

ADDRESS THE MESS

PART 2: “BEST MESS EVER”

Now last week, we left off with asking you to make a confession. And the confession was simply this. In fact, I asked you last week that whenever you saw a messy person—before you judge them, before you were too critical of them—that you would say under your breath, or perhaps you would say in your heart, "I know a mess when I see one because I am one." So let's just confess this together, okay? Because confession is good for the soul, and this is great. You may be the most non-religious person in the world. You may not even be a theist, but this is absolutely true of all of humanity. We've all made a mess. We are a mess. We've messed things up. We've messed up relationships. We've even said, "I've made a mess of that. My life is really messy right now." So this is true for all of us.

And then last week, we said this. We said that when we realize we've made a mess of things, whether it's our finances, a relationship, maybe a marriage, and it's getting worse—you've messed up in school, you've messed up professionally, whatever it might be—there's something in us, and this is just humanity, where we say, "But nobody's perfect. Nobody's perfect. Nobody's perfect." And we said last week that when we confess that nobody's perfect, we're confessing something way bigger than, “No one's perfect.” We're confessing something that is actually an avenue to discovering God. Because when we say, "Nobody's perfect," we're also saying there is a perfect that nobody is. That there's a standard that's outside of me. There's a standard I did not create. There's a standard that I consistently fall short of. There's a standard I recognize that I'm accountable to. I didn't make it up. I didn't make it up, because if I'd made it up, I would just unmake it up, so I'd feel better about myself. What is that?

**1:55**

And so we said that when we acknowledge our messes, we are baby steps away from acknowledging God. When we acknowledge our messes, when we're able to say, "I really messed that up; I really made a mess of things; I have really messed that up," we are acknowledging there's something outside of us that we're accountable to that we fall short of. And the New Testament teaches, and C. S. Lewis confirmed it last week, that we are just baby steps away from acknowledging the presence of God. Not only in the world, but as we're gonna see today, the presence of God in our lives. Now, I know some of you have made some really big messes in your life, not just personally and kind of the serious ways, but there's some pretty big messes because I've seen some of your pictures. So I thought I would share a couple of mine, one this week, and maybe one next week, or maybe one at the end of the series.

But when I was 16 years old, or excuse me, when I was 17 years old, at the end of my 17th year, my dad took me to a Toyota dealership and helped me buy a car. And it was the stick shift and I didn't know how to drive a stick shift. And so he drove it home, and I drove his car home. We got in the driveway. He put me in the car. He explained what a clutch was, and literally—and this is kind of how my dad raised me, and I think it's good and this isn't a complaint—he said, "You're smart enough to figure this out." And he went inside.

**3:04**

I thought he would at least kinda ride around with me, and I think he thought, "I don't think my back is strong enough to ride around with my 17-year-old son learning to drive with a clutch." So I'm sitting in the driveway, and you know how you just rev up the engine. You let that clutch out so slow, it was a disaster. And then I came to a railroad track. You remember that? And it's like, "Uh-oh, I'm gonna back... " And anyway, so for a couple of days, I did really well driving around with the clutch in my Toyota SR5 silver car. Some of you remember those. Anyway, so then one evening, I'm coming home. It wasn't super late, I'm guessing, because my parents were still up and it wasn't a weekend. I worked at the Winn-Dixie. And so I was coming home from work and... We had a carport. It was kind of like a garage without a door, so there were sides. And if you can imagine, if you pulled straight into our carport, right in the middle is the door that goes into the kitchen, and then you can park kind of left and right of the door.

And at that time, my parents were in the Amway business. Some of you remember Amway. And so they would have these big deliveries of soap they sold because they were in the Amway business. And so the delivery truck had come and delivered the soap, and so there were cardboard boxes full of what was called SA8. Some of you may remember this. It was a liquid gallon. You'd get these gallons of SA8, a concentrated soap, and there were boxes of them. They were about three high and about three wide on each side of the door where they had put these products. And I'm coming into the driveway a little too fast, because I'm 17 years old. And instead of hitting the break, I hit the what? The clutch.

**4:31**

And you do not stop. You don't even slow down when you hit the clutch. And I, at way too fast, I just plowed right into those boxes of soap and right into the side of the wall where the door was. Fortunately, the soap boxes kept me from going through the house. It shook the house so hard my parents came running downstairs. But when I hit that soap, it exploded straight up. I'm telling you, all the caps came off all the way up to the ceiling. The whole wall, the side walls, the window. I can still see, I'm looking through my soapy car window at those soap dripping down this blue-green, and my parents standing in the side of the house looking through this goo wondering what in the world has happened. It exploded all over everything. So I backed up.

Now, at 17 years old, my primary concern was what? My car, yeah. It's like forget the house, forget how many hundreds of dollars of soap I just ruined, yeah I'm worried about my car. So I back up and I'm immediately... And of course, my parents slowly opened the door. It was blue-green, just goo everywhere. And so I backed up, I felt terrible. "Dad, I'm so sorry, I'll pay for it." And he is like—he has that triple look that dads get; it's mad, concerned, embarrassed; it's kind of all of it—"Are you okay?" So anyway, I backed the car up; these boxes are just destroyed. They're all gooky; there's soap dripping all over everywhere. So we back up and I said, "Dad, I'll clean it up, I'll clean it up, I'll clean it up." He goes, "No." And I go, "Dad, no, no. I need to clean it up." So I'm 17 years old. So he goes in the house.

So I think, "Well, how do I... " It's impossible to clean up. I'm gonna tell you about another mess in a couple weeks, but you stand there and you think, “where do you even begin?” So I thought, “I'll get the hose, you knew that! And I'll just kind of wash all the concentrated soap off the walls and the garage floor.” Okay, I'll just stop there. It was like living inside of a washing machine. It was a complete, complete disaster. Now, the thing is—and I'll tell you another one in a couple weeks—but all of you have those stories. And again, when you tell them years after the fact or weeks after the fact, they're all pretty funny, but in the moment it's just like, "Where do I even start? This mess is so big. I don't even know that it can be cleaned up. It certainly can't be cleaned up all by... I can't clean it up all by myself."

**6:53**

Now here's who I wanna talk to today. I wanna talk to that group of you that that's sort of a picture of your personal life right now. You have made a mess of something that is so big you're not sure it can ever be cleaned up. It may be your finances, it may be something going on in a relationship, it may be your academic life, your professional life. Something going on in your marriage, something going on with your parents. Maybe you've gotten in trouble with the law. I don't know what it is, but right now you would say, "You know what, Andy? I look good on the outside, I am a hot mess. I am somewhat functional, but there is a disaster going on in my life. And the mess is so big, I don't really know where to begin. And Andy, the mess is so big I'm not sure I can do this or fix this or clean this up all by myself."

And this is a mess, that if you're real honest, it's your fault. You ignored somebody's advice, you ignored your conscience, you ignored your parents, you ignored your best friend, you ignored God, you ignored the people that were telling you the truth. You even ignored yourself because there was something in you that said, "I shouldn't do this, I shouldn't call him, I shouldn't go there." And you just went ahead anyway. And now there's a mess and it's your fault.

That's who I wanna talk to today. You've got a messy part of your life and you're wondering, "What am I going to do?" Now, here's what we said last week. This is so important. We said that "The mess that brings us together..." because we all have messy parts of our life, we've been messy, we'll be messy again. "The mess that brings us together is the mess that brought God near." But what we're gonna discover today and what I hope some of you will walk away with is simply this insight: that your mess has the potential to bring God near to you. That your mess, the mess you're in right now, has the potential to bring God near to you in a way you have never discovered God before. The most famous verse in the New Testament is John 3:16 and it says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son." In other words, John 3:16 says that, "God so loved the messy world that God drew near to the messy world."

**8:55**

But it's better than that, as we're gonna discover, because the verse after John 3:16 is the one that doesn't get much play. Nobody's written this one on their forehead. Nobody holds this up at ballgames. But this is the verse that maybe you need to hear as we begin to discover how the mess that you wish you could go back and unmake, the mess that is absolutely, if you're honest, your fault. The mess that you created for yourself that's so big you're wondering, "How will I ever move past this?" This very mess may be the thing God uses to introduce himself to you in the most personal way possible. Here's what John writes after John 3:16. He says, "For..." cause it keeps going, "For God did not send his son into the world..." Let's say this word together, "To condemn." One more time, "To condemn." This is huge depending on what kind of church you were raised in and what kind of family you were raised in.

God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save, or to rescue or to deliver, the world through him. That Jesus didn't come into the world to get in the faces of all the messy people and say, "Do you realize what a mess you've made of your marriage, what a mess you've made of your friendships, what a mess you've made of your reputation, what a mess you've made of your academic future, what a mess you've made?" But God through Jesus illustrated, as we're gonna see, that God came into this world to enter the lives of messy people to rescue them from their mess, which means to rescue us from ourselves. Because let's be honest, we are behind most of our messes. And when you read the gospels, you see this in the most intimate, passionate, personal ways imaginable.

One day, Jesus is in the temple teaching and the Pharisees and all the teachers of the law drag a woman in there who has messed up her life. She's been accused of adultery. She's messed up her marriage, somebody else's marriage, she has destroyed her reputation because now everybody in that small community knows what she's done, and they know who she is. And after a conversation with her accusers, Jesus stands up and he says to this condemned woman, this woman who has totally messed up her life, "Look at me. Look at me. I do not... " And here's our word, "I do not condemn you." In other words, "I am not going to sentence you. I am not going to sentence you to what you deserve." And then he says, "Look at me. Leave your life of sin."

**11:31**

One day, he's walking along with a crowd and he looks up and there's a tax collector in a tree—first time he'd ever seen a tax collector in a tree. The scripture doesn't tell us this. The New Testament doesn't tell us this, but I think at the bottom of that tree were Zacchaeus' bodyguards. He needed bodyguards. This guy had completely fouled up and messed up his life. He had taken the job as a tax collector. That was his biggest mistake. And then, he began to overcharge people for their taxes, and he had enriched himself on the backs of the hardworking people in his community. And he was despised and he was hated and there was no way forward and there was no way out, but he wanted to see Jesus. And Jesus stops as he's walking along and looks up at this mess of a man and he says, "Come down to me because we're going to your house, you messy little man." And behind closed doors, Jesus looks at this mess of a man and he says, "I want you to leave your life of sin and follow me. And you can't just walk away from what you've done, Zacchaeus. You've got to pay these people back, and you've got to pay them back with interest."

And the New Testament tells us that Zacchaeus' life drastically changed. And even though no one liked him and no one trusted him, he entered the community and he began to pay people back for what the money that he had stolen from them, with interest, and with more interest than the law even demanded. And one day Jesus was in an area of a country that he wasn't supposed to be in because he was a Jew, and the Jews and the Samaritans didn't get along. And he stopped at a well, and it's another famous story. And his disciples went into the little town—it's the little village of Sychar—to get food, and in the middle of the day when it is blisteringly hot. If you've ever been to that part of the world, we don't even have that kind of hot. It's a whole different kind of hot. In the middle of the day, when no one should be out, a woman comes to the well all by herself and her life is a mess. She's been married five times. That's a lot now. That was a whole lot back then.

And the man she was living with at the time wasn't her husband. This was a woman who had a long history of making messes and trying to correct messes that made things even messier. And it's just her and Jesus by the well, and she expected him to say nothing to her. Because first of all, he's a Jew and she's a Samaritan. Game over. There's gonna be no conversation. Not only that, if he knew what kind of mess she had made of her life, there would be even less reason for him to say anything to her. And Jesus says to this woman, "Come close to me. Come close to me. Come close to me, and I will quench the thirst you've been trying to quench your entire life."

**14:22**

And then at the end of his life, he has an interchange with another mess of a man. A man who had messed his life up so thoroughly and so completely that he had been arrested. He had messed his life up so thoroughly, so completely, he wasn't even trusted to serve a sentence in prison. His only use, the only thing he could do with his life, was serve as an example to other people, and he had been condemned to die. He had been condemned to crucifixion. And Jesus says to this mess of a man, "You are coming with me. Today, you will be with me in paradise."

And the amazing thing and the thing I don't want you to miss—and no matter how messy your life is, and how deep the mess is, and how much of it's your fault, and the fact that you told another lie to get out of the first lie, that resulted in another lie, and you dug your hole deeper and deeper and deeper—regardless of your mess, here's what Jesus offered these messy people, that Jesus offers you. Here's what Jesus offered these messy people, that Jesus offers all of us. This is the way out. This is the Gospel. This is the message of Jesus. Do you know what Jesus offered all of these people? He offered them himself. He offered himself as the solution.

And Jesus continued throughout his earthly ministry, and this is why it's important, because this is where we live and this is how we know how God feels about us. The clearest picture of your Heavenly Father is Jesus. If you wanna know what God thinks, read what Jesus says. If you wanna know how God responds, watch how Jesus responds. Jesus is as close to understanding God as we will ever, ever, ever get. He said, "I came to reveal the Father. I came to point to the Father. The Father and I are one. I'm here to take all the mystery out of it for you. You can know what God is like by watching me." And Jesus, the son of God, invited messy people to follow him while they were still messy.

**16:21**

In fact, immediately following the encounter with Jesus and the woman who had been dragged in front of him on the Temple Mount and accused of adultery, immediately following that, John, the gospel writer John, writes and pens and quotes these words. When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. I can and I will show you the way forward, and I will show you the way out. I will show you the way forward and I will show you the way out." And when you've heard your whole life that Jesus is the light of the world and Jesus is the light, it's kind of a Christmas thing. Here's what this means for you if you've created a mess. You are in a dark place and you need a light. You are in a messy place and you need to know the way out.

And Jesus says, "If you follow me... " Which means since you weren't following Jesus into your mess, it's time you begin to follow someone if you're gonna get out. And you may not have been a Christian, you may not have been a theist, you may not even have believed in God, you may not have believed in a personal God, but here you are in a mess, and Jesus says, "You can follow me; I am the light of the world."

And the only way to get out of your dark place is to follow someone whose got more light than you do, and Jesus says, "I am that person and I'm offering myself as the solution." And then he makes this promise: "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Now I know what you want. You want what I want when I'm in a mess. I understand that. Here's what we want. We want Triple A, don't we?

We wanna make a call. We want somebody to show up and fix it. We wanna shake their hand and say, "Thank you. I will call you next time I need you." And that's not how it works in the real world. And look up here. And your Heavenly Father loves you too much to do it that way, because His goal for you is not simply to fix your mess and to clean things up. It's much bigger and broader than that. And look, look. He is a Heavenly Father. And every good and perfect father wants a relationship with their children. And what's more important to a good father than behavior is relationship. I would much rather have imperfect children who love me than perfect children that don't care anything about me. That thing in me as an earthly father is reflected in the heart of your Heavenly Father. Your behavior is important. It is not the most important thing. What is most important to your Heavenly Father is a personal, intimate relationship with Him through the person that made that relationship possible, His son, Jesus Christ. I wanna fix. I wanna make a call. I want somebody to clean up my mess, shake my hand, and let me know they're available next time I need them. And your Heavenly Father says, "I want so much more for you than that. I want a relationship. I want you to follow, follow, follow me."

**20:14**

And what is that? He was saying and referring to and pointing to what He said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "Everyone who hears my words and does not put them into practice. Everyone who hears my words and does not put them into practice... " He could have said, "will end up in a mess." "Everyone who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand." Following Jesus begins with this declaration, which requires a lot of humility. Following Jesus requires this declaration, "God, I have built my house on the sand and I am reaping what I've sown. God, I've built my finances, I've built my marriage, I've built this dating relationship, I've built my academic pursuits, I've built my profession, I've built this area of my life on something that doesn't last, it isn't working, and my house is tumbling down around me. And I need you. And I'm tempted to wanna treat you like Triple A. But I need the thing that you offer: yourself."

Following Jesus is agreeing with Jesus when he said this as well, "That everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice... ” Every single person who decides ahead of time, “Yes, yes, yes, I haven't read it yet, but Jesus whatever you ask me to do, I have pre-decided that I'm following you. And since I've pre-decided that I'm following you, as you show me what to do, that's what I'm going to do. I'm not gonna sit back and just consider things. I'm not just looking for advice anymore. I am surrendering my life. I am surrendering my decision-making abilities to you." The answer is yes, what do you want? "The person, everyone, who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." And here's the thing we miss and here's the thing there's no shortcut for: the word is "built." Go back one time for me, would you. There it is: “built.” This is a process. This is not an overnight fix. You're adults, you know this.

**22:21**

The messes you've made, there is no quick fix. We want a quick fix. But if there was a quick fix, you would be right back in the same situation in no time. We know that because we watch parents do that to their kids all the time. Your Heavenly Father is a good Heavenly Father, and he wants something for you more than simply fixing your mess. And Jesus said, "I'm gonna tell you how to get out. I'm gonna tell you how to follow the light of the world. I'm gonna tell you how to live a life with fewer regrets and much better decisions. I want you to begin the process of building your life, your finances, your relationship, your marriage, your parenting, your friendships, your professional life, your academic life... I want you to begin building those areas of your life around my teaching. And if you do, I will lead you out of your mess."

Everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain came down. And the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because its foundation was on the rock. So here's the bottom line for today. There's no magic prayer. There's no magic words. And that's not because God doesn't care. He cares so much that 2,000 years ago, he shone a light bright enough that if you choose to follow it, you could have avoided your current mess. It was avoidable and you did not step into what you stepped into by following Jesus. You stepped into it by following something else.

**24:11**

And your Heavenly Father invites you to follow his son out. You cannot pray your way out of a mess that you behaved your way into, but you can follow your way out. And God will meet you in the mess. He is not offended by you. He does not condemn you. He sees your mess as an opportunity for you to invite him in. And we know this. We know this because this is what Jesus did. This is how Jesus responded to all the little messes in his world. And I'll tell you how else we know this.

You see, the reason you've ever heard of Matthew, the reason there's a Gospel of Matthew is because one day Jesus walked up to a tax collector's booth and he looked at Matthew—and everybody's around, there's a big crowd around—and Jesus says to Matthew, "Matthew, I want you to follow me." And everybody knew that Matthew was a mess, and everybody knew who Jesus claimed to be, and suddenly there's tension, and Matthew stood up in front of his public and followed Jesus to Matthew's house.

And one day when Jesus stopped, and he looked up at Zacchaeus up in that tree, he said, "Zacchaeus, everybody knows who you are, and what you've done, and everybody knows what I'm about, but I'm asking you to publicly come down from that tree, and publicly follow me to your house, as a first step to following me for the rest of your life." The woman at the well, she's the champion, because the New Testament tells us in John, Chapter Four, that when she recognized who Jesus was, when she realized this may be the Messiah we've waited for, the New Testament tells us Jesus didn't have to ask her to do anything. She set down something very valuable to her, her water bucket, her water jar, it was a life and death instrument. And she turned, and she hurried her way back to her little village, and she gathered the village elders, and she said to them—this is so emotional when you read it—she said, "I just met a man who, like you, knows all about my past. But unlike you, who did not condemn me. Could this be the Messiah? Could this be the one we've waited for?" And she publicly identified with Jesus in front of a group of people who had no respect for her, and Jesus wasn't even in the city yet.