

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount Sermon Series

Sermon 8

She Took a Shower, Yet Still Dirty

I once read the following story:

A man was explaining something that happened to him to a foreign friend of his. When the man was still a child, he would feel his mother's hair when she came home to see if it was damp or not. The child's mother and father were separated but they had not divorced yet. The child would do this to understand if his mother had relations with a man other than his father. "If my mother had taken a shower then her hair would still be damp" said the man to his friend. "I would touch her hair to see if it was dry or damp" he explained.

"But you couldn't understand that" his foreign friend said. "Perhaps she didn't take a shower after relations."

The man looked at his foreign friend in astonishment, "If a person didn't take a shower after relations it would leave them in a defiled condition. That is not possible. She would absolutely take a shower."

According to this woman, if she didn't take a shower after relations she would be defiled before God. For her, external cleanliness was of utmost importance.

Shouldn't she have thought about the fact that she trampled on the law that says, "You shall not commit adultery"? Wouldn't adultery leave her in God's eyes in a more defiled situation than external dirtiness? Is God only interested in cleanliness or is there also a moral purity in life in this business? Which is more important, bodily cleanliness or heart cleanliness? Of course I am not saying that bodily cleanliness is unimportant. But even if the woman takes a shower after an illicit relationship she is not clean because she has trampled the Ten Commandments.

This is not simply about sins below the belt. People today make an ablution before they pray. To come before God with bodily cleanliness is a good thing. But many people, after prayer, thinking they are clean return to their lives which are full of lies. Outside they are clean. Inside they are defiled.

In some countries, before entering the house they do not remove their shoes. That is really dirty isn't it? But in that some country, either deceptively or openly they don't cut in line in front of you to pay their electric bill. Which is dirtier, to enter the home with shoes on or to trample someone else's rights by cutting in front of them in line?

In Jesus' time the regulations for ritual cleanliness of the Jews were exacting and became burdensome. Their minds were always busy with rules, restrictions and the fear of external defilement. They didn't see the stain that selfishness and malice imparted to the soul!

Jesus did not say that ritual purity was one of the conditions for entering the kingdom of heaven. What was the necessary purity according to Jesus?

Matthew 5:8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

Nothing that defiles will enter God's own city. The hearts of all that attain to eternal life will be purified here in this world. Those who learn from Jesus do not think that careless manners is funny. They find coarse language and sensual thoughts disgusting and stay far away from them. Through the Holy Spirit, the heart where Jesus resides begins to be purified.

No, purity is not just concerned with outward cleanliness provided by soap and water. Purity is not avoiding that which is lustful, passionate and sensual. Purity has to do with secret motivations and purposes. Purity has to do with our being humble, self-denying, without self-seeking and pride.

Why do people tell lies? Isn't it to deceive people and earn undeserved or excessive money? Their motivations and purposes are self. Some people tell lies to avoid the responsibility of taking on a task. What is their motivation and purpose? Yes, to be lazy and selfish. Some people tell a lie because of pride; they want to show themselves better than they really are. What is their motivation and purpose? To foster their own pride! None of these things are in the heart that is pure and clean.

People generally behave according to their understanding of God. If they view God as a tyrant, waiting to find a mistake in someone to punish them, they will behave to others likewise. Their character is stern, cold, dark and loveless. They always criticize and are merciless. However those who see God as unjust, indifferent and uncaring about evil behave accordingly. They look at justice according to their own low standards. People liken God to their own characters. In the scriptures, God says this:

Psalm 50:21 You thought that I was altogether like you;

When we think that people in old times bowed down in front of objects and worshiped them we are astonished and say, "How could they do such a thing? What foolishness!" But what were they doing? They were assigning to their gods character attributes of their own devising. Are we not doing the same thing in our own minds? While God is merciful, if we think He is vindictive, critical, cold and unforgiving, what are we doing? In our minds we are attributing to God characteristics of our own choosing are we not? After the Lord has said, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" if we tell a lie thinking, "The Lord doesn't care" what are we doing? Aren't we thinking that the Lord is like ourselves?

You are not an idolater. You never bow down and worship an object. But if we think wrongly about God in our minds, that is if we attribute to Him characteristics of our own choosing, this leads to wrong thoughts and in the end wrong behavior. So when people say, "You cannot know

God" this is very dangerous because people then behave according to their own character. Since the heart of humans is naturally cold, dark and unloving, they behave accordingly. So people who are extremely religious can be bullies, bigots, cruel, base and severe. They are attributing to God wrong characteristics.

How about you? How do you picture God? Is He a vindictive tyrant who is waiting to punish? Is He someone who turns a blind eye to those who violate the rules He Himself set up? Or is God both merciful and just? However you behave to others is probably how you view God.

The Lord is pure and those who enter heaven will be pure. We learn purity now in this life. It is for this reason that this life was given to us.

Jesus committed no sin. For this reason, Jesus, more than anyone else, put before us the best example of God's character. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. Did Jesus stand aloof of those who were suffering? No, He drew near. Did He forgive people's sins? He forgave. Did He approach and heal those who were sick and had no one to help? He healed them. Did Jesus take children in His arms and bless them? He blessed them. Why then do people say, "God is exalted and unknowable?" Because they don't know God or His character. These are cold people who stand far away from people. They are assigning to God their own character.

We cannot clean our own hearts by ourselves. This is the Lord's work. David, after he committed adultery with Bahsheba, killed her husband Uriah and later repented, wrote the following:

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

After committing adultery you can take a shower. But the shower does not make you clean in God's eyes. It doesn't erase you sin. It doesn't change or erase your passions. You are still unclean. Prayer, in and of itself, does not erase our guilt. Only God Himself can create a clean heart.

A shower, a hand-washing, cannot remove our ambitions, jealousies, lies, desires for revenge, and the stains of gossip and vindictiveness. It can't provide love toward those who hate and mistreat you. Only the miracle of God can do this work. However we must seek this gift.

Those who are pure in heart see God as their Savior in a new and loving relationship. When they see the purity and grace of the Lord, they want to reflect these qualities in their own lives. When we see these qualities displayed in Jesus' life we want to be like Him too. This is why I recommend that you study the life of Christ.

In a practical sense, what should you do?

1. Read about Jesus' life and behavior in the New Testament. In this time, behave like Him, God will create a desire to be like Him.
2. Ask for a clean heart from the Lord.

3. Decide to do what is right no matter the cost.