Matthew 15:1-20

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[0:00] I've got no slides to put up this morning, but I've called this morning's session Matthew 15 verses 1-20. Now I know I didn't quite finish the previous chapter, but it's actually a lead-in to this anyway.

And I've entitled it Jesus Deals With Controversy and Identifies Hypocrisy. So if we turn to Matthew's Gospel, the end of chapter 14, then what you'll see is that the end of chapter 14 sets the stage for chapter 15.
No surprise there really, it's fairly logical. And just a brief reminder, coming to the end of chapter 14, we read here at the end of chapter 14, Jesus, from verse 34, when they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret, or they came to land at Gennesaret.
And when the men at that place recognised him, they sent word into all the surrounding districts and brought to him all who were sick. And they implored him that they might just touch the fringe of his cloak, and as many as touched it were cured.
So you've got this situation where we've had these two amazing miracles. He's had the multitude, and then he's walked on the water in the middle of a storm, and he's encouraged Peter to walk on the water.
[1:30] And out of those two miracles, they have become utterly convinced that Jesus is God. Important for us to realise that these miracles were witnessed.

They were witnessed by the disciples. The feeding of the 15,000 people, 5,000 men, was also witnessed by an awful lot of eyewitnesses. These are not things that they could have got under the radar and made up stories about, because people would have said, hang on, that didn't happen, I was there, I was...
Even though there were only disciples in the boat, they then arrived at the dock, and the people on the dock said, well, Jesus didn't get into that boat, how come he's getting out of it? There was a witness to the event.
And the one thing that they came away with was, in this man, Jesus Christ, we are dealing with God. And, you know, that is still the battle that rages in lots of people today.
Well, Jesus is obviously a good guy, and he said nice things, and he gave great advice. But God, and we must always remember when we read the scripture, that he didn't give us that option.
[2:44] He didn't give us the option of demoting him from God. He was either God, or he was the illegitimate child of a loose woman, and of no account whatsoever.

But he was God. And you may recall that they wanted to force him to be their king. And instead of submitting to him as king, they wanted to force him to be king on their terms.
Which, again, is another thing we regularly do with the Lord. We want him to serve us, rather than us serve him. So we make demands on him. I used to be of a branch of the church that does that all the time.
That if you just declare it, and he has to do it. No, he doesn't. He's God Almighty. And at best, we can ask him to do things.
And he is gracious, and he often acquiesces to what we ask him to do. But we are not, if you think about it, making these demands on God makes us more God than he is.
[3:49] And this is what they wanted to do. They wanted to force him to be king. Force him to acquiesce to their demands. And, of course, he didn't do that.

In fact, he withdrew because he had a mission. And unless he could fulfill that mission, he wasn't being anybody's king. And the condition under which he was to be their king was that they would welcome him as their king.

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Because they would believe in him. And they would give him the incentives of their long-awaited Messiah. And he wasn't prepared to be their king just because they wanted to force his hand, put his arm up his back to do stuff for them.
He wanted them to recognize that he was the fulfiller of Old Testament prophecy and he was the king. And they still haven't recognized that to this day, but they will.
The promise of Scripture is that he will return when they call out to him, Baruch Abba, Bashem Adonai. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
[4:58] When they cry that out, he will be back. And so, part of the knock-on effect of this was he finishes up at Gennesaret and everybody realizes he's there and they start bringing their sick and they're all reaching out to grab a touch of his garment and they're getting healed, left, right and center, and word gets out.

And that's when we enter this next chapter, which is... We'll read it.
We'll read from chapter 15, verse 1 through to verse 20. And incidentally, this account is also given in Mark's Gospel in chapter 7.
There's a little bit more detail in Mark's Gospel, some of which we will use this morning. But this was written to Jews, by a Jew, to Jews. And so it doesn't explain things that Mark does explain because Mark's Gospel was written to Gentiles and the Gentiles didn't know Jewish stuff so they needed the explanation.
So let's read from chapter 15, verse 1. Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?
[6:25] For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. And he answered and said to them, Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, Honor your father and mother, and he who speaks evil of father and mother is to be put to death.

But you say, Whoever says to his father or mother, Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God. He is not to honor his father or his mother, and by this you have invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.
You hypocrites! Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.
After Jesus called the crowd to him, he said to them, Hear and understand. It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth that defiles the man.
Then the disciples came and said to him, Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement? But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly father did not plant is uprooted.
[7:41] Let them alone. They are blind guides of the blind, and if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit. And Peter said to him, Explain the parable to us.

And Jesus said, He was still lacking in understanding also. Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.
For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulterers, formications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man.
But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man. So just as a bit of, if you turn to Mark's Gospel, chapter 7, what you get is a little bit more explanation of these washings.
Because as I say, the Jews didn't need further explanation. The Jews had lived this all their lives, and for many generations. But the Gentiles kind of needed a bit of help.
[8:55] And so if we just read the first five verses, which is the same event, the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered round him when they had come from Jerusalem.

And they had seen that some of his disciples were eating bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders.
And when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves. And there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.

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The Pharisees and the scribes ask him, why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands? So, what we have in this ritual is just that.
It's a ritual. And, having read this scripture from Mark's Gospel, the practice of washing before you eat and washing your copper pots and your utensils and everything else in a ritualistic way, and, of course, this is part of their everyday life as Jews, that they would do this thing.
[10:17] The question is, did God ask them to do this thing? How did they finish up doing this thing? And if you turn briefly to Exodus chapter 30, you will see the origin of this.

Exodus chapter 30.
And, Exodus chapter 30 is about the actions and requirements of the priests. And before we read it, what we need to remember is that the priests, when they were active as priests, they were standing in for Jesus.
They were a living example of what Jesus would do when he came. And so, everything about what they did reflected Jesus, but there was one aspect in which they couldn't reflect Jesus, which was, they were impure, where Jesus was not impure.
So, when they represented Jesus, they had to purify themselves first. And, obviously, they couldn't render themselves sinless, but by going through a ritual that everybody understood, they could be deemed to be sinless while they carried out their priestly duties.
[11:40] So, in verse 19, what we read is one of the instructions, Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it. So, this is, if you go back to verse 17, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, you shall make a laver of bronze with its base of bronze for washing, and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it.

Aaron and his sons shall wash their feet, their hands and their feet in it. When they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Now, what this was saying is, if you go in the presence of God without washing off the impurities, you're going to die.
And this is kind of what I would call a big law, you know? It's not the sort of law you want to mess with. You're going to die if you enter the presence of God whilst being impure.
And it was a right thing under the law for them to pursue that ritual for the priests when they were serving the Lord and doing the work of the Lord in representing the people before God.
But, as with many rituals that the Jews were involved in, the Jews took that ritual and then they applied something called the Mishnah and the Mishnah was a whole load of tractates and instructions and things that added to the law.
[13:13] And when it was adding to the law, it added things. the idea behind it was actually in one sense you can understand the care that they took which is we want to make sure we don't transgress the law so we will extend the law so that if anybody transgresses the extension of the law they still haven't transgressed the law.

It's a way of trying to ensure that they don't break the law. But of course once you start extending God's law where do you stop? And at what point does it become corrupt?
And it has certainly become corrupt here. So what they were doing was something by having this tradition of the elders noticed not from the law of God but from the tradition of the elders.
What they were doing by the washing was being righteous in their own eyes and they were being encouraged to do this by the religious leaders who used it as a way of controlling them above and beyond the law.
So the transfer of this ritual from the priesthood to the family it took place it's recorded in the Mishnah in something called tractate yadaim and where you get a copy of that I'm not sure because I stole that piece of information from somebody who knows about these things but it was an addition to the law of God while you're in the Old Testament look at Deuteronomy 4 and verse 2 and God is giving instructions to Israel and he says this in verse 2 you shall not add to the word which I am commanding you nor take away from it that you may keep the commandment of the Lord God which I command you so in this situation where they turn up and they say why are your disciples not following the tradition of the elders what they're asking is why are they not following these additions to the law of God that shouldn't be there anyway and what they then the point that they miss is the very reason for the need for washing is because the people have impure hearts so when the priest goes before God on the people's behalf he's going before God to make sacrifices to redeem those who have impure hearts the ritual washing of a family has nothing to do with any of this it's a complete travesty of the law so their question to Jesus why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders for they do not wash their hands when they eat bread didn't represent an example of the

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disciples breaking the law what it did was it revealed the ignorance of the religious leaders who were requiring them to do so and of course
[16:35] Jesus wasn't slow to pick up on that Jesus' response as is often the case with Jesus was to ask a question of his own so let's go back to Matthew chapter 15 I have to say as I studied this I was quite convicted about the the little we sometimes make of sin because this let me not jump the gun they were showing their ignorance they were saying why are they not obeying the tradition of the elders when there's no reason for them to obey the tradition of the elders as long as they were obeying the law of God at this point they still are under the law not under grace and they were demonstrating that either they were ignorant of that or it was willful ignorance they knew that they were wrong and I think that's a distinct possibility and so he introduces them to two scriptures so Matthew 50 verse 3 he says why do you yourself transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition now that that was a real kind of knife in the ribs for the Jews it was you know you think the tradition of the elders is important what about the law of God which should supersede any of this verse 4 for God said honour your father and mother he who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death but you say whoever says to his father or mother whatever I have that would help you has been given to

God in Mark's gospel that gift to God is called korban I'm not sure how it's pronounced I think it's supposed to roll the out korban but we'll thank korban because I can't get my tongue around it now this let's deal with things as they arise so the first thing he says to them is you're supposed to honour your father and mother that is recorded in scripture in Exodus 20 and we will turn there just so that you know I'm not making it up Exodus 20 and verse 12 now Exodus 20 is a passage where the Lord goes through the ten commandments and interestingly they're not called the ten suggestions you know they're the ten commandments and in verse 12 he says honour your father and mother that your days may be prolonged in the land which the
Lord your God has given you so not only was this a commandment of God you must honour your father and mother but on it depended whether or not you would live long in the land and cross that so clearly as far as God's concerned this is important it's not a suggestion it's not a bit of debatable doctrine it's a commandment and in Deuteronomy!
Deuteronomy 5 verse 16 you have a similar exaltation so you might as well turn there while it's close Deuteronomy! 5 and verse 16 honour your father and mother as the Lord your God has commanded you that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the Lord gives you notice in Deuteronomy it then carries on and says you shall not murder you shall not commit adultery you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour so the commandment involved was the fifth commandment and what Jesus is alluding to is that when you break the fifth commandment you could also because you're in the wrong heart you could carry on to break the sixth the seventh the eighth and the ninth commandment so this is what Jesus is saying to these people is why do you not revere the commandments of God never mind the tradition of the elders but the commandments of God that is out and out sin and so he's demonstrated to them their impoverished knowledge of the law and their hypocrisy because they've introduced man-made laws and put them in a position senior to the law of God and this is where I felt challenged and I think one of the main applications for us today is to really examine our own sin because how often do I put something in my life that I happen to want to do senior to the commandments of God now I'd like to think it happens less than it used to but it's something to which we are all vulnerable is to I happen to want to do something and so I excuse it because of the law that I've created in my own heart which isn't really a law at all it's a tradition of Ray you should see where I'm going with it we need to make sure I'll come back to this point but we need to make sure we attack our own sin all the time and put God's law first I'll return to that point in a minute but his challenge posed as a question that God
[22:43] God's law required the honouring of parents and honouring of parents had financial connotations honouring your parent was not only to say oh my dad's a great dad I love him so much but honouring your parents was to make sure you provided for them that you looked after them until the day they died as one teacher of whom I've heard quite a lot used to say they look after you in your paediatric years and you look after them in their geriatric years but the point is honouring them involves committing your resources and money to make sure they're okay for the rest of their lives and of course they used to have quite big families and particularly the men of the family were supposed to do this they were supposed to commit their resources to care properly for their parents

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and what's been said here to the religious leaders is what you've done is you've said to these men you don't have to honour your parents if you call it if you've got money and you call it korban you don't need to look after your parents anymore because you've given that to

God which has a fake righteousness attached to it doesn't it it's like you've given this to God so firstly you can't possibly give it to your parents now well hang on honouring God is also honouring your parents so it doesn't really work but the word I'm probably not going to go through all of these scriptures but the word korban in scripture if you just turn to Leviticus 2 verse 1 Leviticus 2 verse 1 and in the notes that you'll get there are several references but I'm only going to use this one for this morning just for the sake of time but I've given you several references you can follow up Leviticus 2 verse 1 now when anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the Lord his offering shall be a fine flower and he shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it the word offering is the word korban so it was an offering a sacrificial offering to the
Lord for something for sin for someone else's sin sometimes in verse 13 of Leviticus 2 it's translated as oblation in Ezekiel it's translated as holy offerings in the temple but at no point in the whole of the Old Testament has it got anything to do with money it's to do with sacrificial offerings and what these priests have done and we're kind of I think we've grabbed the reason why what these priests have done is they've said this money you've got to put aside for mum and dad which of course the law requires you to do as a way of honouring your parents you can give it to the temple as korban and then it won't go to your parents you don't have to look after them and then the reply might be and I freely admit I'm making this up but it's what I've kind of inferred from reading the passage the person then might say but then
I won't have the money if I make it korban I haven't got the money either and what the priests did was they said no you can keep the money and we'll just take it when you die so it's not your money anymore you can't do as you please with it so you can't use it to support your parents because you've given it to God and you can't take it back but who gets it at the end of the day where can you see the corruption in this it goes to the priests and to the temple so it's their way of lining their own pockets their future proofing their own ministry it is a travesty of what God intended when he said honour your father and mother and the other scripture that he refers to talks about let's go back to Matthew it says he who speaks evil of his father and mother shall be put to death now what that does what it did for me it meant me it made me realize it made me realize that failing to honour your father and mother in some way involves speaking evil of them and the only way I can kind of get my head around that is I can imagine people thinking I'm supposed to honour my father and mother and I got this money in the bank and
I don't really want to spend it on them because they're a bit of a nuisance really I can imagine that it means speaking badly of them in that sense rather than they're my mother and my father they brought me into the world I owe them honour the dishonouring was a way of speaking evil of them and therefore what Jesus was saying to these religious people is you should be putting to death anyone who doesn't honour their father and mother never mind encouraging them to do it all the more by creating an environment of financial corruption so that you provide a pathway for them to do it and the other thing of course is the pathway they created they created looks righteous oh I've given it to God you can't possibly expect me to take it back from God and it gives them a false righteousness that they can apply to looking after their parents and as I was reading all of this [29:04] I thought do I do that sometimes with my own sin do I put a fake righteousness out there so that people won't see the sin they'll see me so say honouring God when behind the scenes I'm not honouring God at all and I throw that as a challenge to all of us that we need to treat sin as seriously as Jesus does and that should make us treat it as complete anathema and this is a small aside to what I came to say but some while ago I found myself you know you'll understand what I mean by when you are under a besetting sin when it kind of won't leave you alone and it's almost like an addiction and you can't shake it off and I reached a point where everything in me said

Lord please get me free from this and a couple of days later I was listening to a bible study I was listening to a preacher and he was a preacher that I wouldn't normally listen to because actually he was hyper charismatic and I was about to turn him off and he said something about this particular sin and said God destroyed cities for that sin and it was like a switch was thrown and it was instantly changed instantly gone but it wasn't gone until I took it seriously and I think that was the important lesson for me at the time is when something is dogging you and won't let you go a lot of men suffer this with pornography the issue for me at this stage wasn't pornography it was something else but a

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lot of men suffer this with pornography I just can't not look at it
I can't leave it alone but we do need to get to the point where we say God destroyed cities for this God really really hates this with a passion I think another modern example of this kind of thing would be when rich ministries go into third world countries and take massive offerings because they've told the people from whom they're taking these offerings oh you'll be blessed if you do this because it's the godly thing for you to do when those rich ministries should be going into those countries and offloading their millions onto those countries to give them a better life I will be kind of that because it's God's money and it's for the ministry but you can give to our ministry and you'll be blessed if you do it's iniquitous it's just as iniquitous as what we're reading about here so the summary is a way to avoid honoring parents and keeping the command of God has been introduced to these people by the religious leaders and then they're being told off for not doing it
I mean it's again iniquitous I'll just read you an extract from the international standard bible encyclopedia and it says this anything dedicated to the temple by pronouncing the votive word korban votive means given for as an offering or a sacrifice so the votive word is korban forthwith belonging to the temple but only ideally actually it might remain in the possession of him who made the vow so a son might be justified in not supporting his old parents simply because he designated his property or a part of it as a gift to the temple that is as korban there was no necessity of fulfilling his vow yet he was actually prohibited from ever using his property for the support of his parents and that's the best summary I think and once again the establishment of korban was mishnaic it wasn't it wasn't part of the law it was part of the mishna you can tell me what I said it was funny or anything so they created a pathway that adult children could set aside their responsibility and kind of walk away with a clear conscience whilst the priests who put them in that situation were coining it and so
Jesus calls out this for what it is deliberate manipulation of tradition to circumvent the law and so he calls them out as hypocrites and he levels at them the damning prophecy of Isaiah 29 turn to Isaiah 29 he first starts at verse 13 then the Lord said because this people draw me with their words and honour me with their lips but they remove their hearts far from me and their reverence for me consists of tradition learned by rote therefore behold I will once again deal marvellously with this people wondrously marvellous at the wisdom of their wise men will perish and the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed so there is a God is saying if you jack up the traditions of men that he will come in judgment and take things away he says the wisdom of their wise men will perish and of course that's what's happening right before our eyes in Matthew 15
[35:27] Jesus has spoken and their wisdom begins to look most unwise doesn't it so he corrects their thinking then on what really brings about defilement and again I'm challenged by this they were worried you're eating without washing your hands and Jesus is saying look what goes in and I'm going to pre-see this because there's a lot on it but what goes into your mouth isn't what defiles you that goes into your stomach and is eliminated in other words to be slightly graphic it goes in one end and it's out the other and it's done it has no other effect on you what comes out of your mouth though that will defile you because your mouth speaks out of what is in your heart a long time ago I started to pray Lord take me to a place where I am so filled with your word and I'm not there yet

I am so filled with your word that what comes out of my mouth in any given statement is his word but what does come out of our mouths quite often road rage unkind words between husband and wife and vice versa accusation of our brothers in Christ disparaging our brothers in Christ who are they might be wrong but they're still God's kids and he thinks they're wonderful what comes out of our mouths that is what defiles us go back to Matthew we'll have a well worn Bible by the end of today we'll jump ahead and then jump back Jesus says to Peter who's asked for a further explanation do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated but the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart and those defile the!
come evil thoughts murders adulteries fornications thefts false witnesses slanders do you know I'm do I want to say this I'm often around men who despite being born again they trade in innuendo dodgy jokes and dodgy sayings or even flirtations God's word says let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth that's a high standard it means we shouldn't be involved in innuendos or dodgy jokes or anything unwholesome and that's a real high standard not to let anything unwholesome proceed from your mouth it's a real challenge to us

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I bite I bite my tongue far more than I used to but I still don't always succeed in keeping things like that and you know this is an area where we can help each other I used to be a truck driver and when you are among loads of truck drivers they use swear words for punctuation they even put them in the middle of words so you get like absolutely they're ingenious in the way they use profanity I don't find that helpful as a man who's trying to walk in righteousness so we can help each other by not being clever and introducing something with a bit of innuendo in it or something that has got a dodgy connotation to it we can help each other by keeping it clean and by keeping it righteous and we should and what's more and this is the hard one we should connect one another when we do it now that is hard because quite often the people who do it are the ones with whom you are most familiar and so to say to someone who you enjoy being with you have a lot of time with you might even be a memory of your family to say we shouldn't be talking about this should we it says what comes out of the heart this is the unregenerate heart is evil thoughts murders adulteries fornications thefts awkward false witness and slanders these are the next commandments in the list aren't they we've broken number five and this talks about number six number seven number eight and I think number nine one leads to the other and what comes out of the heart is completely contrary to
God's law so I think we are instructed Colossians three verses one to five turn there therefore if you have been raised up with Christ keep seeking the things above which is what we're talking about isn't it never mind paddling around in the sin keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your minds on things above not on things that are on the earth for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God you see we have a free pass out of all it's because we are a new creation in Christ and we died when we got born again the old you died now sometimes my corpse keeps complaining to me and keeps kicking out at me but actually the truth is it's dead when I go to eternity it won't come with me when
[41:43] Christ who is our life is revealed then you also will be revealed with him in glory the old self won't be there it'll be the new meaning therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality impurity passion evil desire and greed which are meant to idolatry so we're told to guard our hearts and to never stop battling with the sin Jeremiah 17 verse 9 tells us that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick so that old heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately sick I desperately want to get free from how do I get free from it let's turn to Psalm 119 because I do believe that part of the way to freedom from all this is to have the attitude that we find in the psalmist who wrote this psalm and you'll be pleased to know

I'm not going to read the whole psalm but I am going to read a couple of stanzas from it because there is a repeated desire Lord help me to keep your statutes and make me fall in love with your word so in the first stanza how blessed are those whose way is blameless who walk in the law of the Lord how blessed are those who observe his testimonies who seek him with all their heart they also do no unrighteousness they walk in his ways you have ordained your precepts that we should keep them diligently oh that my ways may be established to keep your statutes then I shall not be ashamed when I look upon all your commandments I shall give thanks to you with uprightness of heart when I learn your righteous judgment
I shall keep your statutes do not forsake me utterly so the exaltation of scripture is for us to chase down righteousness the second stanza how can a young man keep his way pure by keeping it according to your word with all my heart I have sought you do not let me wander from your commandments your word I have treasured in my heart that I might not sin against you bless you O Lord teach me your statutes and so it goes on there is an urgency to follow his statutes I'm obviously not going to finish this session so I will finish it next time but I've got quite a bit left to go but it's a good place to stop there is an exhortation in this passage for us to pursue righteousness when we read between the lines of what
God was telling them off for he was highlighting that you can't just decide that that commandment doesn't apply to you or God will understand my sister bless her she's gone to be with the Lord now but one of the things she said on one occasion when she was having she left her husband she was having a relationship with another guy which she admitted was an adulterous relationship she said God understands he doesn't understand sin so Father I just ask that you help us with our battle against sin I pray Lord that you give us a yearning hunger for righteousness that Lord we will pursue righteousness and never be satisfied to carry on in sin Lord we accept from your word that those who say they have no sin deceive themselves and even though it seems an unattainable goal

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in this life let us never stop striving towards it and
Lord haste the day when you come and change this corruption into incorruption and this mortality into immortality and that old sinful heart will never again be seen that your word and your righteousness and a pure heart will be all that remains in Jesus name Amen

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