

Clean but Empty

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of true repentance and the dangers of spiritual emptiness, urging believers to fill their lives with the Holy Spirit to avoid backsliding into sin.

Duration: 1:04:40

Scripture: Luke 11:24, Luke 11:27

Topics: "Backsliding"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the issue of people making superficial decisions for Christ without truly committing their lives to Him. He shares examples of large numbers of people who made decisions for Christ but did not follow through in their faith. The speaker emphasizes the importance of true repentance and heartbrokenness over one's sin, rather than just a superficial smile. He also highlights the joy in heaven when even one soul repents and encourages the audience to share the message of Jesus with others.

Transcript

We'll read from Luke. Our text is in Luke chapter 11, and verse 24. When an unclean spirit goes out from a man, he goes through dry places seeking rest, and finding none, he says, I will return to my house from which I came.

And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first.

And it happened as he spoke these things that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to him, blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you. But he said, more than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. We'll stop reading there.

God's word says that if an evil spirit leaves a person, goes through bare and dry places, and seeking rest and not finding it. And then the spirit says, I will return to the one that I was driven from or where I've come from. I remember, I don't know.

I visited people in their homes. Now, we who grew up on the farms in those days, we always took a gun with us. That was for hunting purposes because we often saw birds or something that were a nuisance

and then we shot them.

And then I went to a certain farm where many people lived, went in there. Now, it was a new experience for me going into this hut where they have the fire inside the hut and the whole hut was filled with smoke and tears filled my eyes because I wasn't used to it. But then I noticed that if I go down close to the flame of the fire, that's where I could, there's the least smoke.

I saw the man of the house there. He was a heathen. I spoke to him about the Lord Jesus.

I could hardly speak Zulu and I couldn't read it. So I'd used to read the German text, just one verse, and then I'd practice it in Zulu. So we sat there close to the fire.

There was no stove with the chimney. It was just this open fire. I opened to John 15.

I think you're all familiar with it. I told him about the Lord Jesus. And I said, don't you want to accept the Lord Jesus and invite him into your life? He said he'd like to.

So we knelt down there and prayed that the Lord would come into his life. I was overjoyed. My heart was bubbling over thinking that there must be joy in heaven now because of the soul that's been saved.

Got home. I said to them, guess what happened to me today as I was on my way? They said, ah, you probably shot a buck. I said, no.

They said, oh, maybe you shot a duiker. They were trying to guess why I was so overjoyed. And I said, no, you're wrong.

I said, no. I met up with someone. I could tell him about the Lord Jesus and he accepted the Lord into his life.

We could pray with him that the Lord comes into his life. I remember the joy I had realizing that for one soul that repents, there's joy in heaven. And that's what I often did, going from house to house, telling people about the Lord Jesus.

After a few days, I met up with this man who had accepted the Lord. When I saw him, I thought I'd find him in this new life. But then I, to my dismay, heard him swearing, saying things he shouldn't say.

And then I thought, oh, that happened to him, what the Lord Jesus spoke about, where he said, if an evil spirit leaves a person, goes through dry places, doesn't find rest, and then comes back to the person that he's left. And where he says his end state is seven times worse than before. And I thought, well, it's not just seven other spirits, it's maybe 70 other spirits that he's come back with.

If evil spirits are driven out of a person, if the Lord sets someone free, and that person is not faithful to the Lord, his end state will be worse than before. Dr. Peter Hammond gave me some types. And we looked at one, and it was an American preacher speaking.

He said there's a huge congregation, a church in America. And he was saying that there was a time where over 290,000, almost 300,000 people committed their lives to the Lord, who made a decision for Christ. But of these 294,000, only 14,000 attended church after that.

But they say today if people commit their lives to the Lord, 80 to 90 percent of those backslide. Can you believe that? That's a problem. I remember when Billy Graham said that when he first started preaching the gospel and he'd do altar calls, people would come forward weeping, crying because of their sin.

Where previously they came with tears and crying, now they come with a smile on their face. So there's no true repentance and heartbrokenness about the life that they had lived. And years ago, Reverend Bonka was here in Peter Merrittsburg.

Many people came. They said 4,000 people gave their lives to the Lord. Decision for Christ.

And then I spoke later to somebody who had been present and who was also involved and who had also followed up on these people who had made the decision for the Lord. And I asked him, I said, of those 4,000 that made a decision for the Lord, how many of them have gone through and really followed of these 4,000? And he said, well, he thinks he knows of four that really went through. So one out of a thousand.

So many people may say they make a decision for the Lord, but it's really just a game for them. So it says here that the evil spirit leaves a person, goes through dry places, seeking rest and finding none. The evil spirit doesn't find rest out there in the wilderness, in a dry place.

And then he decides to go back to the one that he had left. And then he comes back to find the house put in order, everything is clean. And then he says, well, let me go back and get seven others that I met up with in those dry places.

And then we'll come back and we'll inhabit this place again. The Lord Jesus says the end state of that person is worse than the first. It's a dangerous thing to say you've made a decision for the Lord, you've committed your life to him, but you don't do it wholeheartedly.

And you don't do it in cleansing your life. God is, man is created in God's image. The devil doesn't like to stay out there in the wilderness in a dry place, where it's just dry and full of thorns.

He wants to stay in a nice place. He wants to stay in those that have been created in God's image. In out there in the wilderness, he's got no peace.

He has no joy. He has no rest. So he says, I will go and stay in those people who've been created in God's image.

And I'll make a point of staying in those who have made a decision for Christ. And then he remembers while I was out there in the wilderness, I met seven worse demons than myself. So he invited his friends and came back and came and inhabited this heart, this life again, that he had been driven out of.

And his last state was worse than before. This place that had been cleansed and cleaned and put in order. In Second Chronicles, 721.

And there we find where it speaks of the temple, where it says, as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, why has the Lord done this to this land and this house? People were shocked to see the house in the state it was, whereas before it was so exalted, so wonderful to see. People had been touched by the glory of this house, how exalted and how beautiful it was. And now they go past and they see it deserted and defiled.

You see, that's what can be, it can happen to a Christian as well, where people say, but this person was such a Christian on fire for the Lord. But now just look at him now. Look at his state, the state he's in now.

Here in Luke 11, verse 24, it says, I will return to my house from which I came. You find that he says he'll go back to that place where he comes from. And then the last state is worse than the first.

However, after he had left, the place was found to be swept and put in order. When the Lord Jesus comes into someone's life, he sweeps it clean and he clothes him in nice and beautiful garments. It is put in order and decorated beautifully.

What is it in English? It says put in order. In Hebrew, it actually means more than that. It becomes beautiful with glory.

Jesus clothes a person with his glory and people see the beauty of Jesus in a person. But when the devil comes back into that life, it's worse than before. Remember once when he went and he drove out those evil spirits and the spirits said, can we go into the pigs? In Israel, there were many sheep, but it's interesting that the demons, the spirits asked to go into the pigs.

They entered the pigs. Do you know what pigs are like? It's like a person who becomes a Christian and then stops sinning, but then goes back to his sin and that person is likened to a pig. So those pigs are like someone who lives for the Lord, but then backslides into sin.

Such a person is also likened to a dog that vomits and then goes back to its vomit. A pig is cleaned, washed, and then goes back and wallows in its mud again. But when the devil comes back into that life, it's worse than before.

Remember once when he went and he drove out those evil spirits and the spirits said, can we go into the pigs? In Israel, there were many sheep, but it's interesting that the demons, the spirits asked to go into the pigs. Some people, they refuse to eat pig meat. They say it's unclean and that the evil spirits went into the pigs.

They don't realize that those pigs all drowned. And after all, it has a much deeper meaning that it's referring to those who live a pig's life, who live in sin and stop sinning and then go back to their sin. See this person, the spirits left him, but he didn't do proper repentance.

He didn't turn away from his sin as he should have. And that's why the devil... Yes, there was some sweeping that was done, but he didn't do it thoroughly. When you repented, did you do it thoroughly? Did you get rid of all the sin that was in your life? When Nicodemus came to the Lord Jesus, he said, we know that you have been sent by God.

But it's not enough just to know that. But that's not enough because Jesus said to him, Nicodemus, even if you know that, but you will not enter the kingdom of heaven if you have not been born again. And Nicodemus with all his intellect and all his studying and knowledge, he didn't understand.

He said, but how can a grown up person go back into her mother's womb and be born again? You see with Nicodemus, his believing was just, his faith was just in his head. He didn't really know the Lord Jesus personally. And if he'd have died in that state, he wouldn't have entered into heaven because to enter heaven, you have to be born again.

And he hadn't been born again. It doesn't help you to say you're a Christian because you've been taught how to be a Christian. You've just been taught how a Christian lives at school.

That's not enough. And salvation is not by education, that you just learn it. It goes into your head.

No, it's something that must go into your heart. It must happen in your heart. A certain woman, a young lady who was also singing in the choir, God started working in that congregation.

One day she got up in church and said, she said, it's not right. We shouldn't drink any soft drinks. We should only drink pure water and grape juice.

She said, we must also not just wear any color dress with different colors, only black dresses. So she came there and made a law of this. So the devil got into her.

And that brought death to the congregation. See, the devil doesn't find any rest out there. He likes being among Christians because the Christians, they just play to his tune.

See, that's where the devil comes to find peace and rest. And that's where he's happy in those hearts. There's another congregation where someone was a blessing in the church, also singing in the choir.

And one day this person came with a cloth on her head and took this duke or the scarf and put it over her head and tied it down here. And the older people, they were happy to see that. They said, oh, that's so good to see because that's how we knew it long ago.

But after a few weeks, it came out that the same woman had had an affair with a young man. So we need to make sure that our heart is cleansed thoroughly and that we don't allow any sin to come in because the devil will come even as an angel of light. In Luke 12, the Lord Jesus said, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.

For there's nothing hidden that will not be revealed. There's a day will come when your sin will be shouted from the rooftops. Dear friend, it's better that you call out your sins now, that you confess them now, rather than that one day they'll be shouted from the rooftops.

It's better that you confess your sin, that you voice it now and say what you have done and confess it, bring it to the Lord that he may forgive you, rather than that you hide it and it gets shouted from the rooftops for all the world to hear. See, the devil gets back into a person's life because you're superficial about your repentance. You say you accept the Lord, but you don't thoroughly cleanse your life and repent of your sin and that you confess your sin, turn from your sin and that you go back to those that you sinned with and apologize to them as well and get reconciled there too.

And then there are others who just cover over and cover up on their sins. They decorate over it that it all looks good, but underneath the sin's still there. One day the Lord Jesus went into the temple and he took a whip and he drove the people out.

He said, my father's house must be a house of prayer, but you have made it into a den of thieves. You see, they were there in the temple, but they'd done their own things there. They'd covered their sins with their own deeds.

They were hiding there in the temple, in the church, and doing their things there in secret. Just like even in these times, people hide their ammunition, their guns and their ammunition in churches because they say

the police won't suspect a church of doing such things. You see, when the Lord Jesus comes into a person's life, he does a thorough job.

He deals with all the sin and it gets thoroughly cleansed. And then he clothes you with his beauty, his glory. But if we have a superficial repentance, then we sit in the church, but we sit there and in secret do our sin.

You sing in the choir and you say, well, I'm a Christian because I'm even singing in the choir. And maybe you get baptized and you say, well, I'm a real Christian because I've been baptized. But you are living in sin.

You even partake of the Lord's Supper, yet there are things that are wrong in your life. That's where the devil finds real rest and peace, and he's very happy to live in a place like that. But your heart will get harder and harder.

You'll be a real hypocrite and just putting on a show. When Adam and Eve had sinned in the Garden of Eden, when they had sinned, they suddenly saw that the glory and the beauty of God had left them. They went to the fig tree and took some fig leaves and they wove those together to make a covering for themselves.

When God came, they hid from him. And he said, Adam, where are you? He started with Adam, do you men hear that? You who are the head of the home, God will come to you first, call you to account first. God will come to you first, call you to account first.

And then God said to him, Adam, have you eaten of the fruit of that tree, which I told you not to eat of? But remember, it was Eve who was first deceived, who was there and saw of that fruit and ate of it. And then she went to her husband and said, don't you also want to eat of it? And he fell and ate of it as well. During the minister's conference, we heard one of the speakers say that there are those who say, well, I'll just get married to an unbeliever.

And when we are married, then I'll win my partner, spouse over to the Lord. But in the end, it's you who gets won over by the ungodly partner. And because you cannot bring someone to repentance, only God can.

If someone stands on a table and you on the ground, and you say you want to pull that person up from the ground onto the table, what usually happens? It's the other way around. It's the one down there who will pull you down to his level. And you'll end up down there at the bottom with him.

And it happens like that when someone is unspiritual as well. He'll pull you down if you partner with him. And then it's difficult for a person to confess his sin.

And God, when God said to Adam, Adam, did you eat of that fruit that I told you not to eat off? And Adam said, oh, it's Eve. And then he said, Eve, did you eat of it? And she said, oh, it's the serpent. It's so difficult for a person to confess the sin he's done.

He'll always blame the next person. But it's interesting when God spoke to the serpent and said, did you deceive them? Did you do this and cause this? The serpent didn't reply. And in that, the serpent was better than man.

See, Adam and Eve, even though they didn't have clothes, yet they were clothed in God's beauty, His glory. See, the glory of God was so great. That's what they saw.

They didn't see their nakedness. But when they had sinned, suddenly they saw just their nakedness, their shame. And instead of repenting and turning to God and asking for forgiveness, they went and they hid and they tried to cover up.

And they lost paradise. Why? Because of sin, their own sin. And it doesn't help pointing at the next person.

Point at yourself. You point at somebody with your finger. Look at my hand.

One finger. You point at someone with your finger. The one finger points at that person.

Three point back at you. And the thumb points up to God saying, God has witnessed that you are three times worse than that person you are pointing a finger at. The Lord says, don't judge your brother and point your finger at him and point at the splinter in his eye when you have a log in your own.

When I was in Germany once speaking to some students, I asked them how many splinters there would be in a log. One student got up and said, he thinks a million. I said, can that be so many? The fault that you see in your brother's eye and in your brother's life is that your own sins are a million times worse than that man's sin.

In finding and pointing the sin at somebody else, you are condemning yourself. Because if Jesus spoke the truth, you are a million times worse than what he is. And then the demons will say, well, let's go back to that person.

That's where we will have a real good time. I hope that you have understood what that means, which we find in the Bible. And that we won't just be hearers, but doers of that which we hear.

Don't say, well, I'm good enough because I go to church. Well, thieves also and criminals also go to church. I would be so happy if those demons that left you or leave you will not come back into you.

It's just something that came to my heart that I felt I wanted to mention. That demon came back and he found everything looking beautiful, but it was empty. There was no one guarding that heart.

There was no Holy Spirit with a flaming sword protecting. And we heard that that person didn't cleanse their life as they should have. There was something that stayed behind.

And it came to me that there are two possibilities, among other things, that could have stayed behind. The one is spiritual laziness. And the other thing is that there was an idol that stayed behind.

What would we think of a person who runs in a race, maybe a race that's two laps, an 800-meter race, and the first lap they're far in front and everybody knows they are going to win. And then the second lap he just starts walking and everybody overtakes him. It's possible that spiritually we start well, we cleanse our lives, we make restitution.

And then when we start feeling good about our spirituality and people are thankful for what the Lord has done for us, we slow down and we become spiritually lazy. I think especially of us young people and those who are still at school. I've confessed my sin, my parents are happy with me, my counselor is happy with me, I sing in the school choir, I play in the brass band.

But spiritually I'm on a holiday. I've got lots of time for myself and my own interests. I'm just cruising along, I'm just not doing anything wrong.

I read that somebody said that the first step in backsliding is if my grasp or my reach, that that I'm reaching out to is not further than what I'm able to grasp. He's become totally satisfied with what he has now. There's nothing more he's striving towards.

Even Paul, the Apostle Paul said, I'm not that I have attained to everything, I'm still striving forward. I'm still running as somebody that wants to win the race. He said we have to run like somebody who wants to win.

Maybe you're here at the mission, you're in the Lord's work, and it's all very nice and you're satisfied with it. But you're not running to win, you're just running even if I come last as long as I finish the race. That sin that we heard that's still left in your life, it's that spiritual laziness, that lethargy.

If you don't repent of that and return to your first love, sooner or later those seven demons will come back to you. And with that can go an idol. John the Apostle said to the children of the kingdom, not to the heathens, in the last verse of 1 John, keep yourselves from idols.

I read these days somebody said, anything in my life which I feel if I can attain to that, if I can be that, or if I can have that, it will satisfy me. Instead of Christ satisfies me, then that thing is an idol. Maybe you say, but I love the Lord more than anything else.

The Lord says we have to love him with the first love. If you really have the first love, then your love for all other things will be like hatred in comparison according to the word of the Lord. We thank you for what we've heard.

Lord, help us not to be like the Pharisees and Sadducees and Scribes in our spiritual lives, but Lord, may we be people who are clothed by Christ, clothed with Christ himself, that it will not be the devil doing his evil work in us, but that it will be you, Lord Jesus, who is at work in us. Lord, we pray that your speaking to us will not be in vain. Please continue working in every heart, that we will not just be people who are living with a devil in their hearts, but that we will truly be your temple, our God.

Now we pray, Lord, that your grace will be with us all, and may the love of the Father overflow in our hearts. At first love, and may the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us always, till the trumpet sounds. Amen.

you

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