

"Will Soft Soap Clean?"

Jeremiah 2:22

September 25, 2005

SERMON OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. The text: "For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God."
2. about soap
3. the message of the text

B. Sin is heinous

1. subject of sin is not popular
2. promises fulfilled about our sin
 - a. Micah 7:19
 - b. Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:12
3. reasons to remember our sin
 - a. Psalm 40:12, 2–3
 - b. Psalm 51:12–13
4. mistakes people make in how they consider sin
5. a sad outlook,
 - a. Jeremiah 17:9
 - b. "incurable" ... Job 34:6

C. God is Gracious

1. our natural state: Ephesians 2:1–3
2. our state by God's grace: Ephesians 2:4–9
3. How God accomplishes this:
 - a. Romans 5:6, 8, 10
 - b. 2 Corinthians 5:19–21

A. Introduction

1. This morning I want to talk about sin
 - a. alternative title could have been, “Sin is Heinous”
 - b. and that becomes apparent from our text, Jeremiah 2:22 (AV): [For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD.](#)
 - c. and if you are using another translation, that word “nitre” may be rendered as “lye” or “soda” and consisted of, as far as we can tell, of a mixture of soda ash, potash, and perhaps, saltpetre, which when mixed with water gave a strong alkaline solution

2. this matter of soap and nitre
 - a. For three summers while I was attending school, I worked in the Colgate Palmolive soap factory in east Toronto
 - (A) there are now newer processes for making soap, but the essentials are more or less the same as when it was made on the farm from soda ash and the lard or fat rendered from a pig after the meat had been taken
 - (B) the raw ingredients to make soap, are
 - (1) oils – palm oil, coconut oil, even fish oil; smelly oils – that arrived by train in huge drums
 - (2) for bar soap, caustic soda or lye, from soda ash
 - (3) for soft soap, caustic potassium, from potash
 - (C) these were boiled in huge – 3-storey – kettles that were heated by steam under high pressure
 - (D) after a few days, then the kettles are cooled and the results of the chemical reaction are removed
 - (1) the soap, hard or soft
 - (2) and glycerine which we shipped out, also in huge drums, to candy and food manufacturers
 - b. now the high pressure steam for those kettles came from three huge, coal-fired boilers, and it was one of the jobs of the students during the summer when they were shut down for two weeks, to clean the soot out of the horizontal six-foot high pipes that led to the chimney stacks – this would pile up three to four feet in height
 - (A) the good part of this job was that you got off an hour early to get cleaned up
 - (B) the bad news was that you couldn’t get clean, even though you could have all the soft soap

(mechanics used to use this because it cleans better than bar soap) or all the vanishing cream you wanted to get clean

(C) at the end of the two weeks you threw your clothes into the garbage

(D) but after all those showers, you still didn't look clean

c. there are some stains that even soft soap won't clean!

3. what is the message of the text?

a. sin is a stain just like that

b. no matter what effort you may make you cannot get clean

c. soap – it may have been the latest development – the X-box – of its day (the Phoenicians who lived next door to the Jews were shipping it commercially in the sixth century before Christ) ... but it won't cleanse this stain of sin

d. even that very potent mixture called nitre – which would take your skin off if you left it too long – won't touch sin

e. sin leaves an indelible stain; sin is heinous

B. Sin is Heinous

1. the subject of sin is not a popular one

a. many disdain the concept of sin and guilt; on this subject, Ravi Zacharias has written the following: ^{–{2}}.

“The first response that one may have, and many fall into this attitude towards guilt, is to expel personal and public guilt with a brazen irreverence. This is a posture that implies that nothing in life is essentially sacred and that guilt is a conditioned response orchestrated by religion. What they argue is that religion is something manufactured, to control others with guilt and fear. Even legal theorists are now calling only for the appearance of wrong, rather than calling something wrong”

b. and, even among Christians, it is not something that we want to talk about; a subject to be avoided

(A) some advocate selective forgetfulness for Christians, listing the “Things Christians should remember: the Lord and his blessings, Christ's death on the cross for our sins, the eternal truths of God's Word. {Hence}

(1) We must forget our sins.

(2) We must forget ourselves.

(3) We must forget our shortcomings.” ^{–{3}}.

- (B) now Christ has indeed forgiven our sins and fulfilled God's promise as given in Micah 7: 19 (NAS): "He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea."
- (C) and also that in Jeremiah 31:34 as we have recorded in Hebrews 8:12 (NAS): "for I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."
- c. BUT, there are also reasons that we should remember sin: that we may glorify God and give witness to His salvation
 - (A) Psalm 40: 12 (NAS): "For evils beyond number have surrounded me; My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see; They are more numerous than the hairs of my head; And my heart has failed me." provides the context of in which David wrote verses 2–3 (NAS): "He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear, And will trust in the Lord."
 - (B) we opened our service today with the reading of part of Psalm 51, where David remembers and confesses his sin; why? Verses 12–13 (NAS) tell us: "Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, And sinners will be converted to Thee."
- d. and
 - (A) if we are going to glorify God for His salvation
 - (B) if we are going to witness to others of His salvation
 - (C) then it is important that we can convey how heinous sin is before a holy and almighty God

2. people, even God's people, belittle sin

- a. in this era of "political correctness" people have found all sorts of euphemisms – candy-coated words – for sin
 - (A) the public figure
 - (1) politician, athlete, preacher
 - (2) found out in some indiscretion, immoral activity, misuse of funds in trust, illegality
 - (3) is described as making an "error in judgment"
 - (4) but, really, it is sin
 - (B) under "lie" in the Oxford English Dictionary ⁻⁽⁴⁾ is to be found the following entry: "white lie: a

consciously untrue statement which is not considered criminal; a falsehood rendered venial {pardonable} or praiseworthy by its motive. 1742 in *Gentl. Mag.* XI. 647 A certain Lady of the highest Quality ... makes a judicious Distinction between a white Lie and a black Lie. A white Lie is That which is not intended to injure any Body in his Fortune, Interest or Reputation, but only to gratify a garrulous Disposition and the Itch of amusing People by telling Them wonderful Stories. 1785 {Canon William} Paley *Mor. Philos.* (1818) White lies always introduce others of a darker complexion. ..."

- (C) and, I am sure that you can think of other examples of phrases used by the media, by society for disguising sin and all of its ugliness
 - b. also, people make all sorts of excuses for their sin
 - (A) "I couldn't help it ... I had had too much to drink"
 - (1) which is then used to justify adultery, because the person was then, supposedly, no longer in control
 - (2) and the same excuse is used, but fortunately not accepted, when they have killed someone while driving an automobile
 - (B) John MacArthur Jr., talking about a disturbing trend of a psychological movement in the Church to believe that a Christian cannot grow without being treated first by some counsellor digging up and freeing them from hidden things in the past, makes this comment: "I hear people say, 'But I come from a dysfunctional family.' Join the human race! I come from a dysfunctional family, I conduct a dysfunctional family, I am a dysfunctional human being, and so are you. I cannot function the way God made me to function. I cannot do what I am supposed to do. I do what I don't want to do, and I don't do what I want to do—I am dysfunctional! I was raised with dysfunctional people. I still live with dysfunctional people, and they live with a dysfunctional person. That's the way it is if you are fallen." —^{5}.
3. sin is not a simple mistaken act; no, it's heinous, it's against God; it's rebellion against a perfect, loving, holy, almighty God
- a. and no matter
 - (A) how we euphemize it
 - (B) how we candy-coat it

- (C) how we window-dress it
 - b. sin is still heinous
 - c. and we are all, every single one of us, guilty of it
4. BUT this is the wrong place to finish this morning's message; what a sad, desperate outlook that would leave with us!
- a. that is the outlook that is found in Jeremiah 17:9 (NAS): *"The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"*
 - b. that word "desperately" is also translated "incurably"
 - c. we could get into a discussion of semantics as to which is worse, desperate or incurable? Yet, by and large, they both mean the same thing: without hope; without hope.
 - d. however, this same word was used by Job of his condition in Job 34:6 (NAS): *"Should I lie concerning my right? My wound is incurable, though I am without transgression."* and we know from what followed that Job was cured.
 - e. Desperate? Incurable? Without hope? ... not when God enters the picture!

C. God is Gracious

1. for here is the great truth that counters the terrible, horrendous fact that sin is heinous; our rebellion is desperate, incurable
- a. but let us turn to the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church; remember this place in your Bible; if you have to do so, then dog-ear the page: Ephesians 2
 - b. Ephesians 2:1–3 (NAS) describes our state before God: *"1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."*
 - (A) dead ... now, isn't that a pretty desperate situation?
 - (B) ... isn't that fairly incurable? ... hopeless?
 - (C) we were the walking dead and were
 - (D) *"children of wrath"* ... standing condemned before God

- c. and then comes two of the most important words in the Bible, indeed, in the English language; “BUT GOD.”
 - d. For continuing to read in Ephesians 2: 4–9 (NAS): “4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”
 - (A) God is merciful, rich in mercy, abounding in mercy
 - (B) God is loving, great in loving, greatly loving us sinners
 - (C) God is gracious, graciously kind, graciously saving
 - e. don't you see now why you need to mark this chapter?
2. but, you ask, didn't you say sin is rebellion against God? ... then how can that be changed? ... good question
- a. God stepped into history to transfer that polluting stain of sin away from us, onto His own pure, perfect Son, Jesus
 - (A) we were helpless to do anything ourselves; Romans 5:6 (NAS): “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”
 - (B) we were sinners, unlovely, yet, Romans 5:8 (NAS): “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
 - (C) ... enemies, rebels, treasonous, Romans 5:10 (NAS): “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”
 - b. Because the Lord Jesus Christ was perfect in every way, without sin, then a second wonder takes place: not only is the stain of our sin place on Him, but His righteousness becomes our clothing by which God sees us; 2 Corinthians 5:19–21 (NAS): “19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through

us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

D. Conclusion

1. so, then we can see that God’s salvation is tremendous
 - a. He has dealt successfully and eternally with most heinous item in the universe, sin – both its guilt and its shame
 - b. so then, we with the Psalmist, have a
 - (A) a reason to glorify God
 - (B) a story to tell; small wonder that we can sing
We’ve a story to tell to the nations,
That shall turn their hearts to the right,
A story of truth and mercy,
A story of peace and light,
A story of peace and light.

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noonday bright,
And Christ’s great kingdom shall come to earth,
The kingdom of love and light. —{6}.
2. What about in your life?
 - a. Jeremiah 2:22 (AV): For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD.
 - b. your own efforts cannot cleanse from you the stain of sin
 - c. but God can; God can and God does
 - d. may God’s Holy Spirit speak to each and every one of you, so that you will leave here this morning rejoicing in the fact that through the work of Jesus Christ you have been perfectly cleansed; cleansed whiter than snow

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick's database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. “Guild Expelled by Irreverence” by Ravi Zacharias, A Slice of Infinity – Kerux illustrations #22689
3. “Selective Forgetfulness” by Andrew Acquistapace – Kerux illustrations #1411
4. “The Oxford English Dictionary” in twelve volumes, 1933, a reissue of “A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles,” 1931, University of Oxford Press
5. “Christian Counseling: Putting On The Lord Jesus” by John MacArthur, Jr. – Kerux illustrations #965
6. “We’ve A Story to Tell” by H. Ernest Nichol (1862-1928)