the consequence of sin. The “wages of sin” is still death. But God has given us a hope

God has given us a hope of redemption. Jesus has given the unclean an offer of Hope. an offer of Hope, recorded in Scripture long ago. Centuries before the birth of Jesus, during the time of the prophet Jeremiah, people busted their behinds trying to follow the letter of the law. Those who failed were rejected as “unclean” and the Unclean, had to live the best they could as outsiders in society.

Jeremiah, however, brought some good news. He came out and told the people of the world “this was not how it was supposed to be.”

*“The time is coming, when I will make a new covenant It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took lead them out of Egypt,*

“Covenant” means a contract. We have a new contract with God... or perhaps a better word is we have a new “relationship” with God. The Old covenant demanded perfect obedience to the law, not only to the letter of the law but to the spirit of the Law. Our sinful nature made it impossible to follow. WE were doomed. So, God in his mercy made a new covenant with us.” one based not on our works, but on God’s. God sent His son, Jesus, to free us from the condemnation of the Law, Jesus freed us from the Law which punished us for being unclean, the Law which made us unworthy to be with God.

How did he do this? When Jesus died on the cross, He paid for the condemnation which was ours. He didn’t change the Law. Rather he took the punishment we deserved. At the cross, He took the death we deserved and gave us life. And in doing so he changed us. We are no longer “the unclean” Without Jesus, we are unclean unworthy to be with God. But because of Jesus, or more importantly, because of His death on the cross, we were made clean. We were made acceptable before God.” That is the new hope we live in. That is the new hope which the Bible offers to all people. This is the Gospel.

This new relationship starts at our baptism. Through Baptism God offers new relationship with Him, not a relationship which depends on perfectly following the Ten commandments. but rather one where God has placed His mark upon our minds and written it on our hearts. At your baptism you Received “the mark of the cross both upon the forehead and upon the heart, to mark you as one redeemed by Christ, the crucified.” At our Baptism the sins which made us unclean before God were personally forgiven,... washed away.... Having received that mark having been washed by Baptism.... we are no longer part of the “Unclean.” Through Jesus Christ, we have been changed from being “the unclean” to being “friends of God,” We now have a relationship with God.... a relationship so close that we are

now considered to be His children. In your baptism you were marked as one belonging to the triune God, father, son, and holy spirit. as one redeemed by Christ. You were formally identified as part of God's family. We are part of God's family. We have been changed. We WERE the unclean. We are now, the redeemed. We are now the children of God.

With our Baptism comes many blessings! ] In Romans it says We were therefore buried with him through **baptism** into death [SO THAT] just as Christ was raised from the dead... we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

What does that mean?... It means.... if something bad were to happen to someone we love, if they were to die,... if they were baptized we have a proof that they were a child of God, And for this reason, we know for sure that we will see our loved one again, we can look forward to seeing them again in Heaven. That is a great comfort in this uncertain world. It is a comfort which can only be given by God.

This comfort is especially important with regard to small children. It is for this reason that we also baptize young children and babies. What a comfort to have a concrete proof that God has adopted our little ones into his family. We believe that even a baby needs a savior. We believe that Jesus died on a cross even for a baby. We believe that Jesus' promise of redemption is not only for us but for our children as well. When a child is baptized, we know that they are a child of God. because we know that it is totally a work of God. It is God who brings saving faith to that child. For this reason the promise of baptism for a child is a comfort in times of trouble. If anything would happen to a child, if a baby were to die untimely, their baptism would be a guarantee that they were part of God's family, that they are with God, in the joys of heaven. Their baptism would be a guarantee to us that one day we would see them again in heaven.

Because we are now part of God's kingdom,... because we have been adopted by God, baptism is also a comfort, when our children grow older. Many youth as they grow older experience a fascination with the sinful life. Baptism is a guarantee that a loved one is a child of God, even if they stray away. It is a guarantee that God continues to love them and will continually seek after them. Like in the story of the Prodigal Son, where the father waited by the city gates for the return of his wandering son, God waits patiently, for those who stray... loving them always.

Finally, God does not only seek after those who already know Him. God also seeks after those who do not yet know him those who will be his children in the future. The people on the streets who were asked about the 10 commandments by the interviewer, who I spoke of earlier... the people who didn't know "what they needed to do" to avoid going to Hell for breaking the 10 commandments. They need to hear an Answer! Their hearts cry out, "what must we do?" You may not hear it with your ears. But you will hear it with your hearts if you are open. "What must we do?" "What must we do?"

And the answer is... Believe in His Son.... Repent of your ways Be baptized and let God work in you. Follow Jesus. 2000 years ago, the disciples shared the Good news with the people of Jerusalem and thousands of people were baptized, Thousands were transformed from enemies of God into children of God... from unclean into redeemed. Today, God calls you to share the same good news. God is calling you to be the messenger by which these "unclean" can be transformed into children of God. They cry out

What must we do?

Answer them!