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Desperate Households: Desperate for a Clean Sweep

1 John 1:8—2:2; Luke 7:36-50

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by Matt Hook

Desperate households. What are people so desperate for? Desperate to get away. Desperate for adventure. Desperate for purpose, to make a contribution. Desperate to be more. Desperate to be remembered. Desperate for personal peace. Desperate for escape from the situation you're in. Desperate to escape the pain. Desperate for relationships without the pain or awkwardness of real life. Desperate for healing. Desperate for meaning. Desperate for love. Desperate for truth. Desperate for friends. Desperate for significance. Desperate not to be left out. Desperate to get away from the loneliness, the pain, the bitterness, the emptiness. Desperate for satisfaction. Desperate to live up to others' expectations. Desperate for an anchor, for an identity, Desperate for a change. Desperate for margin. Desperate to be loved, to be known, to be held. Desperate for hope. Desperate for life to be better. Desperate to feel good... As I thought about it, I realized we really needed to take one last stand against our self-imposed desperateness.

Several years ago, newspapers carried a story about an elderly lady who lived in the Big Cypress Swamp in south Florida. Her home was an old shack located by a small pond. Every day the lady went out to the pond to draw water.

In the pond lived an alligator. Despite the danger, the lady allowed the alligator to live in the pond for years. It seemed tame. She didn't bother the gator and the gator didn't bother her.

However, one day while she was drawing water from the pond, the gator swam under the water and then lunged up, grabbing the old woman's hand with his mighty jaws. She tried pulling her hand out of his mouth, but the gator ripped it off. Bleeding profusely, the terrified and stunned old woman crawled back to her shack and called for help. Paramedics finally arrived and she received medical attention.

The next day, the park ranger found the alligator in the pond and killed it. When they cut the alligator open, they found the old woman's hand. The park ranger told reporters, "Alligators are most dangerous when they lose their fear of humans. By allowing an alligator to remain in your pond, you unknowingly give it the courage to attack. The lady still lives in the swamp. But there are no longer any alligators in her pond.

Too many times we think we can keep sin in our lives and not suffer the consequences. Eventually it will take a bite out of us. Paul in his letter to the Romans 6:23 reminds us that "the wages of sin is death." What we earn is death. You may be sitting here today, seeing for the first time the supposedly innocent stuff you've allowed in your life as the true alligators that they are. And you know what? They may not just be in your pond. Some of them have made their way into your house—your very household. You realize it now, don't you?

Don't be ashamed. Don't think it's just you. We live in a world wracked with sin. God never intended the world to be like it is. God designed the universe without sin: perfect and complete, without suffering, without death, without pain. But He created humanity with the ability to choose to be in relationship with him. Adam and Eve broke the covenant, and that is when sin entered the world. And sin has a cumulative effect. Alligators breed more alligators. We today are reaping the effects of caring for our alligators too much.

When I think of alligators, I think of the Gulf Coast and the high waters and the picture of the python that swallowed that alligator whole, and ultimately burst open and died? What an intense image of what happens to us when we stuff our alligators way down inside.

The problem is we've grown comfortable with the alligator in our lives. We allow it to make its home in our lives—in our very households! And we think we can live a normal, fulfilled life. Not only are we in danger of losing a hand, we are in danger of losing everything because of our sin isolating us and tearing us apart.

Our “desperate households” need a “clean sweep”. How do you get rid of the alligators in your household? Do you stuff them deep down inside? Do you visit a priest? Do you make up for them by doing an equal amount of good works? Hear the words of 1 John 1:8-2:2:

1 John 1:8 *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

In the midst of the theological explanation is a glimpse of God's forgiveness. John says there are two problems: **First, We cannot continue to choose to sin and remain close to Jesus.** That's like continuing to feed your alligator and invite more of them into your pond and expecting to be able to keep your eyes on Jesus and the full life he wants for you, rather than on those gators. That's a lie. **The second claim is to tell yourself you're without sin.** That's like pretending your alligator-infested pond is free from gators. That's a lie. That's when you get blindsided. But when we choose to walk in the direction of Jesus, we become aware of all that God still has to do within us to make us authentic.

We cannot live in fellowship with God if we live a lie. We must face the reality of our sin and deal with it. How? We *confess* (the Greek word literally “we acknowledge”) our sins. Instead of pretending they don't exist or hiding them under a rug, we acknowledge them to God. And God will “*forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*” God removes every barrier between us and God, even that of remembered guilt.

Here is the second part of this really good news: God will not only forgive us as we acknowledge the alligators. He will also *purify* us. God will even touch our motives and desires, and gradually reshape us. We will become men and women who really live and really love. We become desperate for all the right things!

To confess, we have to humble ourselves. Nothing will happen to the alligators in our pond until you and I humble ourselves. Humility comes from recognizing that all we have and are comes from God. The Greek philosophers despised humility because it implied inadequacy, lack of dignity, and worthlessness to them. Our proud selves sometimes slip into this view.

As Christians, we must resist the temptation of thinking the number of committees we have led, or the number of years of Bible study we've attended, or the number of sermons we have preached have earned us anything. Spiritual humility comes from realizing that “*There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who seeks God* (Rom. 3:10-11). “*Even our righteous acts are like filthy rags*” in God's sight. (Is. 64:6). Humility is not

belittling yourself, but exalting or praising others, especially God and Christ. Humble people focus more on Jesus and other people than on themselves. “*Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,*” said Christ. He daily demonstrated this when he befriended the sick, the poor, the homeless, the filthy sinner, the alligator-lovers of his day. He washed a lot of sick, smelly feet. He demonstrated *his* lordship by *not* lording over others.

“*In humility consider others better than yourselves,*” Paul writes to the Philippians, adding “*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*” The tough part is that we are followers of a man whose attitude didn’t get him crowned. It got him killed.

Jesus’ first “beatitude” was “*blessed are the poor in spirit.*” Those who know they are spiritually needy are blessed. Have you claimed your need for Christ? Do you know enough about yourself to know of your great need for God? Have you sought Jesus’ help to clean out your pond?

Some of our households are in need of a clean sweep. Like the alligator in the pond, the dirt and filth in our households have been a part of our homes for too long. You may be thinking “I’m tired of being desperate. I’m tired of managing my sin.” You know, today can be your clean sweep.

There are many here today living with alligators of unconfessed sin. And many of you have alligators lurking in your house. You think you’ve tamed them. You think you’re managing them; staying just this side of desperate. But aren’t you sick of it?

What does the Gospel say? It doesn’t say “Just dismiss it and pretend like it didn’t happen. Stuff it down inside and it will really go away.” That’s not how Jesus deals with things. He deals with them like he did in the Gospel of Luke, when he’s sitting down at the table with Simon the Pharisee and all kinds of dignitaries. And they’re sitting there enjoying supper, and Jesus, while he’s reclining there, hears a knock at the door, and a woman comes to the door, and she won’t be brushed aside. She pushes her way in, and every one is aghast when she walks into the room. What is *this* woman doing here, they ask. For she was a woman of the town that was well-known as a woman of the night.

She comes in her colorful clothing and falls down at Jesus’ feet. And Jesus watches her. And there is total silence in the room. And she begins to weep, gut-wrenching tears, uncontrollably at his feet. And she takes her long hair and she wipes his feet with her hair. And Simon the Pharisee is sitting there and though he doesn’t say anything, Jesus sees the grimace on his face as he is thinking to himself, “Why is Jesus allowing *that* kind of a woman to touch him? Doesn’t Jesus know what she’s about, what she is like? What is she doing here? And Jesus, sensing what he’s thinking, turns to Simon the Pharisee and says “You don’t understand, do you Simon? I walked into your house, and you didn’t even give me a cup of water to wash my hands or feet with, and yet this woman washes my feet with her tears. You don’t understand that those to whom a great deal of forgiveness must be extended are also those who are most grateful for the grace that’s shown them. You don’t understand, Simon, that it’s for such as *this* that I came.”

And then he turns to the woman. I can only imagine why she’s weeping uncontrollably. Is it the guilt? Is it the shame? Is it the dreams that she had that have been cast down? Is it the way she’s been used and abused by men through the years? Is it that she so wants one man—like Jesus to love her?

And Jesus looks at her, and I can see him raising her face, and saying to her “Woman, I love you. And my grace is sufficient for you. And your sins are forgiven.”

Listen carefully. There is not one of you in this room who does not stand in need of God’s grace, of what Jesus did in dying on the cross. Not one of you. None of you can self-righteously sit in Simon the Pharisee’s chair and point your finger at someone else. Because every single one of us has fallen short of God’s plan for our lives, and we have blown it again, and again, and again. But hear this: *Your* sin is not the unforgivable sin. You see,

the Lord understands the trauma you felt. He knows what was going through your mind as you were going through that. Even the most terrible thoughts—the stuff you did then--He redeemed.

You know what he longs for today? Not for you to stuff you sin back inside, but for you to say “Jesus, forgive me. Forgive me.” And when you call on your Savior, though your sins were as red as scarlet, they become as white as snow.

The Lord knows you better than you know yourself. He knows every one of you: The stories. He knows what you stuffed down inside of you and the secrets that no one else knows. And he stands ready today to say “I love you. My grace is sufficient for you. I forgive you”. And all you have to do is ask, so let’s pray together.

Lord Jesus, we are grateful that you came among us and showed us the way. And through your actions and your love for this woman who cast herself at your feet, that you demonstrated your love and your mercy. And we thank you that there’s not one of us that you turn away, when we confess our sins. Lord, for these who are here today who said for the first time in years “Jesus, save me. Forgive me.” Help them to know that they are forgiven, loved, and free. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.