

We all want to be perfect, like the liquid in this glass, white and spotless, pure and holy. We all want a perfect world, a world without problems, a world without people who harm others, loved ones who don't let us down, and drivers who don't cut us off in traffic.

But that's not the world in which we live. We live in the midst of a sinful world filled with sinful people. The news headlines tell us this. Our daily interactions with other human beings tell us this. Even as we look in the mirror and see our own imperfections, foibles, and shortcomings, we know that things are not as they should be.

And so we go on a quest for holiness, to turn that pink back into white again, to return to the paradise that was lost. We as humans seek to defeat sin and imperfection.

For those of you seeking perfection, Jesus gives you bad news. **“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”** Our theme for today: FROM THE HEART COMES SIN, BUT THE LORD IS GREATER THAN OUR HEARTS.

Jeremiah writes, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”** The Bible teaches the doctrine of total depravity. The Bible teaches that humanity's nature is corrupted in its entirety such that from our hearts flow evil thoughts words and deeds. To put it simply, I. From the heart comes sin. One theologian put it this way, “total depravity doesn't mean that every human being is as wicked as they could possibly be. Rather, it means that the fall is so serious that it affects the whole person.”

Take this jar for example, is all the liquid in this jar pink? Yes, it is. But can I take a spoon and siphon out all the pink particles and leave the white ones behind? No, not without a fancy tool like a centrifuge or something. Is it as pink as it could possibly be? No.

What total depravity means is that sin affects our entire being, it affects our bodies so that we decay and grow old and die. It affects our minds, so we think twisted thoughts. It affects our hearts so that we desire evil and selfish things. Does that mean that all of us are serial killers and criminals? Again, that jar could be pinker.

And so we see that out of the heart comes things such as murder, sexual immorality, theft, and deceit. It's not as though these sins came from nowhere; they came from the heart. They came from the totally depraved human being.

What are we to do? II. Humanity manages symptoms but doesn't find the cure. Jesus is speaking against the pharisees in this text. What did the pharisees do? They saw the sins outpoured in these buckets, the murder, the sexual sins, the theft,

and the lies, and they said, we have a solution, let's make some more laws! Ten commandments not enough? How about six hundred thirteen?

Now, we might look down on the pharisees and wag our finger and say “shame, shame,” but the Pharisees were the Biblicists of their time. The 613 commandments were taken directly from Scripture. A trained pharisee could cite the chapter and verse of each commandment. Never go against a trained pharisee in a game of Bible trivia. They knew the Old Testament better than any of us.

And so we might take the Bible and try to apply it to our laws today. Murder? Let's outlaw abortion. Let's get the right set of gun control laws. Let's reinstitute capital punishment. Adultery? Let's have landlords not allow unmarried couples to sign leases. Let's get rid of no-fault divorce. Let's force google into blocking inappropriate Internet content. Theft? Let's increase the punishment for white-collar crime. Let's double the funding for Internet piracy policing. Let's give people stricter punishments for shoplifting. Deceit? Let's shut down social media, so lies and misinformation would stop spreading. Let's actually put some teeth in libel legislation to give news outlets more than a slap on the wrist.

If all or some of these wishes came true, do you think the world would be a better place? Most likely, but would it eradicate murder, adultery, theft, and deceit? No! The problem still lies at the source!

Maybe we should take a different tactic. Don't focus on not doing what you shouldn't do but focus instead on doing what you should do. Get filled up with good to overcome the evil within. If pink is sin, then dilution is the solution to pollution.

Yet we all know that's not the case. Even if I filled this glass to the brim, and it would be almost white, white to the untrained eye, we still know what's there, there's still a little pink dye. We can't save ourselves by good works outweighing the bad.

Okay, third time's a charm, what about this? The real problem is the murder, adultery, theft, and deceit in the society around me. Andy Dufresne, The protagonist of the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* is framed for a crime and sent to prison. He later remarks, “On the outside, I was an honest man, straight as an arrow. I had to come to prison to be a crook.” Maybe if we just get away, that will be what the heart needs to heal itself.

In Jesus' day, a sect of Jews called the Essenes tried just this, get away from the corrupt society and live apart in a special community. The monks and nuns of the Middle Ages tried this also. Today we might see this in the Amish or Mennonites.

The way we might see this in our lives is trying to start new. If I just move to a different town, if I just cut out the toxic relationships in my life, if I just find the right guy or girl, I can get married and we can start our own little garden of Eden.

But what's the issue? Let's go with the marriage analogy. Take a totally depraved man and a totally depraved woman, and mix it together and you get a... totally depraved child. The sin and brokenness follows you. Andy Deufresne's flawed premise that he was an honest man before prison.

Jeremiah writes, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”** Yet the text continues **“I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”** The Lord knows the heart of man, and III. The Lord is greater than our hearts.

And so David prays in Psalm 51 **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”** And God does do that. He does that in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is pure, perfect, holy, even more crystal clear than us our on best days. He is without sin, not even original sin, that inherited depravity you and I have. He's incapable of sinning such that sin simply slides right off of him. And He entered this world to cleanse our hearts.

He fulfilled the law for us. All those rules and regulations the Pharisees wished they could keep, He actually kept for you. He took on your sins and carried them to the cross. He forgave them, and rose again on the third day, leaving the sins in the grave.

Jesus said, **“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”** Faith in Jesus cleanses our hearts and removes the stain of the original sin. It transforms us into new creatures who want to keep the law and fulfill God's commands.

And this happens through baptism. The Lord prophesied of Ezekiel saying, **“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”**

And so this Sunday we had a baptism, and that was the real miracle. This is just a parlor trick with a bit of knowledge of chemistry and acid base reactions. In Christ, our desires are transformed, even if ever so slightly, and that is how we can truly have a world without sin, and a clean heart. Not through one more rule to follow, but through a transformed heart in Christ alone. Amen!