

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
Take the Next Step: Book of Titus
March 2, 2008

Gospel Clean!
Titus 3:3-8

I was never so dirty, filthy really, then I was when I was once year, during my elementary years at the Arlington Heights Evangelical Free Church's annual Sunday School picnic. If you grew up in a church, and if your church had a Sunday School picnic then you are familiar with egg tosses, 3-legged races, etc. And those are fine – but our church did something different...

I don't know exactly what to call it. There would be a large tarp spread out on the grass, and each boy and girl would bring from their home the messiest food items they could find: syrup, catsup, mustard, oatmeal, spaghetti, eggs, chocolate sauce, milk, molasses, etc.

Then, when the whistle blew – it was a free for all to pour, splatter and smear all that stuff on each other – in our hair, our faces, in our noses and ears – all over our clothes - I have never been so completely messy as I was then.

My parents would put plastic bags on the car seat while we drove home, and then they would say – “Get in the shower”. And the water with a little soap would wash all that mess away – down the drain. The washing would transform us from dirty to clean.

If you can picture the dirtiest of the dirty and contrast that with the cleanest of the clean – and marvel at the water that washes it down the drain – *if you can picture that* then you can picture what Paul is going to talk about today in our text. Paul is going to use the image of physical cleaning to illustrate something much more important – spiritual cleaning. You can clean a muddy child, or a dusty car or a stained shirt - But can you clean a stained soul – a dirty,

filthy, guilty conscious? There are people who know they have been dragged through the mud of this life. They fear they are so far gone no one will ever accept them again. It is one thing to clean up physically, but can you clean up spiritually?

Turn there with me to the book of Titus – chapter 3. We are in the section in which Paul takes Christianity out of the sanctuary and onto the streets of the community. Out of the narthex and into the neighborhoods. Does the church have a message for regular people with messed up lives - or is it only for squeaky-clean do-gooders who put on fancy clothes on Sunday and look as if they have no problems at all? Look with me at verse three.

Exposition

Verse Three - Dirty Laundry

Titus 3:3 For we too were once foolish, disobedient, misled, enslaved to various passions and desires, spending our lives in evil and envy, hateful and hating one another.

It starts with “for”. In other words, Paul is continuing his discussion of verses 1-2. The “for” provides the reason *why* believers can do good and be citizens for Christ in the general community. “For we too were once.” Paul says - open the scrapbook, people – pull out the old photo album – time for a trip down memory lane and it is awfully messy: We too were... “foolish” (making self-centered choices, don’t listen to advice), “disobedient” (rebellious against authority), misled (not an excuse, but your state spiritually - deceived by confident voices that sold you a bill of goods and by a world system that promises everything and delivers nothing), “enslaved to various passions and desires (various passions – love, food, money, greed, gluttony, power – all kinds of passions and pleasures (lit: *hedonism*) the world told us would make us happy). “Spending our lives in evil” (bottom line: it was a life in opposition to what God wanted

– endorsed by the worst celebrity – the Devil – it was an evil place – not good, not morally neutral, but evil...) “**hateful** (of their own life) **and hating one another.**”

Our dirty laundry is flapping in the wind. And we say -- “Paul why did you need to bring that up again?” Why did you have to remind us how bad we were before we found Christ? It’s because Paul doesn’t want you or *I to ever forget that as we leave the sanctuary and enter into the streets that we were exactly like the people around us.* Paul says - don’t you dare look down up, or judge or turn your nose up at “those people”. You were once just like them. Remember the Dicken’s Christmas Carol? The Ghost of Christmas brings Scrooge into his messy past and Scrooge says, “Enough – Show me no more!” But he must see what he was if he is going to change. That is the way you were, until you were cleaned up. Verses 4-7

Verse 4-7 - Washed by the Spirit

Titus 3:4 But “when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, Titus 3:5 he saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, Titus 3:6 whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior. Titus 3:7 And so, since we have been justified by his grace, we become heirs with the confident expectation of eternal life.”

Verses 4-7 are one sentence in the Greek. It is one thought. It may well have been an early hymn of the faith – an early creed or confession that they recited in their worship services. Paul says – you were a mess until:

The kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared. That is the way it was for you, until God the Father sent God the Son, Jesus Christ, into this world reflecting his love as he died for you, to save you from that messy life and give you a fresh start. This is the turning point of human history, the hinge on which the history of this globe turns. Pastor David

Jeremiah, a great radio preacher's show is called "Turning Point," because the good news of Jesus Christ is the Turning Point – Capitol T, Capitol P.

Because when that happened... **He saved us (3:5)** (from that messy life – from the punishment that would follow such evil deed). But ... key point: **It was not by works of righteousness that we have done.** Paul has been stressing good works to the church for three chapters – beating the drum over and over so that some in the church have by now become icons of good Christian work and they have begun to think this: "Wow – look at all the good I am going. Look at the blessing I am experiencing. No wonder God saved me ... and not those messy people." NO Paul says – please be clear you are not saved by anything you ever have or every could do. Statistics I read consistently reflect the belief that people believe that if they work hard enough – do enough good deeds, they will one day perhaps make it into heaven. No so!

So how are we cleaned up? How are we saved? **On the basis of God's mercy** – his undeserved kindness to us, **through the washing of the new birth (regeneration) and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.**

Now what is "washing of the new birth?" Some will argue that this refers to baptism - but I don't think so. The context is of spiritual cleaning, the cleaning of the human heart - the source of the cleaning is not water by the Holy Spirit, who renews us from the inside out – makes us a new person. Baptism, later on, is an outward picture of the inward washing that takes place at conversion to Christianity. But this washing is inward, and spiritual and instant - the cleansing of the soul. Remember, too that Paul's refutation, in the broader context, of the false teachers were in chapter one, teaching the people that it was possible to be pure through physical actions – selection of various foods, ceremonial cleansing. Paul is saying the cleaning you need does not come from water – but the Holy Spirit.

Shakespeare's Macbeth, you may recall that Macbeth kills Duncan and he has the blood of the murder on his hands his wife says to him: "Go get some water, And wash this filthy witness from your hand. Why did you bring these daggers from the place? They must lie there. Go carry them; and smear the sleepy grooms with blood." Macbeth freaks out a starts to panic at his guilt and what he has done – he cries: "*Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather The multitudinous seas incarnadine, Making the green one red.*" Don't worry, Lady Macbeth says: "A little water clears us of this deed; How easy it is then." But as the play goes on she realizes that water can physically, but it cannot touch the stains on the soul.

But for us the Spirit has been "**poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior.**" (3:6). The picture is that of a basin of water completely emptied – we are drenched with the Spirit's power to clean us up spiritually from the inside out. And so verse seven, "**We have been justified** (declared not guilty) **with God by his grace and we are heirs with the confident expectation of eternal life.**" Do you hear the assurance, the strong assurance – confident expectation of eternal life? Do you know for sure that when you die, you will go to heaven? It is a tried and true question. The Bible teaches we should have a confident expectation of eternal life. Notice, also that we are heirs. The spiritual cleanings not only forgives us our sins, but it restores the broken relationships between us and God – we are adopted into his family, and now we are rightful heirs waiting for our inheritance.

Verse Eight: Application

We move toward application in verse eight. That which was dirty has now been made clean, in Christ. By the scrubbing of the Holy Spirit poured out over us. This is Gospel Clean!

This is the good news of the Christian faith. Paul says, “**This saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on such truths.**” (3:8a). And so when a person does respond: “**So that those who have placed their faith in God may be intent on engaging in good works. These things are good and beneficial for all people.**” Here we have come full circle, a messy life, cleaned inwardly, by the Holy Spirit – so that we might engage in good works.

Continue in Your Good Works. I want to talk to our regular attenders and members. You have invested some of you almost two years into this church plant. You have been doing very good work for the Lord, both within the church and in the community. How are you feeling? Are you getting worn out? That would be understandable. I feel a little tired. Are you wondering if you are making a difference? Is what we are doing mattering? Yes – I think it is. I know of someone’s life who has been changed because of this church. Living Faith. Changing Lives. It is not just a slogan, you know. There person’s whose life has been changed – *is you*. We have all been changed – we are all being shaped by God through this church plant. I don’t know what the future holds. I have great confidence it will be to good things and greater impact and usefulness to God. It is a good work that we are doing here.

10-years before LCCC started, another small group – in Rockwall, was associated with our mother church Trinity Fellowship. And they said they wanted to change from a small group into a church. “OK”, said Trinity – they organized, identified a pastor and began to map out the process of planting a church. And then the group said, “Stop! – We didn’t realize it would be this much work!” And it did stop.

Grade schoolers, youth, adults – men and women – I want to remind you this morning that a church plant is a lot of WORK. It is HARD work – it will not happen on its own – but it takes faithful and dedicate people willing to be used by the Lord. It is hard work but it is GOOD

WORK. It is good work because it is GOD's WORK. Paul said to the church in 2 Thessalonians, in the context of local church ministry: [2Th. 3:13](#) Brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing what is right. Don't grow weary – it is hard work, but it is good work because it is God's work. And we do not do accomplish in our own power, but God Himself strengthens us for the task. If you take God out of the Good works – you have nothing left at all – Zero.

We started with a mess and we end with good works – that is the spiritual journey – and this work you have committed to is a good work. Well done. Don't grow weary. By His power and grace. It is hard work, but it is good work, because it is God's work.