

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001

JESUS' CLEANSING POWER

Luke 8:40-48

By

Steven J. Cole

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Luke Lesson 38

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Generally, I enjoy backpacking. It's great to get out into God's beautiful creation and enjoy things you just can't see if you stay where there are roads. But there are two things about it that I hate: the bugs and not being able to take a shower. The swarms of bugs force you to coat every inch of exposed skin with bug repellent, which makes the desire for a shower even greater. I can only stand about two nights before I'm ready to wash off the bug repellent, sweat and trail dirt with a hot shower. After backpacking, a shower always feels so good!

The same is true spiritually. If you are defiled by sin, it feels great to get cleaned off, inside and out, so that you have a clear conscience before the Lord. Being truly clean before God is important not only for how it makes you feel, but also because your eternal destiny depends on it. Sin alienates us from the holy God who judges not only our behavior, but even the sinful thoughts that we all have. If we die in our sins, apart from Christ, we face His righteous judgment and wrath. So both for how it makes us feel and for our eternal standing before God, it is crucial that we understand how to be cleansed from our sin.

For those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their sin bearer, the Bible promises, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). He bore God's wrath for us, so we do not need to fear the day of judgment. But we still need to apply the benefits of the cross to our hearts on an ongoing, daily basis so that we maintain a clear conscience. We have to bring sins of thought, word, and deed to Him and apply His cleansing blood. If we don't do that regularly, we begin to feel pretty grungy. We all need cleansing because we all get defiled by sin.

An incident in the life of Jesus, in which He healed a woman who suffered from a hemorrhage, gives us a parable of how we can be cleansed from our sin. The lesson is simply stated:

To be cleansed, lay hold of Jesus by faith.

This story reveals three simple truths: First, that we all need cleansing; second, that Jesus has sufficient power to cleanse us; and, third, what we must do to receive His cleansing power.

1. We all need to be cleansed of defilement.

This woman had suffered for 12 years from what was probably a uterine hemorrhage. It left her physically weak and uncomfortable. But the physical suffering was minor compared to the religious, social, and emotional aspects of her problem. According to the Law of Moses (Lev. 15:19-31), she was perpetually ceremonially unclean. Whoever touched her was unclean, so that even her own family had to keep their distance unless they wanted to be defiled. Whatever she lied or sat on became unclean, so that whoever touched those objects also became unclean. If her husband had relations with her, he became unclean for a week.

For a woman especially, relationships with her family and friends are the very stuff of life. In that culture, all of life revolved around the various religious feasts and celebrations at the temple, not to mention the weekly synagogue meetings. This poor woman was an outcast, cut off from her family, friends, and culture.

Not only that, but her problem had drained all of her finances. Mark 5:26 reports that she "had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse." Luke, the physician, is a bit kinder to his profession. He simply states that she could not be healed by anyone (Luke 8:43; some manuscripts add that she had spent all her money, but omit that she had grown worse).

When Mark reports that she had endured much at the hands of many physicians, he wasn't kidding. The Talmud proposes eleven different remedies, including drinking a goblet of wine containing a powder made from rubber, alum, and garden crocuses. Another potion was made from Persian onions cooked in wine (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [Eerdmans], 1:620). She had tried them all, but none of them had

worked. And, as with doctors in our day, there was no refund if the cure didn't work. The woman was broke.

This woman's ceremonial defilement is a graphic picture of how sin defiles us all. It creates distance between us and God, as well as distance from our family and friends. Often, like her problem, our sin is an embarrassing sort of thing. We'd rather not discuss it or have anyone know about it. We clear our throats and try to change the subject if anyone dares ask about anything that might bring it out into the open.

Like this woman's problem, sin is often costly. Sins such as drunkenness, drug abuse, and gambling can reduce a family to poverty and can cost a person his employment, his health, and his life. Emergency rooms are filled with victims of sin—beaten, abused, raped, stabbed, or shot because of anger, greed, and disregard for human life.

Like this woman's disease, sin is also degenerative. Her disease was slowly killing her, draining her strength and her very lifeblood from her body. That is how sin works in the human heart, starting at first perhaps almost imperceptibly, but sapping our strength as it continues, leading us toward a slow but certain death.

And, like this woman's illness, sin is a hopeless problem apart from the Lord. Try as we will, we cannot extricate ourselves from its tentacles. Like climbing up an icy slope, we seem to make progress for a while, but then we slip and fall back to the bottom. We may compare ourselves with others and think that we're not so bad. But when we recognize that we must compare ourselves with God in His absolute holiness if we want to be accepted into His heaven, we despair. There is no human remedy. We are defiled by our sin; we need to be cleansed; we cannot cleanse ourselves; nothing we try can rid us of our guilt. What can we do?

2. Jesus is the only one who can cleanse us.

We don't know how much this woman knew about Jesus, but she was part of the multitude that followed Him in the hopes of being healed. This incident probably took place in or near Capernaum, so she probably had heard of and witnessed some of the many miracles Jesus had performed there. Perhaps she knew some who had been healed just by touching Him (Luke 6:19). So she

determined that she would go and try to touch Him, thinking, "If I just touch His garments, I shall get well." (Mark 5:28).

Jesus was teaching by the sea when a man named Jairus desperately threw himself at Jesus' feet and begged Him to come and heal his little daughter, who was at the point of death. Jesus started off, with the crowd pressing around Him. For a while, the woman despaired of getting near Him. But as she desperately tried to fight her way through the crowd, suddenly she saw Jesus just ahead of her. She reached out, grabbed the tassel on the edge of His robe, and instantly felt healing strength pulse through her body! She knew she was cured!

She had what she had come for and was ready to retreat when suddenly Jesus stopped and asked a question that seemed absurd to everyone in the crowd except for this woman: "Who is the one who touched Me?" The crowd was pressing against Him, but Jesus sensed the power that went forth from Him to heal this woman who had touched Him by faith. He didn't ask the question to gain information, since He knew who had touched Him. He asked it to elicit her confession and to clarify for her what had taken place. It was not her touch that had cured her, but her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was not magic, but God's power in Christ which had accomplished the cure.

Just as Jesus Christ was this woman's only hope, because only He could cure her defiling illness, so only Jesus Christ can cleanse us of the defilement of our sin. He alone is the bridge between the holy God and our sin. When He died on the cross, God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Just as this woman was instantly cured, so all who come to Christ in faith are instantly cleansed of their sin. This incident shows us that ...

A. Jesus is the sufficient Savior.

He is *sufficient in power*. Even though power went forth from Him, it did not drain or exhaust His supply. He had just stilled the raging storm and He had commanded the demons to depart from Legion. He would shortly raise Jairus' daughter from the dead. And yet His power was not drained. He has unlimited power to save anyone who will come to Him in faith.

He is *sufficient in holiness*. He had just been with two demoniacs who inhabited the tombs. This contact would be defiling to a normal Jew. This defiled woman touched Him, which should have rendered Him unclean. He would momentarily touch the hand of Jairus' dead daughter, another defiling act. Yet none of this defiled Jesus or He could not have performed these mighty deeds.

You can come to Jesus with all of your sin and lay hold of Him by faith. Instead of defiling Him with your sin, His holiness and healing will be instantly imparted to you. He has saved those whom the world would judge to be the worst of sinners, with no drain on His mighty power and no smudge on His absolute holiness. But perhaps you fear coming to One so powerful and so holy. Then note:

B. Jesus is the sympathetic Savior.

He was in a hurry to get to Jairus' dying daughter, yet He had time to stop and deal with this one needy woman. He did not scold her for the interruption. He didn't upbraid her for her years of seeking human solutions to her problem. Nor was His purpose in calling attention to her to embarrass her publicly, although no doubt she was at first a bit uncomfortable. He spoke to her with tenderness, addressing her as "Daughter." He spoke words of assurance and comfort, to confirm her faith and her healing, lest she go away unclear about what had happened. Archbishop Trench explains, "This woman would have borne away a maimed blessing, hardly a blessing at all, had she been suffered to bear it away in secret and unacknowledged, and without being brought into any personal communion with her Healer" (*Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord* [Baker], p. 118).

Whatever your problem, however great your sin, you can come to Jesus and know that He will treat you with compassion and kindness. As Isaiah 42:3 prophesied of Jesus, "A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish" (see Matt. 12:20). Like a skillful doctor, He may have to wound in order to heal. But He always does it tenderly. He welcomes every sinner who comes to Him to cleanse his dirty wounds.

Because Jesus is the sufficient Savior, you can know that He has adequate power to cleanse your sin. Because He is the sympa-

thetic Savior, He will treat you with gentleness and understanding. You can know for sure that if you come to Him in faith, He will instantly forgive all of your sins, because He has promised it. You will be cleansed of all defilement if you lay hold of Jesus by faith. Let's explore what that means:

3. We must lay hold of Jesus by faith.

By looking at this woman's experience we learn five things about what it means to lay hold of Jesus by faith:

A. Faith is active, not passive.

For 12 years, this woman had aggressively sought a cure for her illness. She had been to every quack she had heard about. She had tried every cure her friends suggested, no matter how troublesome or distasteful. She had spent every dime. She was actively doing all she could to find a remedy and she would not quit until she obtained the cure she was after. She was not put off by the large crowd that kept her from getting near to Jesus. She was not bothered by the fact that she would make everyone she touched unclean. She elbowed her way through. She didn't worry about the fact that Jairus' daughter was dying and that Jesus was hurrying to a life or death mission. She persisted with her goal.

A few years ago a pastor friend of mine wasn't feeling well. He thought it was just the flu, so he didn't do anything about it. But when he started feeling much worse, he went to the doctor and found out he had cancer. Once he knew how serious his condition was, he started fighting it with everything available.

Like my friend, many are oblivious to the cancer of sin and death spreading through their bodies. In some cases, they are unaware of the enormity of their guilt before God. Others ignore it and hope for the best. But you won't be cleansed of your sin if you do not actively seek the cure. The faith that saves actively seeks the Lord: "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7).

B. Faith works best when human solutions fail.

The best thing that happened to this woman was when she ran out of money without being cured. Then her only hope was to come to the One who heals without money or cost. As long as there are human remedies, we will try them. If we think that our good works can cleanse us, we'll keep on working. But when we realize that Jesus is the only way we can be cleansed, we will be driven to rely on Him alone. Like Peter when he began to sink beneath the waves, we will cry, "Save me, Lord, or I perish!" The Lord delights to respond to such a cry of faith.

C. Faith accepts the simplicity of the gospel.

This woman had tried some difficult, bitter and expensive remedies. But this was easy and free! There were no bitter potions to drink. She didn't have to apply the medicine three times a day for the next month. The disciples weren't there collecting the fee. She touched Jesus by faith and she was instantly healed.

Many think that the more bitter the pill, the better the remedy. They stumble over the gospel because it is too simple, too free. Tell people that to be right with God they must crawl on their knees over broken glass, or repeat prayers every day until they die, or add their merits and good deeds to what Christ has done, and they will do it. But tell them, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved," and they say, "No, that's too simple."

The problem is, faith in Jesus Christ is an affront to their pride. There's no human glory in such a simple remedy. We want to do something difficult to earn salvation. But God's way is simple and free: Put your faith in the Lord Jesus.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I know that I am a sinner and I would like to know that all my sins were forgiven. You're saying that all I have to do is trust Jesus. But I don't have enough faith." There's good news even for you:

D. Faith need not be perfect to be effective.

This woman's faith was probably tinged with a bit of superstition. She thought that there was some magic power conveyed by touching Jesus' garments. Her faith was self-centered. She came to Him only for the cure she wanted, and she would have been content to go away with nothing more. Her faith was quite ignorant. She didn't know much theology. But the Lord took her

weak, misguided faith, healed her on that basis, and sought to develop and strengthen it from there.

How much faith does it take to be cleansed from your sins? Thankfully, not much! Salvation depends on the strength of the Savior more than on the strength of our faith. When Jesus told her that her faith had saved her, He meant to clarify that it was not magic or superstition, but rather faith that was the means of God's blessings coming to her through Christ. Faith is merely the channel, weak though it is, through which God works. But it is Christ, the object of our faith, not our faith itself, which cleanses us.

Say we were hiking in the woods when a forest fire began behind us. Strong winds were blowing it toward us faster than we could run. In a matter of minutes we would perish unless we could somehow get to a place of safety. Suddenly we come to a wide, deep gorge, spanned by a footbridge. If we cross the bridge, we will be safe. If we stay where we are, we will die in the flames.

How much faith does it take to get you to go across that bridge? You probably wouldn't do engineering studies to make sure that the bridge was sound. You might hesitate if the bridge was rickety. But what if the bridge looked like the Golden Gate? Trucks and cars were rumbling over it. What kind of faith do you need to walk across a structure that is so obviously solid, especially when you are fleeing the rapidly approaching flames behind you?

Did your great faith save you? Not at all! It only took enough faith for you to go across the bridge, knowing that you would perish if you didn't. If that bridge had been faulty, you would have plunged to your death no matter how great your faith. But if the bridge is solid, then weak faith is all it takes to get you across. The strength of your faith is not the real issue, but rather the strength of the bridge. Jesus Christ is mighty to save all who flee to Him.

E. Faith must be confessed.

It's interesting that with Jairus and his wife, Jesus told them not to tell anyone about His raising their daughter from the dead, although it could scarcely be concealed. But with this woman who would rather hide her embarrassing condition, Jesus singles her out in front of the crowd and makes her confess what had happened. I believe Jesus asked Jairus and his wife to conceal what had hap-

pened because He didn't want to pander to the shallow miracle-seekers. But He made this woman confess her faith and healing for several reasons.

As I mentioned, He did it for her sake. He wanted her to realize that it was faith in Him, not magic, that had cured her. He wanted her to be brought into personal communion with Him. He wanted her friends to know that she had been healed, so that she would be accepted back into the social and religious circles. And, He wanted her confession to bolster the sagging faith of Jairus, whose 12-year-old daughter was near death. If Jesus had the power to cure this woman's 12-year-old disease, He could raise Jairus' 12-year-old daughter.

If you have experienced Jesus' cleansing of your sins, He wants you to confess it in public baptism. The waters of baptism symbolize the complete cleansing that Jesus works in your soul. For His name's sake, for your sake, and for the sake of others who need their faith strengthened, every believer should be baptized to confess that you have been cleansed through faith in Christ.

Conclusion

Like this woman with the hemorrhage, we all have been defiled by sin. We must be cleansed or we can never spend eternity in the presence of a holy God. Only Jesus can cleanse us through His death on the cross. We must lay hold of Him by faith as she did that day.

Don't be put off by those around you. Many in the crowd touched Jesus that day and weren't healed, but this woman didn't let that stop her. Don't fear that your weak faith is not enough. Jesus will accept it and work to strengthen it. Don't think about anything except that your sin has defiled you and that you desperately need what only Jesus offers, complete cleansing from your sin. Fear only that He will pass by this morning on His way to healing others and you will not touch Him and be saved. Weak faith is enough to lay hold of His mercy, but indifference or hesitation can result in the ruin of your soul. If you lay hold of Jesus by faith, you will hear His assuring words, "Your faith has made you well; go in peace."

Discussion Questions

1. Do Christians need ongoing cleansing or is the cleansing at salvation sufficient?
2. Why is it essential to affirm that salvation is by faith alone apart from any human works?
3. Is salvation always instantaneous or is it sometimes gradual?
4. Is it wrong to encourage a person to come to Jesus for the benefits he/she will receive?

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