



Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 70

Christ our Laver

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 10th February, 1991**

Text: *“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: when they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the Lord” (Exodus 30. 17-20).*

The Old Testament types are very beautiful, very attractive, especially to a spiritually-enlightened conscience. Now we look right beyond the details, right beyond the type, to the Lord Jesus, to Christ and Him crucified. So the subject this morning is Christ our laver. And if your religion is real, if you are taught and led by the Spirit of God, you will need a laver, a place of washing, if ever you are going to get to heaven. You will need it day by day throughout your spiritual pilgrimage.

Now some of you may ask the question, If we have the Lord Jesus and His precious death and finished work, His resurrection, the fountain opened, the preciousness of His blood set forth so clearly in the New Testament, why bother to go back to these types and shadows? Why bother to go back to the old dispensation? Why go back to the Book of Exodus? Perhaps some of you young people at times ask this question. Why do we speak about types? Why do we think about them? Mind you, I do believe some people are too much swallowed up by them. There is a type of religion, and it is always going back to Exodus and Leviticus. I remember when I was a boy, there was a minister who came to preach, and you could be almost certain that at one of the two services he would be in the Book of Leviticus. There is a danger on that side, but there is a danger on the other side in neglecting them.

I think the first thing concerning the types and shadows that should affect us is this, that such a tremendous part of Scripture is devoted to them. Never forget that *“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and*

is profitable.” There is a tremendous amount of Scripture devoted to the setting up of the tabernacle and the various types and shadows and sacrifices. Also, I think you will find that in this part of Scripture, you have more of the actual words which God Himself spoke than any other part of the Word of God. I rather think the Book of Leviticus has a greater proportion of God’s own words, the words God Himself spoke, than any other part of Scripture.

Now creation was a great work, but the account of creation is given in just a few verses. But when we come to the setting up of the tabernacle and the establishing of the sacrifices, we have chapter after chapter, the latter end of Exodus, almost all Leviticus, a good part of Numbers. This was the church of God in its infancy. If you will, this was the church of God learning its alphabet, the church of God as children learning how to read and write. For the first time, we have revealed to us the awful holiness of God, how solemn it is to approach Him. There is only one way to come. It must be by blood. So the ABC of vital godliness is so simply explained, almost in picture language if you will, to the church of God in its infancy.

So when you come to the New Testament, you have a kind of gospel vocabulary. When John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” the Jews did not need anyone to explain what he meant. When the apostles spoke of precious blood, the Jews did not need any explanation of what they meant. When the New Testament insisted on substitution, a sacrifice in the place of the sinner, the Jews did not need any opening up of the meaning of it. They had had it set before them, generation after generation, in the tabernacle.

But I think of it something like this. If a skilful architect went to visit a majestic building, when he came away, it would be with the greatest of interest that he would look at the plans for that building, examine every detail, see it all set forth, opened up bit by bit before him. Also if there was a skilful scientist and he saw a new machine operating for the first time, with great delight he would see the plans of it, how it was built, the details of it. It is something like that with the types and shadows of the ceremonial law. The Epistle to the Hebrews beautifully explains them, says that none were without meaning. It applies them all to the Lord Jesus, especially His death. It tells us they are now abolished. But if we

go back to the Old Testament (it may seem a strange thing to say), these shadows can throw much light on the work of the Lord Jesus. It seems that bit by bit in detail they open up the wonder and the value of the work of Christ.

Now I thought it needful just to say those few introductory words concerning the whole subject of the types and shadows of the ceremonial law. Perhaps some of you will be encouraged to read Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers again and to meditate and to seek the Lord Jesus there. Do not forget the Lord Jesus did say, “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.” In a special way it can be said of these types and shadows of the ceremonial law, “They are they which testify of Me.”

With God’s help, I want to speak to you about this beautiful subject, the laver, the brazen laver, which speaks of the dear Lord Jesus, especially in His wonderful ability to cleanse from sin and defilement. Now let me first of all lead you up to the laver. If you as an Israelite had approached the tabernacle in the wilderness, you would have found that outside the tabernacle itself, which contained the holy place and the holy of holies, there was a large courtyard. Now as you approached that courtyard, you would find it was completely surrounded by pure, spotless, white linen hangings, or linen curtains. The whole of that courtyard, all the way round, was surrounded by these pure linen hangings and curtains. Throughout Scripture, the pure linen signifies the perfect righteousness of God. So there is this tabernacle, the place of approach to God, the place of worship. But everyone is completely shut out by this fence, if you will, that goes all the way round – the pure linen curtains. Without righteousness, without holiness, shall no man see the Lord.

But then as you came near, you would find that there was a door. There was only one door, there was only one entrance. And this door was not of pure white linen. It was of blue and scarlet and purple, and through that beautiful blue and scarlet and purple door, you must enter, if enter you would. Blue, the heavenly colour, speaks of the Godhead of Christ. Scarlet, the colour of blood, speaks of redemption. Purple, the kingly colour, speaks of His royalty. It was through that beautiful door, the blue and scarlet and purple, that you must enter. And once inside, you would see how you were shut in by those pure linen hangings, those pure linen

curtains, which before had seemed to shut you out. O to be the right side of God's righteousness! O to be inside, not outside! O to have an interest in the glorious, imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus!

Now as you entered in through that door of blue and scarlet and purple, immediately through that door there would be the brazen altar where the blood was shed and where the sacrifice was offered. Still in the courtyard, still before there was any entry into the tabernacle itself, the holy place. You see, the important thing in vital godliness is the sacrifice of Christ. You and I are sinful, lost, ruined, guilty. There is only one door to enter by – Christ. There is only one sacrifice – Christ and Him crucified. There is no other way of approach to a holy God, no other way of entry into the tabernacle. It must be the altar. It must be the place of blood-shedding. It must be the place where divine wrath falls. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” There is no other way of venturing, no other way of approach, but through the sacrifice.

Immediately you entered through the door into the courtyard of the tabernacle, you met the brazen altar, and there the burnt offering was offered, every morning, every evening. So you see the smoke ascending to heaven. You see the place where the blood was shed, the ground of the sinner's acceptance. And then as you went further towards that tent which was the tabernacle itself, the holy place and the holy of holies, you would find the only other thing that there was in the courtyard, and that was the laver, this laver made of brass, and it was between the entrance to the holy place and the brazen altar where the sacrifice was offered. This laver was the place where the priests had to wash.

Let us be clear, beloved friends. Under the law, no-one at any time could ever enter the tabernacle itself, could enter the holy place, except the priests, and into the holiest of all, only the high priest, and he but once a year, not without blood. But that was a dispensation of darkness, separation, distance, and dimly through it the faithful Israelite saw the gospel. It was the gospel to the ancient Israelite. It spoke of Christ to him, preached Christ to him. But under the old dispensation, it was only the priest who could ever enter, draw near to God, worship at His footstool. That is why one of the great doctrines of the Glorious Reformation was the priesthood of all believers. Didn't Luther and

Calvin contend for it, that every believer is a priest? What did they mean? Well, there is only one great High Priest, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and then every sinner saved by grace is a priest. A minister is not a priest, a clergyman is not a priest, a bishop is not a priest. There is one great High Priest, Christ, and then every sinner saved by grace is a priest. What does it mean, the priesthood of believers? Two things. First of all, they have the wonderful privilege of access through the Mediator, the Lord Jesus. They do not need any popish priest, they do not need any Mary through whom they should come. Every believer has the privilege of direct access through Christ. And secondly, they all have the privilege of offering to God their sacrifice of praise and of thanksgiving.

Well, the point was this: before these priests could enter, before they could worship, before they could pray, before they could draw near to God, they had always to come to the laver. And before any of these things, they must wash their hands and their feet in this laver, because it was continually filled with pure water. It seems that every morning it was filled with fresh, pure water. And these priests, as they came from their tents through the desert, their feet were defiled. Now there was provision for this. They had to wash those defiled feet in the laver before they drew nigh to God. But with all their many duties, their hands also became defiled. There was provision made by God for that. They had to wash their hands in the laver before they ventured near to God.

Beloved friends, don't you find this attractive? Don't you find that as you journey through the wilderness, as you come in contact with the world, as you have so many things to do, even lawful things, that your hands and your feet are continually being defiled? You need daily cleansing, daily confession of sin, daily repentance. O there is fresh-contracted guilt on your conscience, that idle word, that wrong word, that evil thought, that careless action. O that contact with the world! You feel the defilement. As you journey on, your hands and your feet are defiled but there, before you enter the sanctuary, stands this precious laver with the water of cleansing.

“Daily I'd repent of sin,
Daily wash in Calvary's blood.”

O beloved friends, we need a daily religion. We need to seek for daily contact with the Lord Jesus. Daily we are defiled. Daily we need to

confess our sins. Daily we need to be cleansed. O the mercy of God in the provision of this laver!

Now it was filled with pure water. You remember that when the Lord Jesus hung upon the cross, the soldier pierced His side. “Alas! the cruel spear went deep into His side.” O sinner, did you ever see that spear piercing the side of the dear Redeemer? It made a special impression on John. O didn’t he love the Lord Jesus! He saw that “forthwith came there out blood and water.” And he seems to emphasise it. When he writes his Epistle, he still seems to come back to it. It was not just blood alone, but water; not just water alone, but blood. He seems to see something so solemn, so sacred, so significant in it. Our hymnwriter, in that beautiful hymn we sang just now (155), comes right to the heart of it:

“This fountain so dear, He’ll freely impart;
Unlocked by the spear, it gushed from His heart,
With blood and with water; the first to atone,
To cleanse us the latter; the fountain’s but one.”

O beloved friends, we need the blood and the water. We need the altar, as we enter through the gate, where the sacrifice bleeds and dies. We need the blood. We need to go on to the laver. We need the water. But it is one fountain. It flows from Christ and Him crucified, from His wounded side. The blood to atone, the water to cleanse. I take the water to be the cleansing, sanctifying effect of the atonement, of the death of Christ. O but don’t we need the laver? “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.”

Now I think if you read the Book of the Exodus carefully, when Aaron and his sons the priests were instituted in their office, in the laver they had to wash from head to toe at the beginning. That first washing was not just their hands and their feet: it was a complete washing of all their bodies. They had to be completely cleansed before they were put in the office of the priesthood. Now the Word of God speaks of “the washing of regeneration.” I know usually when we think of the washing, the cleansing, we speak of the precious, sin-atonement blood of Jesus. But do not forget also that the Word of God speaks of “the washing of regeneration.” That is, when a sinner is born again of the Spirit of God, then that new birth has a cleansing, sanctifying effect – the washing of

regeneration. Now the washing of regeneration will make you love the precious blood, long for the precious blood, value the precious blood. But as you journey on, your hands and your feet are defiled. Now you cannot be born again a second time. You cannot be regenerated a second time. You do not want that complete washing of regeneration a second time. But you do need the daily cleansing in the laver, the daily application of forgiveness, the daily application of the effects of the death of Christ. You cannot separate the water from the blood, or the blood from the water.

This was the great lesson which the Lord Jesus taught His disciples in that very beautiful passage we read (John 13). Didn't His love overflow to them just before He went to the cross to die for them? That wonderful word: "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Then, to their amazement, He left the table where they were sitting, and took a basin and filled it with water, took a towel and girded Himself, and knelt down and began to wash their feet, a thing the most menial slave would do. O the love and humility of the Lord Jesus! It seems that in an awed silence they witnessed it – until He came to Peter. Peter said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But Peter did not realise the spiritual teaching, the spiritual significance of it. "Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Now Peter could not stand that, to have no part with Christ.

"Depart from Thee? – 'tis death – 'tis more;
'Tis endless ruin, deep despair!"

Peter could not stand that, he could not bear it. He said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

"Plunge me in that crimson ocean,
Thy atonement made for sin."

But then you see, the Lord Jesus beautifully set forth the type of the laver. "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him." I understand in the original it is this: He who is bathed need not to bath again, but to wash his feet, the analogy being that if a person has just had a bath, and then in walking along his feet become dirty, he does not need to return again and have a second bath, but he does need to wash his feet, but only his feet. That is the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Some dear child of God, his feet and hands are defiled. He thinks he is out of the secret. He thinks he is wrong. No, says the Lord Jesus. You do not need to be born again a second time. There does not need to be any repeating of the washing of regeneration. That is once and for all. But there is the need of the daily cleansing, the daily washing. And so the laver appointed for the priests day by day, every day, before they approached God, before they worshipped, before they sacrificed, whatever they did, there had to be the fresh washing of hands and feet, the fresh cleansing before they ventured near. O the value of Christ our laver! O but don't you feel it, beloved friends? You do not just see it as something under the ceremonial law. You say, "Lord, that is me. As I come to the house of God, I feel the defilement of my hands and my feet. As I pick up the holy Word to read, I feel it is with defiled hands. As I go forth into the world, I feel it is with defiled feet. I do need that daily cleansing, that daily washing. Daily I need to feel that gracious effect which flows from Calvary, which flows from the precious blood."

"Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

You want the double cure. But these will be real things to those of you whose religion is real, whose conscience is made tender, who daily feel the defilement of your sin and guilt. "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." So there were those daily errands to the laver, daily errands to the place of washing.

Now there was something very interesting about the laver. Do you know how the laver was made and what it was made from? It was made from all the looking glasses which the women had when they were back in the land of Egypt. Once they had been brought out into the wilderness, the women gave up these looking glasses, which were made of polished brass, and they were melted down and the laver was made from them. All pride, all vanity has to be laid down at the foot of the cross. It is an amazing thing that the precious laver was made of what had once been the women's looking glasses in the land of Egypt.

But there is something here which speaks so loud and clear. Was this laver made of such shining brass that once it had been mirrors, looking glasses? Then as these priests drew near to the laver, they could see themselves in it. They could see their own defilement. They could see their defiled hands and their defiled feet, and yet inside the laver was the water which would wash them, cleanse them from their awful defilement, which they saw reflected even as they drew near. There is an experience here, and I trust many of you have walked it out. In the Lord Jesus, as you look upon Him, as you see all His spotless perfection, the dear Lamb of God without blemish and without spot, as you see Him holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, even as you draw near to Him, you have a sight, you have a reflection in His Person, and there you see yourself in all your sin and all your vileness and all your guilt and all your shame – not just in the holy law, in the broken covenant of works, but you see it in the dear Saviour, even as you shrink from His spotless purity. Yet there in that laver which reflects you and shows you your guilt, you find the place of cleansing.

“My sins, O how black they appear,
When in that dear bosom they meet!”

You will see your sin and guilt in its blackness in the condemnation of a broken law, but you will never so view your sin and filth and defilement as when you see it silhouetted against the holy, sinless, spotless perfection of the dear, dying Lamb of God. O the mirror, the looking glass of the laver as those priests drew near! They came for cleansing, but the nearer they came, the more they saw their defilement, their need of cleansing. But then there was the application. There was the washing, the cleansing, and then how gladly could they enter the holy place and worship!

“Fly, then, awakened sinners, fly;
Your case admits no stay;
The fountain’s opened now for sin;
Come, wash your guilt away.”

The value of the laver!

Just one other thing. When the courtyard was made, there were the dimensions; so with the tabernacle, so with the holy of holies, so with the holy place, so with the ark of the covenant, so with the altar of burnt

offering. But have you noticed, there is not one single dimension given to the construction of the laver? We do not know how big it was, how small it was, how wide it was. You do not need me to suggest to you how that sets forth the wonderful fulness in Christ, His wonderful love. Who can comprehend the height, the depth, the length, the breadth, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge? There is unlimited cleansing for the believer here. It does not matter how greatly your hands and your feet are defiled. It does not matter how high your guilt rises. There are dimensions given to other things; there are no dimensions given to the laver. The wonderful efficacy of this pure water! The gracious effect of the atonement which cleanses from all sin, which washes away all guilt! There was another verse which attracted me as we sang the hymn just now (155). Let me read it to you, because it is so applicable to the brazen laver, and let me close with this:

“This fountain from guilt not only makes pure,
And gives soon as felt infallible cure;
But if guilt removed return and remain,
Its power may be proved again and again.”