

Text: Exod. 30:17-21, 38:8

Title: The laver – water that makes white as snow

Time: 3/5/2023 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We read a passage this morning that refers to the whiteness of snow (Isa. 1:18). Have you ever investigated what makes snow so very white? We know that a pure stream of water is clear or transparent. So why is snow, made up of water, white instead of clear?

As you know, the snowfall we see outside is made up of innumerable snowflakes. But did you know that every snowflake is comprised of hundreds of water crystals that are clear? I am told that they are not transparent, but they are translucent. When they combine into a snowflake they make something with many different angles that reflect light in different ways.

“Because light bounces back and forth within the crystal, some light is reflected and some is absorbed. The millions of ice crystals bouncing, reflecting, and absorbing light in a layer of snow leads to neutral ground. That means there is no preference for one side of the visible spectrum (red) or the other (violet) to be absorbed or reflected, and all that bouncing adds up to white” [<https://www.thoughtco.com/why-is-snow-white-3444537>].

Just like the whiteness of snow comes from the comprehensive reflection and absorption of the light of the sun, so the glory of mankind as created by God in the Garden of Eden was a comprehensive reflection and absorption of the Creator’s perfect image. But Isaiah does not speak of man’s glory, but rather of man’s inglorious sin: “Though your sins be as scarlet” and “though they be red like crimson.”

When impurities get into snow, they inhibit the perfect reflection and absorption of light, and consequently what we see is

no longer pure white. Ever since the Fall recorded in Genesis 3, the perfection God gave man as created in His own image has been marred by the impurity of sin.

Once snow becomes discolored with impurities, only God can wash it. We might have said that it cannot be washed, until we remember our third-grade science class where we learned about the water cycle. Some of that new, pure, clean, white snowfall outside was likely once a bunch of dirty snowflakes, but as those water droplets melted back into water and eventually evaporated back into the clouds of the sky, God removed the impurities and caused the pure white snow to descend upon us again yesterday.

We might say that God, and only God, can wash dirty snow. And following our analogy, the Bible tells us that God, and only God, can wash us from the impurities of our sin.

King David needed this supernatural washing. He prayed: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51:2). "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (v. 7). David had sinned greatly. He committed adultery with another man's wife, and then he had her husband killed to cover up his sin after learning he had impregnated her. There were impurities in David's snow, but amazingly somehow he knew that God could wash him.

David very likely thought of the laver of the tabernacle during times like this in his life. He had written songs about the washing and cleansing that happens on God's holy hill: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps. 24:3-4). "I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord. That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. Lord, I have

loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth" (Ps. 26:6-8). David would have told us that the priest's use of the laver symbolized the washing his sinful heart needed..

So our message this morning is about the laver and the way it symbolizes water that makes white as snow. One commentary included a poem about the importance of this device:

"The laver stands. If earth defiled,
Go, wash thy hands, thy feet;
And simply as a pardoned child,
Approach the mercy-seat;
Within the veil thy censer bring,
And burn sweet incense to the King."

Consider with me three details about God's design for the laver and its water, which symbolized a washing that makes the defiled whiter than snow.

I. The laver is God's idea, not man's (v. 17-18a).

Illustration: In 2007 the liberal evangelical group Sojourners organized a panel discussion on the religious views of Democratic presidential candidates. Hillary Clinton was there, and I remember that she said at the time about her religion as a liberal Methodist: "I don't like to wear my faith on my sleeve." Her Republican opponents criticized her for that because she campaigned in more than a score of churches during her presidential run asking for congregations to "Amen" her sermons while they promised to give her their vote.

Application: I mention that to emphasize that the Bible never speaks of "my faith" and "your faith" the way that it may speak of "my sleeve" and "your sleeve." It speaks rather of "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). It is important this morning that our study of the laver begins with verse 17. The laver did not come from Moses's faith, nor that of an

Israelite. It was not the creation of man, who found it a fulfilling way to express his own idea of religion.

It was God's idea. It was the faith that God revealed to man to obey. It pictured the exclusive truth of God, which alone can lead men to God. Very simply, the laver, like every other truth that can wash our sins away, was God's idea not man's. If we want to be washed from our sins, the first thing we have to do is pursue "the faith," not "my faith."

Jude 3: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of *the common salvation*, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for *the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*." Your faith and my faith must be the faith once delivered to the saints, or it cannot wash away our sins. The laver is God's idea, not man's.

II. The laver is brass, not gold (v. 18a).

Application: We do not read about any design features of the laver, except to say that it was made of brass and that it was comprised of two components, a basin for water and a stand. We know that the design needed to facilitate the washing of both the hands and the feet of the priests, so it was probably not shaped like our typical bird-bath basin on a stand.

One suggestion is that the stand was a more shallow basin, like a saucer under a cup, and that the upper basin had holes from which water could pour into the lower basin for washing. A Jewish rabbi named Ben Uri suggested that the stand had an axle from which the basin hung and under which it could rotate, so that water could pour out.

It would seem from the text that the Lord wants us to focus on a specific design feature, the fact that it was brass. The laver's brass came from a source specified by the Lord in Exod. 38:8, "And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of

the lookingglasses (mirrors) of the women assembling, which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

Ancient mirrors were made of brass, and the laver was made with brass from mirrors that came from the people of Israel. In addition, we do not read about any shittim wood going into the brass structure of the laver, unlike the brass altar. Nor is there any gold. There is much about all of this that we will have to ask the Lord someday, but what we can glean from these details must include what the Bible says elsewhere about mirrors. In many passages, the Bible calls itself a mirror.

James 1:22-25, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass (mirror). For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

Speaking of the day when the New Testament Scriptures would be completed, Paul wrote: “For now we see through a glass (mirror) darkly; but then face to face.” And referring to the reading of the Books of Moses, he said it is like looking into a mirror: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

So, the laver is brass, not gold, and it is made of the brass of mirrors, and mirrors often represent the Word of God in biblical imagery. It is not surprising then that we read clear passages that teach us about the importance of God’s Word to the washing away of our sins.

Ps. 119:9, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word.”

John 15:3, "Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."

John 17:17, "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth."

Eph. 5:25-27, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

William Ashbrook used to tell his son John, my boyhood pastor, about his Bible: "Either sin will keep you from this book, or this book will keep you from sin." The laver is brass made from mirrors, and time in God's Word can cleanse our way.

III. The laver is between the altar and the tabernacle of the congregation, nowhere else (v. 18b).

Application: There is order in the positioning of the laver. The order is sacrifice, then cleansing, then entrance into God's house. The laver was sprinkled with the blood of the altar, and its cleansing ministry presupposes the salvation that comes through the sacrifice of the lamb. It symbolizes the effect of the sacrifice on our sins, because it is not water from a laver that washes our sins away, but rather the blood of our Savior.

1 John 1:6b-7, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His son, cleanses us from all sin." "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission (cleansing) for sin" (Heb. 10:18). Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins? Believing this, we can be washed.

IV. The laver washed priests for service so they could be clean, not defiled (vv. 19-21).

Illustration: According to Old Testament law, the priest was bathed entirely upon entrance into the priesthood (Exod. 29:4) and on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:4). These events symbolized the initiation of God's washing away our sins.

The laver, on the other hand, was used for daily washings of hands and feet in preparation for service. So, when it comes to being washed from sin, our need is twofold. First, we need the complete initial washing of the bath. And then we need the daily maintenance washings that ready us for service.

Application: John 13:1-11 gives the account of the Lord Jesus's washing the feet of His disciples. When he came to Peter, Peter objected that their roles should be switched, "Thou shalt never wash my feet!" Jesus explained to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me" (v. 8). Peter then wanted his whole body washed, but Jesus said that was not necessary: "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean" (v. 10).

So there is the washing of becoming a Christian and then the washings of Christian growth into greater Christlikeness. When we first trust Christ to be our Savior, the Bible says of us "ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). That washing creates our relationship with the Lord. But as believers who are washed this way, we still sin, and we must confess that sin, not to restore our relationship, but rather to restore our fellowship with the Lord. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Have you been washed? Have you trusted Christ as Savior? Are you in close fellowship with Him through the washings of confession and conviction from the Word?

Conclusion: As we close, I want us to remember a symbol the Lord gave us as a New Testament local church that is very

similar to the symbol of the laver, which the Lord gave the worshippers of Israel at their tabernacle. It is the ordinance of baptism. Just as the laver stands between the altar and the house of God, so baptism is for those who first have placed their faith in the sacrifice of Christ for their sins, and it is for those who want to enter the interior of the house of God, membership in a good local church.

The blood of bulls and goats never took away sin; it symbolized the blood of Christ that does so. And the water of the laver never washed it away either; only the power of the Word of God can. Partaking of the Lord's Supper cannot save, but Jesus's broken body and shed blood can. And baptism does not take your sins away, only the power of the Word of God can. But just as the Lord took very seriously His command that Israel use the symbol of the laver ("that they die not," vv. 20-21), so also he takes seriously our need to obey His command to be baptized in our day. We cannot expect His blessing on our lives in disobedience to His command.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching