

Washed with soap yet iniquity marked

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[0 : 00] Jeremiah chapter 2, we read of verse 22. For though thou wash thee with niter and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God.

For though thou wash thee with niter and take thee much soap. What is being described here in the days of Jeremiah is a solution that the Israelites and the people of Judah think that they can do by altering the outward cleanliness and the outward appearance of their relationship to God.

And yet fail to recognize that the real problem is within. The real issue is within. And that which must be addressed is not that which any amount of outward ablution can sort.

When it says with niter, nowadays of course we would understand that to be potassium nitrate or saltpeter as it's sometimes referred to. But in the olden times almost certainly this refers to a nocturne or nitre which was in Egypt certainly.

And it's also perhaps the same stuff that's in the base of the Dead Sea. When lakes on water evaporated in some of these Middle Eastern watering holes or whatever, there was this sort of hard crystalline kind of element left.

[1 : 28] And this was gathered up and used as a sort of detergent type kind of soap thing. And you scrubbed with it. But, you know, if you're scrubbing with something that's made of crystals, then that's going to tear away half your flesh.

You know, but its potency at cleansing away stains and outward dirt was recognized. And this was the sort of, as I said, a crystalline deposit that was found at the base or at the shores of lakes and so on.

When they evaporated in the heat of the sun before the rainy season came again. And still to this day at the Dead Sea, there's a whole industry there of its minerals and salts and muds and so on that are meant to be very healthful and good for the skin and so on.

But that's what is meant here, this nitre, the crystalline forms. Not the modern day potassium nitrate, but it is that which was used in ancient times as an extra scouring strength and an extra cleansing agent.

Not just a softer soap, although that too is made mention of here. But no amount of scrubbing. You can scrub until your skin is raw. You can wash until you're as pure as can be.

[2 : 41] And yet all of that will only solve the outward hygiene problem. And the outward hygiene problem cannot be solved permanently because you can wash as clean as you like.

And in a couple of days you're going to need to wash again. Just because of the nature of our lives, the nature of ordinary body secretions and sweat and so on. We have to keep on doing it because we have to keep the dirt down.

We have to stay clean. Outwardly, it's not a case of once washed, that's me clean forever. But rather, the problem is not what is on the outside. As Jeremiah is making clear in this chapter, the Israelites believe falsely that because the evil that they practice is done in secret, that God doesn't see it.

He talks about them having, you know, the idolatry that's carried on at every green tree and every hilltop and so on. According to their cities, so are their altars.

And the idea is that they would make their little false gods and their statues. They'd put them in a grove of trees where it's hidden from the rest of the world. Or at the top of a very high hill, they'd make another altar to a false god.

[3 : 54] And nobody goes up there. And nobody sees. So God wouldn't see. And then they would carry on their normal lives as though they were good, upstanding Israelites, as though they only worshipped Jehovah.

But really, they would go to their little secret household gods. They'd go to their grove. They'd go to their mountaintop altar or whatever. And they would seek the blessing or the help of these gods that they have made themselves.

And when they are found out, then they're ashamed. But it's not the shame of repentance. It's just the shame of remorse. It's like it says, verse 26, as the thief is ashamed when he's found.

He's not ashamed that he's stealing, but he's filled with shame when he's caught. And so, likewise, as the thief that thief is ashamed of his found, so is the house of Israel ashamed. They, their kings, their princes, their priests, their prophets.

Same to a stock, that is, to a block of wood. Thou art my father. To a stone, thou hast brought me forth. Oh, of course, it's not just an unadorned block of wood. It would be a block of wood from which they had carved the image of a false god, an idol, or whatever form that took.

[5 : 03] So, likewise, a stone. They would have carved the stone into the shape of a statue, to which they would then burn incense, and then they would pray to it and make out that it was somehow their god that would deliver them.

But, of course, at the end of the day, it is just a stone. A fancy carved stone, but a stone nonetheless. It is a block of wood. A fancy carved, god-shaped block of wood. But it is just a block of wood at the end of the day.

It cannot save, and it cannot deliver. However, the real problem is within. Now, so much of our lives goes unseen by most people in the world, and yet the effects of it can be seen.

We may say, for example, disappear for a fortnight, and nobody sees us. But if we then come back and look at all brown and tan, they'll think, Oh, maybe they'll be in our holidays. They've been somewhere abroad. They've been somewhere nice, and they've got lots of sun.

So, that's where they've been. And the outward effect shows of what we've been doing somewhere where nobody sees us. And likewise, if we engage in a dissolute lifestyle, but it's all behind closed doors, and nobody sees us doing, the effects will appear in our physical condition.

[6 : 16] It takes its toll. And such a lifetime given over to dissolute living and to the wrong ways, it drains away the energy of the life from our lives, from our bodies, and so on.

Likewise, if you go off to a gym or something, and you're constantly working out, and most people don't see you at that gym, but they'll see the effects of you having worked out, and how healthy and strong you look, and so on.

It is the same spiritually. If you go away to your closet and shut the door and spend your time with the Lord in His Word and in prayer, then that will show in your outward life.

And likewise, if you run away to the hilltop or to the grove and you're worshipping a false god, or you're dabbling in the occult, or whatever it may be, I realise that's maybe not a big thing for most people here, but let's take a more secular example.

If in the privacy of your own life, or your own home, or your own time, you're instead pouring your energy, pouring your devotion, your worship, your attention, your time, your money, into simply the things of this world, then as Jesus said to the Pharisees, that's why, you know, they already have the reward.

[7 : 30] That's what you want, that's what you'll get. Some years ago, I happened to be visiting a young man who was going through a difficult time in his life, and it was a personal situation, and because of what had happened, he was emotionally pretty miserable.

And I went round to see him, and we went for a wee walk, and you didn't hear where his house was, and he had just got himself a, I think it was a big motorbike or something like that, and there it was gleaming in the sort of driveway, and he had his sort of, his remote control ignition key there, and it was just as it was going away, he clicked it, and the things flashed in it, and it came on, and he shrugged.

He said, stuff, that's all, it's stuff. Because his own heart was so sore, because his own life was so empty feeling at the time, all the things he had worked for, all the things he'd surrounded himself with, and felt as if this was going to make his life, it was just stuff at the end of the day.

At least he had the clarity to see that, and no doubt able to turn to the Lord and seek greater blessing from him. But at the end of the day, some people fill their lives just with stuff.

And if they go enough times to the gym, or if they buy the latest bike or car, or whatever it may be, or they go on this course, or they do that, or they fill their life with this achievement or that achievement, or they rise to the top of their profession, then they will have the self-esteem, then they'll have the blessing or the feel-good factor that they so crave.

[9 : 00] But at the end of the day, it is just stuff. And all the time that we pour into it, and all the energy we give to it, we are seeking to sort an inner problem with an outer solution.

For though thou wash thee with nitre and take thee much so, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God. Let's keep it on outward examples for a minute.

Let's say, just for the sake of argument, I had a tattoo. If I had a tattoo, a tattoo, as you know, it's ink injected and used a needle to go under the skin. So if it's under the skin, then it doesn't matter how much you scrub away, that tattoo is not going to come off just by washing it and scrubbing it and so on.

The only way you can do it is by burning off the skin and several layers of it. So, you know, you can't sort a problem that is underneath simply with outward hygiene.

Now, the problem for Israel here, like the problem for so many of us, is that when we are out of the public gaze, when we are alone or when we are in our own time or our own priorities or whatever, the Lord is not in those as he should be.

[10 : 16] And this is the problem for Judah and this is the problem for Israel. This is the problem so often for us. But it's not whether or not the content of our services is more uplifting, if we went to more services, if we went to more prayer meetings, all these things are good and right, but they are still at work.

When you listen to people's testimonies, it always amazes me how much, when I listen to people's testimonies, and I expect to hear something like, well, I want to hear this or so-and-so on it, and there was such a powerful sermon that day.

That's what changed my life. That's what did it. And, okay, it may be a brick in the wall, a stitch in the tapestry. It may be one factor and one little drop in the bucket, all these things adding together. But there's no single life-changing thing so often when you hear people's testimonies. What you get is there's this bit, there's that bit, there's that bit, there's that bit, the next bit. And all the while in the background, in their lives, in their hearts, in secret, the Lord is at work.

The Lord is at work in their individual lives. The Lord is at work secretly in their heart. The Lord is working within. And that is where the solution to the problem must be found, within, because it is an inner problem at the end of the day.

[11 : 33] It is a spiritual problem we have. We are separated from our God. And except and unless that be the Lord that rectifies that within in the heart, we will continue to flounder around, saying, Oh, I'm not a bad person.

I'm not really too bad when you look at the rest of the world. And God says to verse 23, How canst thou say I am not polluted? I have not gone after Baal and all the other false gods.

He says, I see what you do in the valley. Now this was the valley of Tophet, or the valley of Hinnom, it's sometimes referred to as. And in its darkest days of idolatry, what the Israelites would do is they would take their children, or one of their children, or more of their children, and they would sacrifice them in a most nauseating manner to one or other of these false gods, or Moloch, or other ones.

And they would do it in the valley. The valley would become filled with the screams of the victims, and flowing with the blood of the victims. And because of the almost constantly burning fires of the dead, this is one reason why the Hinnom Valley, when it changed from the Hebrew into the Greek in the New Testament, was referred to as Gehenna.

And Gehenna is one of the words that is used to describe hell. Now that valley was taken as a picture of hell, with the endless burning and the screams of the victims, and the endless slaughter that was going on there.

[13 : 03] And this is what they did. And they said, oh, we're not polluted. Just because we're not doing it in the temple itself, or just because we're not doing it in the open face of the Lord. We think God can't see us.

Now our nation is steeped in slaughter, in the blood of the innocent. Our nation is steeped in unrighteousness. Our world, our society is filled with evil.

Well, I'm not part of that. I'm not guilty of that. We don't have to look very far to find how much we are guilty of. We fall into this problem of thinking, because most of what I do wrong I do in secret, nobody sees.

Well, that may be true for the world. But if most of what I do wrong, God doesn't see, then that's a complete falsehood. All that would be needed for us to be shamed in the eyes of our neighbours, and of the world, and of everybody else, is simply for the true story of our lives to be told publicly.

Every day of our lives, set out there in the open, all the account of our lives, all that we have done, all that we've said in secret, all that we've whispered behind people's backs, all the things we are so glad nobody knew about, all of that set out in the open, in the bright light of day, we'd just be looking for a hole deep enough to hide in.

[14:17] And that's before you bring the judgment of God into account. How canst thou say, I am not polluted? Verse 35, Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me.

Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned. Now is this not most people's lying? They think, Well, I'm not a bad person. Yeah, I'm not a saint.

I haven't done as well as some others. But hey, I'm not that bad. You know, and if there's a heaven, then I should be going there. And you know, I can amend my ways a wee bit. I can change a wee bit of behaviour here and there.

It doesn't matter how much you try and clean up your act. No, thou wash thee with nether and take thee much soap. Yet thine iniquity is marked like a tattoo under the skin.

Not just like dirt that's ingrained in the lines of your hand. It's actually deep, deep inside. Marked before me, saith the Lord. There's nothing that outward attention or behaviour can correct.

[15:20] This is a problem that has to be sorted within. And when we think about the Lord, it's not just about, Oh, well, how can I please him by doing a wee bit of this or a wee bit of that?

You know, some years ago, a roving reporter went round, a Christian reporter with a microphone, interviewing people. I think it was in the United States. And said, Do you think you're a good person?

Yeah, I think I'm a good person. Okay, every single person would begin with that. Yeah, I think I'm a good person. What would be a bad person? Oh, well, you know, somebody was a criminal or a thief or a rapist or whatever and so on.

And I said, what do you think about God? Oh, well, God wants us to be good, you know. And did you sin against God? No, no, I don't really sin against God. So, have you ever told a lie? And then we say, well, yeah, okay, I have told, I have told a lie.

I says, well, it says, and by the old wires, I'm going to the lake of fire. You ever committed adultery? Remember that Jesus said, you know, if you even think about it, then that's the same as committing. Have you ever thought about it? And they say, well, yes, okay, fair enough.

[16:19] We have thought about it. Have you ever wanted what somebody else had and thought about stealing it? Well, yeah, sure. A lot of times. So, by your own admission, you're an adulterer, you're a thief. And if you're angry with someone in the case that you wish that they were dead, you're a murderer too.

Even if you don't physically commit these things in the eyes of God, to think them, to want them, to desire them, it's the same as being. The problem is within. And all these people say, okay, fair enough.

Yeah, we would be condemned, right? You know, if God were to apply all his rigorous judgment to us, as we were singing earlier, thou, O Lord, juts mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?

But there is forgiveness for thee, and the damnedest be feared. You see, this would all just be bad news, if it were not for the fact that there is good news. Earlier on, in this week, one of our family had lost an important document.

And an important document, they're phoning from someone else, looking all over where they were, looking all over the house, couldn't find it, couldn't find it. And then, and I think, oh, know where it might be, and then look somewhere else.

[17:26] No, it wasn't there. And then somewhere else, and then finally, it was found. But there is that sense, as I'm sure you'll think, you know, if you lost your car keys, or something like that, and then you think, ah, I'm looking in entirely the wrong place, I know where it should be.

And then you go on, look in that other place, and you find it. And when you think, oh, no, I'm looking in completely the wrong place, the first time, that doesn't make you think, oh, no, all the time that I have wasted, all the problems I've had, scurrying around, scrambling about here, looking for my lost keys, or document, or passport, or whatever it might be, and it's in the wrong place.

The relief of thinking, oh, no, I know where the right place is, this is where I have to go on, sure enough, there it is. That's good news, you're just so glad you found the thing. It's good to be told.

Look, you've been looking in the wrong place, all this time. It's good news, because your item isn't gone forever, it's just, hey, you've got to look somewhere else with it. And this is what this verse 22 is.

Though I wash you with night, and then take thee much so, yet an iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord. You can't solve the problem if you're looking in the wrong place.

[18 : 35] And if you're looking simply to change by behaving a wee bit, simply be a wee bit better, you know, they might be nicer to people, and so on, and maybe go to church a bit more, or whatever, that's all at work.

That isn't going to solve the problem. The problem is with it. When we think about the Lord, it's not just a case about trying to please Him with a little bit more of this, a little bit more of that. When the Lord changes our heart, He causes us to love Him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

What does the Bible say about love? It says, in Corinthians, using that old-fashioned word, charity, that means self-giving, self-emptying love. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have no charity, I am become a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

It's like an empty gong or a tinkling piece of crystal or whatever. And even though I can speak with angelic beauty, the tongues of men and angels, you think, oh, listen to them speak.

Oh, they must be so filled with the Spirit. If I haven't got love, if I haven't got the love of the Lord in my heart, it's nothing. I am become a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

[19 : 43] Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I can remove mountains and have no charity, I am nothing. Lots of people have got faith.

The people who blow up others with bombs and who decapitate others, they've got faith in something. Their faith is in the wrong thing. Their faith is in the wrong person.

You can have as much faith as you like, but if it's not in the right God, if it's not in the right Lord, if there isn't the love of the Lord in your heart, it's nothing.

I could remove mountains and I have not love, I have no charity, I'm nothing. And though I restore my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned and have not charity, it proveneth me nothing.

If I have not the love of the Lord in my heart, all of these things will do me no good, because it is the heart which must love the Lord with all its heart and soul and mind and strength.

[20 : 44] The problem is within. And all the obedience to God's commands and all the things that we seek to do, thinking we please Him, it will not even begin to do it unless first our heart is changed.

And this we cannot do for ourselves. It is only the Spirit of Christ that can do it. As Jesus Himself says in John 6 and verse 63, it is the Spirit that quickeneth, the Holy Ghost that brings alive, the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.

The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life. And this was the problem with the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They were seeking to do everything in the flesh. They were seeking to do all the outward stuff and all the outward conformity, but the heart wasn't changed.

There was no love in the heart. They were looking in the wrong place. And so they would never find what they were looking for no matter how much they rummaged.

And only by the Lord's grace were able to say, I'm looking in the wrong place. This is where I should be. Though thou wash thee with nitre and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord.

[21 : 58] How can those marks ever be washed away? Only by the blood of Christ shed for us upon the cross. We are going to the wrong place if we think we can change our own lives ourselves to please the Lord or to get us safely across the threshold into glory.

Job, probably the earliest book in the Bible ever written, puts it this way at the end of chapter 9. I am afraid of all my sorrows. I know that thou would not hold me innocent.

If I be wicked, why then labor? I am vain. Why am I doing all the things I'm doing? Why am I knocking my head against the brick wall? Why am I trying constantly to make my behavior pleasing, acceptable?

If I wash myself with snow water and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch and my own clothes shall abhor me. Iniquity is marked before me.

It's what God says to Jeremiah. For he is not a man as I am that I should answer him and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any days man betwixt us that he might lay his hand upon us both.

[23 : 10] That means a sort of referee, one with a hand on the head of each combatant. Who can come between us and God? Paul writes to Timothy, 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 5, where there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

There is a basement betwixt us. There is one who can place his hands at work both in the Lord's hand and in our hand. There is one but only one who is a mediator between God and man. And Isaiah 53 puts it this way in verse 4, verse 6. He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[24 : 20] We have turned everyone to our own way. We have sought to fill our lives with the stuff that we think will make us happy. We have sought our own affirmation, our own approval, our own self-fulfillment and self-esteem in the stuff, the empty things of this world which cannot solve an inner problem with an outward solution.

For though thou wash thee with nighter and take thee much so, yet an iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God. Who alone can wash away that iniquity?

Nothing but the blood of Christ can take it away. You see, man, whether Israel or anybody else, man is not designed to be this kind of slave of sin.

That's not how he was created. You know what it says in verse 14. Is Israel a servant? Is he a home-born slave? Why is he spoiled? Israel was not meant to be a home-born slave. Israel was not meant to be merely a chapel or simply a unit of work.

In Exodus 4, this is what the Lord says about Israel. Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn. And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me.

[25 : 40] And if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn. Israel's not a slave. He's not meant to be the child of the bondwoman.

He's not meant to be Ishmael, the son of Hagar. He's meant to be the child of promise. He's meant to be the Isaac, the child of the covenant. That's what Israel is meant to be.

And the New Testament tells us that even as Gentiles, we are grafted into this inheritance, into the wild olive tree being grafted in to the pure and the true natural.

So likewise, we are grafted into Israel's inheritance. We are not the child of the bondwoman, but of the free. We are not meant to be slaves to our own sin and to this world.

We're meant to be free in Christ. And what was it that the Lord said, remember, about Israel when he's speaking to Pharaoh through Moses? He says, let my son go. Let him go free that he may serve me.

[26 : 39] You see, this is what our freedom is designed for. So often we think, oh, well, if I were free from all this religious stuff, I could do what I wanted. But it's not really what we want, is it that we do?

It's what the world dictates to us that we should do or we should want or how we should be. It's what our own particular desires or lusts compel us to do or force us to do.

We are effectively slaves to ourselves and to the world until we are set free. How much of our lives, how much of your life, if you think about it, is conditioned by doing what you think people will expect you to do or what you think will gain their approval or what you think will make you look better in their eyes?

We're not really free. We are only free if we are free in Christ. And it is only that inner problem that can be solved by the inner application of his spirit and his precious blood and his life.

And when he renews our heart and enables us to love him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, when he puts his spirit within us that cries, Abba, Father, not master as a slave to his master, but rather Father.

[28 : 00] Jesus taught his disciples when you pray, say, Father. We're not intended to be slaves. We're intended to be free in Christ. God created man for fellowship fellowship with himself.

He made them male and female to reflect the completeness of his Godhead. And he designed them for fellowship with himself. Let us make man in our image.

Yes, he had the capacity to serve because he had free will. Because God wanted man to be free, to be able to love him freely. And without that love, it doesn't matter what else we do.

It doesn't matter what other gifts we may have. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, I have no charity. I look at a sounding brass or a tinkling seal. Though I have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries and all knowledge.

Though I have all faith so that I can remove mountains and have no charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and though I give my body to be burned and have no charity, it profiteth me nothing.

[29 : 06] And then it goes on to list all the virtues and aspects of charity of that kind of love which is exhibited perfectly only in Christ, of course. But that love that the Lord desires us to have for him, that love which is above all and through all in the Christian life, that's what we ought to be seeking.

And it is an inner application which then manifests itself outwardly. You see, this is the thing that God, once he couldn't get his head around in the sense of couldn't understand, because of course God understands everything.

We go back to verse 13, it says, My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me in the fountain of living waters and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Now a cistern wasn't just a pot. It wasn't like a big cauldron. A cistern was literally hewed out of rock. You had a cistern cut into rock and it was like a huge big water tank and water would flow in there.

But the water that filled it up would just lie still. It wouldn't say stagnant, it would hopefully stay fresh, kept in by the stone, but it was just still water. It wasn't flowing water, it wasn't fresh running water.

[30 : 21] And this is what the Lord says, They have forsaken me the fountain of living waters and have hewed them out cisterns, which even if the cisterns worked, it would still be just still, stagnating water.

But they're not even good cisterns, they're broken cisterns, they're cracked and the water just oozes out away from it. It doesn't hold any water. And I alone supply what they need, says the Lord.

He can't understand, if we can say that reverently, why Israel would want to so damage themselves as to turn away from the blessings that they had in the Lord to the emptiness of the world and the false gods who cannot save.

Because there will come the day where eventually they will be in need. And then, when they cry to him in need in the time of their trouble, verse 27, they'll say, Arise and save us.

But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble. For according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah. If something terrible was going to happen to us, if there was a tsunami going in from the bay or an earthquake or we were being bombed or something, an awful lot of people, I imagine, would suddenly cry out to the Lord.

[31 : 38] And if the Lord were to say, Well, you've got your motorbike or your cars or you've got your career and ask it to save you. You've got your bank account asking it to save you. You've got all the things of the world that you've built up neglecting me and turning away from me and saying they were more important than me.

Go to your golf course. Go to your club. Go to your gym. Get them to save you. Go to your career. Get it to save you. None of these things are going to save us when the time comes.

And even if we seek to amend our outward life, it will not solve the problem with it. For though thou wash thee with knife and take thee much salt, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord.

There is only one who can address this problem and that is Christ. He alone is the one who is the days man said betwixt us, who is both God and man, who alone can bridge the divide, who alone can enter the heart through his spirit, who alone can change our heart and put the spirit of Christ there, crying, Abba, Father, testifying that we are not home-born slaves.

We are children of God. Children designed to inherit. Children designed to love the Lord with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

[32 : 56] That is what we are created for. And when we begin to fulfill the purpose for which we are created, there is that sense of fulfillment, that sense of satisfaction.

We all know of people, surely we all know of people, who maybe are doing jobs which maybe aren't as high-powered or as highly paid as maybe they could have achieved. We say, well, why are they doing that job?

We say, because this is what they love to do. This is where their gifts are. This is what they're good at. This is what they get satisfaction from. Because maybe they were doing this different job before and they never could get on with it or that other job that they just couldn't enjoy.

Then they found their niche. Then they found the thing that all their gifts and all their expression and all their abilities could be poured into and it would just blossom in their hand.

And that's what they gave themselves to. Maybe they could be getting another more highly paid job somewhere else but it wouldn't fulfill and satisfy in a way that this one does.

[33 : 59] The one for which they know this is what they were meant to do. This is what they were meant to be. Now for every soul that finally finds Christ, they have that sense of this is what I was meant for.

This is what I was designed for. And yes, when we're in Christ, we do seek out of love for him to amend our outward behavior. We do seek to be faithful in our religious devotion.

We do seek, yes, to be at services and outwardly to not do things to offend people. We do seek to give the Lord our best in every sense. But it's not now in terms of impressing him.

It's rather out of love for him. We know that if we fail or we stumble, it's not the end of the world because it's not the end of our relationship with him. All the years, my own father is no longer living. But if I were to say to my mother, for example, you know, all the years you did all that ironing and washing and cooking and so on, was that to make dad love you more? She would have said, don't be silly.

[35 : 06] Just do it. It's just what I do. But he doesn't love you more because, no, I know he loves me anyway, she would have said. I know he loves me. I know he cares for me and I care for him. This is just part of what I do.

And what he does, it's part of what he does. And he's not thinking, oh, if I earn more money, then she'll love me more. No, if there is that love, then you do what you do and you do it to the best of your ability.

You give all that you can and you be all that you can be. But it's not to earn more love and it's not to earn points and it's not to earn salvation. When we're in Christ, we have found our niche.

We have found our fulfillment and the thing for which we were designed. And there is that satisfaction. There is that fulfillment. There is that sense of being clean on the inside because we are cleansed by the blood of Christ, which cleanses us from all sin.

And then the outward washing, yeah, unheated place. Yeah, then you can take your knife out and your soap and you can be as clean as you like outwardly. It'll only last a day or two, but you can do it and you can give the Lord your best and you can conform your behavior outwardly to the best that you can be.

[36 : 15] But it's not to earn points and it's not to gain luck. It's just to show love for the Lord who first loved us. Our iniquity is marked and it is marked deep.

We cannot pretend with the Lord that we are innocent because we're not. Because thou sayest, I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from thee. Behold, I will plead with the hour you'll demonstrate for nothing as righteous as we think we are.

There is no goodness in us. All our goodness is in Christ. All our righteousness is in him. All our hope of cleansing within is in Christ.

He alone is able to solve the inner problem with the inner application. All the rest, it's just window dressing. It's just tinkering about round the outsides.

It's like if you take your car to the garage and say, I think there's something wrong with the carburetor or whatever. And the mechanic says, okay, I'll have a look at it. And you come back and your car is washed and polished and gleaming.

[37 : 20] And it's absolutely, you think, that's great. You did that as well. And you open the bonnet and he hasn't touched the problem at all. He's made a lovely job on the outside. The wheels are gleaming and the car is sparkling and it's been beautifully validated.

But the engine hasn't been touched. And that's not why you took it there. You took it there to have the inward problem solved. And this is why we must come to Christ. Outward cleaning may be lovely, but it will not solve the problem.

Though thou wash thee with knife and take thee much salt, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, said the Lord. And yet we believe in one of whom it is said, surely he hath borne our iniquities. He has taken our griefs upon him. And he it is who solves the problem within. So that that which is without may flow out and follow after.

This is the solution to our problems. This is the good news that we've been looking in the wrong place. But there is a place to look where we shall find all that we need and all that we desire.

[38 : 27] And that place is in that person who is Christ Jesus. Our Lord. Let us pray.