



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

*Only Christ Can Make Us Clean!*

NUMBERS 5:1-10 & SELECTED SCRIPTURES

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Cleanliness is very important to us. That fact is certainly expressed in life here at the capitol. As we prepared to come to the statehouse today we sought to make sure we and our clothing were clean and presentable. If we have an important meeting we make doubly certain we look sharp. It would be hard to imagine entering one of the legislative chambers or an important meeting in the governor's office in filthy coveralls and muddy boots. When entering the presence of an important person, it is automatic that we strive to be as clean and presentable as possible.

On a much grander scale, we must consider what it means for us to enter into the presence of our holy God! God is holy and pure, "of purer eyes than to behold evil or look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). We are sinful and "unclean" in His sight. So how can we as sinful people be cleansed so that we might come into the presence of a holy God?

In our studies this session we have been looking at how the story of the whole Bible, including the Old Testament, point to Jesus Christ and what He did for us on the cross. In Luke 24 Jesus taught His disciples that the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were written concerning Him, specifically that He would suffer and die and rise again.

Much of the Old Testament which we may find confusing and hard to understand, such as Leviticus and Numbers, actually points us to our need for Savior and how Christ fulfilled that need for us. In previous studies we have looked at the Tabernacle and the sacrificial system and how they pointed to Christ and His work. Let us look at another Old Testament passage that clearly points to our need for a Savior and how that need is met by Christ and His work on our behalf:

*<sup>1</sup>Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>Command the sons of Israel that they send away from the camp every leper and everyone having a discharge and everyone who is unclean because of a dead person. <sup>3</sup>You shall send away both male and female; you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst." <sup>4</sup>The sons of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp; just as the LORD had spoken to Moses, thus the sons of Israel did.*

*Numbers 5:1-4*

At first reading this passage seems strange and a little harsh. You may have been a true member of the nation of Israel, yet due to the physical impurities listed, you were excluded and removed from the camp. Yes, it seems harsh but there is a message here about what defiles us and makes us unclean and excludes us from the presence of God.

## THESE PHYSICAL IMPURITIES ARE A PICTURE OF SIN

There may well have been a practical reason for the separation of those with these physical impurities from the rest of the people of Israel. Such isolation would have prevented the spread of disease among the rest of the camp. But there is a much more important spiritual or theological significance to this. It was meant to teach the people of Israel, and us, something about God. Ligon Duncan suggests there are three important truths about God we learn from this passage:<sup>1</sup>

**God is Holy:** This is really the point. God is in their camp so the unclean and defiled cannot be there. Notice verse three, "**you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst.**" God is holy and does not dwell with that which is unclean and defiled. These physical impurities are but a picture of the sin that separates us from God. This is why when our sins are forgiven through repentance and faith in Christ our sin is described as being "cleansed" (1 John 1:7-10) and "washed away" (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5). Jesus Himself gives us a vivid description of how our sin defiles us and makes us unclean:

*<sup>20</sup>"That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. <sup>21</sup>"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, <sup>22</sup>deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. <sup>23</sup>"All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." Mark 7:20-23*

The physical impurities that excluded the people of Israel from God's presence in the camp are an illustration of the sin that separates each one of us from God's presence.

**God is Present:** You might recall how the Tabernacle represented God's presence among the people and how His glory dwelt over the

INTERIM BIBLE STUDY

TUESDAY, MAY 15, 12:00 NOON    TREASURER'S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)

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holiest place. This passage is the flip side of God's presence. The blessing of God's presence requires purity and cleanness on the part of those with whom He dwells.

**God has Spoken:** God, as the holy creator, has given His commands of what is required of those who would follow Him. Note the people's response in verse 4, "**The sons of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp; just as the LORD had spoken...**" What God says goes, even when it seems harsh and cuts across the grain of what we might think or desire. If we want to come into the presence of God we must do so on His terms because He has spoken.

We learn from this passage that God is holy, that God is present, and that God has spoken. More importantly we can learn how this passage points to Jesus Christ and how He alone can make us clean.

### ONLY CHRIST CAN MAKE US CLEAN

If we turn to the Gospel of Luke, we can see how this Old Testament passage points to and is fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ. Luke would have read and been familiar with Numbers, and he shares with us three events from Jesus' ministry that demonstrate how His work can make us clean from our defilement and impurity.

*<sup>12</sup>While He was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."<sup>13</sup>And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup>And He ordered him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."  
Luke 5:12-14*

*<sup>40</sup>And as Jesus returned, the people welcomed Him, for they had all been waiting for Him. <sup>41</sup>And there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus' feet, and began to implore Him to come to his house; <sup>42</sup>for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying. But as He went, the crowds were pressing against Him. <sup>43</sup>And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, <sup>44</sup>came up behind Him and*

*touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. <sup>45</sup>And Jesus said, "Who is the one who touched Me?" And while they were all denying it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing in on You." <sup>46</sup>But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." <sup>47</sup>When the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. <sup>48</sup>And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." <sup>49</sup>While He was still speaking, someone from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore." <sup>50</sup>But when Jesus heard this, He answered him, "Do not be afraid any longer; only believe, and she will be made well." <sup>51</sup>When He came to the house, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother. <sup>52</sup>Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her; but He said, "Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep." <sup>53</sup>And they began laughing at Him, knowing that she had died. <sup>54</sup>He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Child, arise!" <sup>55</sup>And her spirit returned, and she got up immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat. <sup>56</sup>Her parents were amazed; but He instructed them to tell no one what had happened.*

Luke 8:40-42; 49-56

Notice the three accounts Luke shares with us. First of all, we see a leper approaching Jesus. Every person's response would have been to stay away lest they become unclean. What does Jesus do? He reaches out and touches him and says "be cleansed" (5:13). Next, as Jesus is moving through the crowds, the woman with the hemorrhage reaches out and touches Him. Rather than Jesus becoming unclean, she becomes clean and is healed. Finally, as Jesus reaches Jairus' house, He goes to their dead daughter, takes her by the hand, and says "Child, arise!" Again, Jesus does not become unclean but she is raised from the dead! Luke is showing that all three of the categories of uncleanness mentioned in Numbers 5:1-4: the leper, the one with the discharge, and the one who is dead – those who would be unclean and excluded from the presence of God – are made clean and healed by Jesus Christ. The point, **Jesus is the answer to our uncleanness!** Jesus suffered and died on the

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cross in our place so that our sins might be forgiven and cleansed. His righteousness (or “cleanness”) is given to us.

### CONCLUSION

What is our response to the truth that it is only Christ who can cleanse us from our sin? John writes of this in his first letter:

*7...If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. 1 John 1:7-9*

### EACH OF US MUST RECOGNIZE GOD’S HOLINESS AND OUR SIN AND UNCLEANNES BEFORE HIM.

We would be hesitant to visit the governor, senate president, house speaker, or other important leader with dirty clothes and in need of a shower and shave. How much more should we dread entering God’s presence with sin and uncleanness in our lives? All of us are tempted to believe we are good people. When we truly begin to recognize how holy and pure God is, then we begin to understand how sinful and unclean we are before Him. It is then we realize we need a Savior who can cleanse us from our sin.

### BELIEVERS MUST STRIVE TO BE HOLY AND CLEAN IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

When we repent and trust Christ, we are cleansed from our sin, given Christ’s righteousness, and made right with God. This is **positional** cleansing or **justification**. This is something Jesus does (“...The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin”). However, each of us must still deal with indwelling or remaining sin in our daily lives. This is what the Bible calls our “flesh” or “the old man”. (Rom. 7; Gal. 5:17; Eph. 4:22). In this area we are called to work at putting aside these things as we seek to become more like Christ. Paul clearly teaches us this:

*16...We are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 17“Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. 18“And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” Says the Lord Almighty. 19Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

*2 Corinthians 6:16 – 1:1*

This is **practical** cleansing or **sanctification**. We do not earn our salvation by making ourselves holy and clean. Our desire for holiness and our work towards it is a result of the change Christ make in our heart. This is something towards which we must work as we hear, read, and study God’s Word, pray, and spend time with other believers who encourage us in our Christian life.

This is one of the great challenges of the Christian life. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. Yet we are called to cleanse ourselves from the sin with which we struggle on a daily basis. We are seeking to live up to the position we already have in Christ.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were fastidious following all the rituals for cleanliness and avoiding anything that would make them unclean. In our day we may joke of folks who are “germaphobes” – who hate to shake hands, wash their hands constantly, and carry their own stash of Purell®. As followers of Christ we should be just as sensitive to sin in our lives. We should seek to avoid wrong attitudes and actions and quickly confess and seek God’s forgiveness when we do sin.

- **HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE CLEANSING OF YOUR SIN THROUGH REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN CHRIST AND HIS WORK ON THE CROSS?**
- **AS A BELIEVER, ARE YOU SEEKING TO AVOID WRONG ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS AND DEALING WITH THEM QUICKLY WHEN YOU DO SIN?**

<sup>1</sup> Ligon Duncan, Pastor First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS. “Defiled”. February 7, 2007. [www.fpcjackson.org](http://www.fpcjackson.org). <http://bit.ly/IIIXY6>.