

THE LAVER - THE PLACE OF CLEANSING EXODUS 30:17-21

INTRODUCTION:

Each piece of furniture in the tabernacle teaches important spiritual lessons. As we stood at the brazen altar, we understood better our need for redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ. The altar will forever be a reminder of the centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ. Indeed, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins." This is the place where worship began in the old order. No one came near to God unless they came by way the bloody, brazen altar.

The second piece of furniture in the tabernacle was no less important. It is simply called "the laver." The laver was a large, brazen bowl or basin that sat upon a brass base. It was daily filled with water so that as the priest prepared to enter the holy place to perform his daily ministry, he could stop for cleansing. No priest entered the holy place without stopping at the laver and washing his hands and his feet.

Some of you who have visited the Mosque called "The Dome of the Rock" in old Jerusalem may have observed the daily ritual by Moslem men. Whenever a Moslem man is preparing to enter the Mosque to bow before Allah in prayer, he stops at an outside fountain and washes himself. This reveals an awareness, that before he can come to address his deity, he stands in need of cleansing. This is the lesson that God has included in the tabernacle for all of us who are serious about our walk and our service. There are

important lessons for us to learn about God and our relationship with Him through the laver.

I. CLEANSING IS ESSENTIAL FOR THOSE WHO SERVE.

It is a lesson worth remembering -- those who serve God can become defiled in the process of their service. The priest who stopped at the laver to wash his hands and his feet had already been to the altar to offer a sacrifice for his sins. Yet, he knew that in the process of working around the most holy place on earth it was possible to become defiled. They were taught this important lesson through the laver. It is a lesson that we may be prone to forget. We become so preoccupied with what we are doing for God that we just assume that we are acceptable to Him and that what we are doing is pleasing to Him. There was a solemn warning added to the instruction about the laver. The priest was instructed to cleanse himself at the laver. The priest was instructed to cleanse himself at the laver lest he die. There was certain spiritual death if they attempted to offer service to God with defiled hands and feet. The cleansing was essential for those who would serve.

Your first reaction may be then that this has no application to you since you are not a priest. But you are a priest. While in the old covenant only one tribe of the Israelites served in the priesthood, in the new covenant all of the people of God serve in the priesthood. Those who occupy full time positions in the church are no more ministers than those who have vocations in the world and yet serve the Lord. We are all priests before the Lord. If the service that you are to render to God is to be effective and fruitful, then you must stop at the laver for cleansing.

1. Intercessory Prayer.

One of the ministries that the priest performed in the holy place was that of intercessory prayer. Daily a priest would go to the golden altar of incense and would trim the wick and put fresh incense on it so that a sweet smelling fragrance might ascend to God. The sweet smell of the burning incense that ascended represented the prayers of the priest and the prayers of the people. Before the priest could come to the altar of the incense, and in type, present prayer before God, he needed cleansing at the laver. Should we not learn a lesson? Are we so presumptuous in our prayers that we approach God without pausing to be cleansed? Is it enough to end our prayers with some kind of general confession that says to the Lord, "If I have sinned in any way, please forgive me." Is there some doubt about whether or not we have become defiled along the way? Surely, we must be more aware of our own frailty and sinfulness than this. But if we are to effectively stand before God, it is important that we spend time at the laver.

2. In worship

Another thing that the priest did in the holy place was represent the people of God in worship. He went into the holy place to bow before God in worship. Whenever a person comes into the holy place to present himself before God in worship, it is important that he be able to lift up "clean hands." Where and how do you get clean hands? The Old Testament priest got clean hands when he stopped at the laver and washed his hands. He was carrying out an essential act of cleansing.

Are we guilty of coming into the house of the Lord and never washing our hands spiritually? Do we prepare ourselves to stand before God, sing praise, and offer prayers? The strategic location of the laver in the tabernacle is a reminder to us of the essential nature of this spiritual cleansing.

The principle is applicable to all that we would seek to do for God. Do you make sure that you stopped at the laver before you go into your Sunday School Class on Sunday morning to teach? Do you make sure you stopped at the laver before you join the choir to sing? Do you make sure you stopped at the laver before you prepare to offer your gifts to the Lord? It is applicable to all of life! Do you make sure that you have stopped at the laver before you go out to do evangelism through the FAITH process? Do you make sure you have stopped at the laver before you go to your place of ministry at the office? Do you make sure you have stopped at the laver before you take your position of a servant for Christ in your home? The laver is a reminder to us that we need cleansing if we are to serve the Lord. Even though we have been made white through the blood of the Lamb there is still the need for daily cleansing in the life of the believer.

II. CLEANSING COMES THROUGH THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT.

The laver itself would glisten in the sunlight as it sat there in the court of the tabernacle. Having been made of brass it would pick up the rays of the sun and reflect the light all around. The priest would carry clean water and fill the laver daily. It stood there as the

means of cleansing for the servant priest who was working in the tabernacle. What in the life of the believer is represented in this laver? What is the laver to the believer?

A little reflection and study of the New Testament would indicate that God has provided a special laver for the cleansing of His people. He has given to them the Word and the Spirit.

1. The mirror of the Word.

There is an interesting piece of history with reference to the laver. It was actually constructed out of mirrors that were presented by the women of Israel. Moses reports, "They made the bronze basin and its bronze stand from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting" (Exodus 38:8). The best mirror available to a woman in that ancient world was made of brass. It would be kept polished very carefully so that when she looked in to it she would see the reflection of her own image. By looking at this reflection she would be able to fix her hair or fix her face to make herself more presentable to her husband. The women of Israel gave these mirrors to the Lord as a part of the offering for the tabernacle. The workmen who assisted Moses in the building of the tabernacle took those mirrors and molded them in to this brass basin that served as the laver. It is of special interest

You will remember that in the New Testament the word of God is likened unto a mirror. James likens it to a mirror in the first chapter of his little letter. He indicates that when we look into the Word of God and see a reflection of ourselves and our need, it is like a

woman looking into a mirror and seeing a reflection of her need. A part of the daily cleansing in the life of the Christian is to come to the Word of God and to allow oneself to be evaluated by the Word of God. We sometimes refer to this time as a "quiet time." In my experience, it is not always a "quiet time." It is sometimes a very disturbing, distressing time. As I look into the open Word of God, I see things about myself that I would rather not see. I see a reflection of my own attitudes and acts that are displeasing to my Lord. But this is an essential part of the work of the laver. It is there to keep me in touch with myself lest I in presumption began to attempt to serve God with dirty hands.

Jesus was referring to this use of the Word in His high priestly prayer in which He prayed, "Sanctify them through Thy truth. Thy Word is truth."

2. The water of the Spirit.

Actually, in Scripture water is used as a symbol of the Word and the Spirit. And well it should be because they are put together in a special way in the plan of God. It is a mistake to attempt to use the Word as a laver without the work of the Spirit. It is a mistake to attempt to experience the Spirit apart from the Word. They work together in the life of the believer. In a very helpful passage in which Paul is talking about Christ and the Church, he writes, "And gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." While most scholars see the reference to "the washing with water through the Word" as having a reference to Baptism, it is also possible to see in this statement the Word and the Spirit

functioning as a laver in the life of the believer. The mirror of the Word shows us our need, and then the Spirit draws our attention to the accomplished work of Christ at the brazen altar. So, by faith we then in that moment are able to appropriate to ourselves the cleansing that He has provided.

I cannot emphasize too much the strategic place of the Word and the Spirit in the work of sanctification in the life of the believer. There is a special work of continual cleansing that is to go on in the life of the believer day by day if they are to be able to serve the Lord effectively.

III. CLEANSING INVOLVES PERSONAL JUDGMENT.

It is worth remembering that the laver was made of brass. We have already learned that brass is associated with judgment, primarily the judgment of God, in Scripture. The brazen altar conveys this to the heart of the people of God. There is judgment involved. However, there is an aspect of judgment that is often overlooked in the life of a Christian. We are not only judged by God, but we need to learn to judge ourselves.

This is what the laver represents in the life of the believer. The believer comes to the laver and as he or she stands at the laver, they see reflected their own defilement. They reach a judgment about their defilement and thus appropriate to themselves the cleansing through the water in the laver.

There is a statement from the Apostle Paul in the New Testament that sets forth this truth. In the Corinthian Church some serious offenses had taken place. One of the more serious offenses dealt with how they were observing the Lord's Supper. They were observing the supper in a manner that brought division into the life of the church, discouraged the poor believers in the church, and skewed the very significance of the supper itself. Paul addressed a corrective word to that congregation. He said to them, "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" (I Cor. 11:28.) He then warns about physical illnesses that will come upon people who go about the observance of the supper in the wrong way. He indicates that some have actually died under the judgment of God. He says, "That is why many among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep. But, if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world" (I Corinthians. 11:30-32).

It would appear that we have another option with reference to judgment. We will either judge ourselves, or we will be judged by the Lord. This is what the laver is--a place of self-judgment so that we will escape the judgment of the Lord. In his inspired description of the laver, Moses adds this word of warning; "They shall wash their hands and feet so they will not die." That puts it in to a very serious context. But what is involved in this washing of the hands and the feet?

1. Confession

Whenever the priest took water from the laver and washed his hands and his feet, he was acknowledging his defilement. This is precisely what confession is. Confession is nothing

more than agreeing with God that we have been defiled. If we keep ignoring and denying our defilement, then we are going to expose ourselves to the judgment of the Lord. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Or to state it another way—if we judge ourselves before the Lord through confession.

This process of cleansing through confession should be a daily part of our lives. Every morning and every evening as I come to the Word of God for my personal time of reading and study, I will see deeds in my life. I will become aware of defilement in my life. What do I do? I confess that defilement to the Lord. Confession is essential for cleansing.

2. Claim

When the confession is made, you look back to the sacrifice on the brazen altar for cleansing. I cannot cleanse myself. "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, goes on cleansing us from all sin.

The condition for knowing such cleansing in my life is that I walk in the light as He is in the light. This is what I do when I come to the laver. I come to see myself as God sees me—walk in the light. When I see something in me offensive to the Father, I forsake it and claim the blood of the Jesus Christ as the covering for my sin. Oh, what a truth for those who are going to serve God effectively.

We must be always prepared to handle holy things with clean hands. We must always be prepared to lift up holy hands unto the Lord. The only way we can have clean hands and a pure heart is to stop at the laver at the Word of God where the Holy Spirit works through the Word and experience daily cleansing.

God has given you a laver—His Word and His Spirit. Are you daily utilizing the laver that the Lord has given you?