

The Cleansing of the Body

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon calls believers to weep for and intercede on behalf of the Body of Christ, emphasizing the need for unity and cleansing in the church.

Scripture: Mark 2:1

Topics: "Church Restoration", "Intercessory Prayer"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the importance of intercessory weeping for the sins of the church, drawing parallels to the saints who wept for Israel in the past. He emphasizes the need for believers to care deeply for the body of Christ, weeping and praying for her cleansing and restoration. The sermon highlights the role of believers in bringing the broken and paralyzed church before Jesus for healing, stressing the urgency of unity, love, and fervent prayer within the body of Christ.

Transcript

READ Jeremiah 8-9

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the house of the daughter of my people not been restored. Oh, that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slaying of the daughter of my people.

"...That I might weep day and night for the slaying of the daughter of my people."

From the very oldest times there were people who loved Israel so much that, when they saw uncleanness and wrong in the nation, they didn't just criticize, point the accusing figure, and then turn their backs; they wept before the Lord! It was through this intercessory weeping that God restored His people again and again.

From the days the fig tree of Israel produced this new shoot, Jesus, the Messiah, there have been saints who love the body of Christ enough to weep for her sins. Through these weeping saints God has brought cleansing to the church again and again.

There has never been a greater need for such saints than right now. There are many who can diagnose, who can tell us everything that is wrong with the church. Many a self-appointed Moses wants to lead the church to a new Promised Land. But few come before the living God the way Moses did, eating his heart out, crying, weeping, calling for God to spare the nation.

And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many gathered together so there was no longer room for them, not even about the door. He was preaching the word of God to them and they came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. When they could not get near to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening they let down the pallet on which the paralytic laid, and when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

The men who lowered this paralytic to Jesus represent those believers who are troubled about the condition of the church, and weep for her. It grieves them enough to press through to the Lord, until they see some kind of healing in the Body. The paralytic man represents the church in its present state: bound, discouraged, weak, and weighted down with guilt. These men bring their friend and lay him before Jesus; and when Jesus sees their faith, He says to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

This paralyzed man is healed. And from that point on, there is no mention of the four men who brought him to Jesus. Once they have opened up the roof and lowered him down at the foot of Jesus, their job is done. Jesus takes over and he forgives the man's sins, gives him a clean heart, lifts him on his feet, and sends him on his way. But this miracle would not have taken place if it had not been for the four men who took the trouble to bring him.

Today the Lord is facing us with this question: "Do you care enough about my people to weep for them, to bring them to me as if they were your own sick children? My Body on earth."

So long as we think that we can have a private fellowship in our part of town and hold attitudes against brothers or sisters in another part of town, we aren't bringing life to the Body we are polluting the Body! As long as we even half think that we are the only ones that are right, and imply that those saints on the east side or the north side or the downriver side aren't safe to be around, we're polluting the Body.

"Look out for them, brother, those people are weird!"

And we're flawless?

This wariness, this hardness, divides us from each other and hinders our prayers. The world sees how divided we are, and shakes its head. The heavenly Father sees our mean spirits and weeps.

But we have come to a time when God is about to cleanse the body of Christ on earth. In fact that cleansing has already begun. God is cleansing his church first of all by raising up a people who care enough about the body to weep for her, and pray for her. Who will "take no rest and give God no rest" until healing, comes to her.

God is also cleansing his church by removing from the doorway of his kingdom those people who for years have been blocking the entrance by their indifference to brothers and sisters inside and outside their own fellowships. People who say they love God, but never lift a finger to help their struggling sisters, brothers, neighbors.

Cleansing fires are about to purge the Body as the press of the Spirit of God increases. Every believer reading these words will find themselves either raised up to care for the Body or left to drift away in that sea of indifference.

We will begin to edify the body, weep for the body, pray for the body and minister to our brothers and sisters in ways that we have never done before, or we will be driven from the door of the kingdom by the offence of the cross. God is cleansing his church. The only people who will survive this cleansing are those who allow themselves to be gripped by the Spirit sufficiently, that their lives begin to change.

When the Spirit of cleansing comes upon us, the first change we will notice is that we start to turn our criticisms into prayers. No doubt there are situations that call for hard words. If we have to turn over the tables of the money changers in order to cleanse the pulpit, let's do it. Most of us aren't disrupting the money changers, and we are not speaking those words that have to be spoken to the Scribes and Pharisees, including the Scribes and Pharisees that live inside us. Rather, we are walking around with a sour attitude toward everybody. We have our spiritual binoculars out, scanning the horizon looking for flaws in others. .

That critical attitude never brings cleansing to the body. It simply pollutes the body.

With patience forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

What do we do when we see sickness in the body? Do we complain to each other about it?

(Who of us isn't guilty of this?) Or do we take this sickness in the body and lift it up before the Father and cry out for his mercy? If you are having trouble finding things to pray about, start with all the people you have been critical of, and the saints you have doubts about, the things that you don't like. "I don't like the liturgy." Pray about the liturgy in our worship. Maybe God doesn't like the liturgy either. Maybe God sees the liturgy as a valuable aid to corporate worship. Let God show us. Meanwhile, pray about it. And every time you catch yourself criticizing, discipline yourself to turn your moaning into prayer.

Another change will take place in us when the Spirit of cleansing takes hold of our hearts: we will begin to face reality about ourselves. Paul pleads with the Ephesians, "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called in all lowliness and meekness." In other words, face the truth about yourself. When we face the truth about ourselves, what else can we be but meek and lowly?

When Jesus tells us to go down and take the lowest place, he is not telling us to put on a production of our humility, he is telling us to face the truth about ourselves. For where else do we belong but down there in the lowest place?

Cleansing from God will come to the body of Christ when we start leaving those highest rooms, where we are trying to establish ourselves and come down to the lowest room where we really belong. What a relief to no longer have to maintain an image or defend a reputation!

Another change will come to our hearts and into our lives when we allow ourselves to be gripped by the spirit of cleansing: we will begin to believe that the church really can be changed. Although we "pray for the church" all the time, we don't quite believe that there will ever be a change. We just see it going from bad to worse. What's the use?

We need to see a vision of a pure, holy, marvelous, glorious church. Jesus not only wept over Jerusalem, even though he knew that Jerusalem was about to come under a devastating judgment, he looked beyond that judgment to the day when Jerusalem would once again say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!" Jerusalem is going to be restored!

2000 years ago the Lord Jesus saw Jerusalem's coming glory. It hasn't happened yet, but it is coming. Her very buildings will shine with the glories of the Messiah, and her streets will echo songs that will transform those streets into the very music of heaven.

Just as our Lord looked beyond the presence of the state of Jerusalem as it was when he was here to the day when it will be restored and glorified, so we also need to look beyond the present state of the church and see the Bride who has made herself ready, clothed in beautiful garments without a spot or a wrinkle. There is going to be a people of God who are holy, anointed with glory, without spot or wrinkle, without anything deceitful, a people whose every deed is righteous. With us or without us, whether we work with God or against Him, God is going to have a glorious church.

A final thing that will begin to happen to us when we allow the Spirit of cleansing to come into our hearts: we will go out of our way to bring the Sick Body into the presence of Jesus for healing. As those four men climbed the steps to the roof of the house, lifted up the tiles and lowered their friend down in front of Jesus, they were taking a risk. Someone might call the police or make a fuss.

It always takes risk, inconvenience, pain, denial of our own wishes, if we are really going to take the trouble to bring the sick body of Christ into the presence of the Lord Jesus. But what else can we do?

We will lift up the problem that bothers us most about the body of Christ now. It may be the lack of laborers, or the divisions in the body, or the prayerlessness or the absence of love, or the slothful spirit. We cry out for his mercy. We identify with the problem confessing that it has roots in our own heart.

Soon the mind of God's love will begin to flow into our lives and overflow into the Body of Christ itself.

"My son your sins are forgiven, rise and walk."

You will see evidence that your prayers are being answered, you will see quickening and cleansing and power and life flowing into brothers and sisters.

May we all be cleansed by the Spirit of the Living God, and may that Spirit of cleansing begin to rule our lives.

May he change these hard hearts and these rigid minds and this critical, slothful flesh of ours and transform them into vessels that he can really use to bring restoration and cleansing and life to the body and to prepare the way for his return.

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