

Great Words of the Gospel - Part 3

by Roy Hession

The sermon emphasizes the critical distinction between forgiveness and cleansing in the Christian faith, highlighting their importance for a healthy spiritual life.

Duration: 1:01:11

Scripture: Hebrews 9:11

Topics: "Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of having a cleansed conscience through the blood of Christ. He emphasizes that we often struggle to meet our own standards and please God, but through the sacrifice of Jesus, our conscience can be cleansed from dead works. This cleansing allows us to serve the living God in the newness of the spirit, out of love rather than duty. The speaker also mentions a book by Wesley Nelson called 'Captivated by Christ' that explores the concept of finding the shepherd in the wilderness and being led to still waters.

Transcript

Will you turn to the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 9. The epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 9, verses 11 to 14. We have to break into the sentence and sequence. It's all part of an ongoing argument, but we cannot but break in.

We'll break in at verse 11. But Christ being come and high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands that are to say not of this building, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once, that means once for all, into the holy place. Having obtained eternal redemption for us.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctify to the purifying of the flesh, as it did under the old mosaic ritual, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. The word purge, in the authorized version, is really a word that sounds too strong. Purge, scrubbing, using detergents.

No, the Greek word is simply the same word, translated in many other places, cleanse. How much more then, shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. We come now to another of the great words of

the gospel.

Yesterday we were thinking of that great miracle of grace, God's forgiveness of the sinner. Now we come to this second linked thing that he does. He cleanses the conscience from dead works that we might serve the living God.

Our subject then is cleansing. Now there is one verse in which, if not more, but certainly one great well-known verse, in which both forgiveness and cleansing are put together. That is of course 1 John 1 verse 9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, that is what we considered yesterday, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, that is what we want to consider this morning.

Just because these two things are put together in the same verse, and just because the one condition, the confession of sin, secures both, we are inclined to think that they are virtually the same thing, which as we shall see is not so at all. Yesterday we saw that forgiveness is that act of God whereby he releases us from the obligation to make reparation for the vast loss that God has sustained by our sin. And we saw that it was quite impossible for us to make any reparation for that great loss that he has sustained.

Could my tears forever flow? Could my zeal no respite know? All, all for sin could not atone. But grace does what we just have no right to expect. Referring to a parable in Luke 7, when they had nothing to pay, he frankly, freely forgave them both.

And he released them from that impossible debt. Remission, sent it away, that's forgiveness. And therefore quite obviously it has this sense of debt, of indebtedness, of guilt.

That is forgiveness. Now cleansing on the other hand is something quite different. Cleansing is being washed from the hangover of sin which is defilement.

Sin leaves a hangover. It leaves what the hymns call stain. It brings to the heart inner defilement, which in practice so often works out as self-recrimination.

You go on blaming yourself. And it also works out as shame. Shame.

You feel you don't stand, look God in the face. And you feel you can't look your brothers in the face. And cleansing deals with this inner thing.

And God not only in his grace forgives us our sins, but cleanses us from the defilement of them, the self-recrimination of them, the shame of them, the pollution of them. Do you see the difference? One is objective. Forgiveness.

A debt. It isn't inside, it's there against me, which God prevents. But cleansing isn't objective at all.

It's subjective. It's something that happens in there, and which needs to happen. Now I believe, I speak for us in our own personal fellowship here in this conference, we've become a bit loose in our terminology when we testify or speak of these things.

I think we often use cleansing. I've been cleansed, when you ought to say a deeper thing. You've been forgiven.

For I find it much harder to seek to be forgiven of that thing that stands before me, before God, than to be cleansed. Because that's something on the inside. And I think perhaps we do become a little loose.

Cleansing, cleansing, cleansing, cleansing. Wait a minute. The first thing is forgiveness.

And I would say that's the basic thing. The bigger thing, and the far more humbling thing, I think it's possible. I can only speak for myself.

When you're talking about cleansing, I'm using an easier word and sidestepping a little bit of humbling. On the other hand, it is possible for us to talk about forgiveness when what we actually need on that occasion is cleansing. Anyway, let's hope that this is going to be helpful, this distinction.

I thought of David in Psalm 51. And when he prayed that great psalm of penitence, we were thinking about it yesterday, in the evening. His first prayer was not wash me.

He didn't say, oh wash me and I shall be whiter than snow to begin with. Wash me thoroughly for my iniquity. David, what about the great loss you've inflicted on God? Oh, he said, I confess it.

I confess it. What I've done there. And his first prayer was, according to the multitude of your loving kindness, can you please see your way to relieve me of the obligation with regard to that terrible loss I've inflicted on thee.

His first prayer was, blot out my iniquities. Only then did he say, wash me on the inside thoroughly from my iniquity. Alright, there are the two things.

The one objective, the other subjective. And though forgiveness is so, obviously the first and the most humbling thing, you won't be able to get on in the Christian life unless you know also what it is meant to be cleansed from all unrighteousness. So, as David said, you are, in your consciousness and before God, whiter than snow.

I don't know any detergent advertiser that dares to say that his detergent will make things whiter than snow. Snow is the whitest thing we know. But David saw grace could do something further for him than that.

If we were to be restored to be made as white as snow, that would be to be restored to that state of innocence from which Adam fell, white as snow. But grace does something better for you. Whiter than snow.

The man so stained, he's brought to a richer place, a deeper place. And the only phrase that the Bible can use is whiter than snow. Now, this verse, 1 John 1, 9, offers one condition for us to fulfill, and both blessings are made available to us as a result.

If we confess our sins, he forgives us our sins and cleanses us from that which our sins left behind, all unrighteousness stands. But although both are promised on the one condition of confession, our faith must encompass both. Otherwise, it is possible, though never intended, that we could experience one without the other.

It is possible to confess your sin and accept God's forgiveness for your sin, but still go around with a sense of being dirty on the inside, a sense of shame and disgrace. But our faith needs to encompass not only the forgiveness of our sins, but cleansing from all unrighteousness. My dear friend Peter Elford, who sometimes comes to this conference, his son Paul brings with him, you will remember, a week or two ago, his great double bass.

Well, I remember hearing my friend Peter Elford giving his testimony. He was in Bath, in the war, I think, in the Admiralty or something, and he was in the church, but he took the very liberal view with regard to the Bible, and he wasn't born again at all, though quite religious. And when the Admiralty moved down to Bath, lots of Christians came with him, and they started a Christian union.

He got sort of caught up a little bit in it, but he couldn't stomach what they were saying. He had many an argument with them, and as for this talk about the blood of Jesus Christ, ah, it was hopeless. He had no place in his thinking or his theology.

Oh, yes, forgiveness, and he trusted he was forgiven, but the blood, and cleansing by the blood, and then something happened. He never told us what it was, and it's of no consequence, but there was a grievous moral fault occurred in his life, and he sought forgiveness, but he couldn't shake off the sense of shame, and disgrace, and self-recrimination, and I remember him saying that if I was allowed to go to heaven, I wouldn't want to go there. I'd get right out, though I might be forgiven.

I had this awful sense of shame still hanging over me, and then it was he saw the meaning, power, and purpose of the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses a man from all sin on the inside, as well as secures his forgiveness objectively before God. All right, then, there is something of a difference between forgiveness of our sins and being cleansed from all unrighteousness. Now we come back to this very important verse in Hebrews 9, which is the great classic on cleansing from sin.

Hebrews 9, we'd better read it again, because we want to look at it in some detail. Verse 13, If the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctify to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? This verse speaks, first of all, of the defiled conscience. Inasmuch as it speaks about the conscience being cleansed, it implies there are sometimes when it isn't cleansed and when it is defiled.

It's not talking about defiled thoughts, nor a defiled heart with its affections twisted. It's not talking about a defiled memory, even. But it is talking about a defiled conscience, that most inexorable faculty within us.

And when it is aroused, nothing seems to pacify it. The passage of time certainly does not. For long after a sin has passed from the thoughts and ceased to grip the affections of the heart and has almost passed from the memory, it's still there.

Years afterwards, defiling the conscience, giving a man a sense of shame. There are certain things in his life about which nobody must ask him any awkward question. And it comes between himself and God.

If he is unfit for fellowship with God. And it comes between him and his others. He's not free with his brothers.

He never dared talk very intimately about himself because as of now, he's got a conscience which is defiled. Let's suppose that one evening you go home and you have a cup of coffee before you go to bed. You're too tired to wash the cup and so you say, that's all right, it'll be okay by the morning.

But in the morning, yes, the coffee has certainly gone, but the stain remains. Or when you say, it's quite simple, we leave that a day or two. But in a day or two, the stain's still there.

Leave it a week, the stain's still there. Leave it a year. And the passage of time has done nothing to remain, to remove the stain, the defilement in that cup.

So it is as I say, the passage of time does nothing to remove the defilement of sin, the accusations on the inside and the sense of shame. And God knows sometimes how to awake memory and bring it back so that it becomes more conscious than at other times. Although you've begun the story of it to grow deep, it's still there.

Secondly, this verse tells us that the great hindrance to our serving, that such a defiled conscience is the great hindrance to our serving the living God. In as much as it says that when the conscience is cleansed from dead works, we are able to serve the living God, it implies that when the conscience is not cleansed, we are not able to serve the living God. I've certainly found that.

Paul talks in 2 Timothy 1.3 about God whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience. Ah, when the conscience is pure, then we're free to serve him. And what a delight his service is.

But oh, when the conscience is accusing, when the conscience is defiled, we are so much less able to serve the living God. Indeed, if we try. With the conscience defiled, you find there's a little demon from hell on your shoulder.

And even if you're trying to speak or trying to take that class, that demon is saying, hypocrite, hypocrite. And as you're asked to lead the prayer meeting, you try to do it, that little demon is saying, you hypocrite, you hypocrite. And I've known sometimes that demon while I've been preaching, saying all the time, hypocrite, I don't get on very well, I tell you.

When my conscience is defiled and when Satan is calling me hypocrite, hypocrite, the words don't come and I would do anything rather than engage in whatever service may be ahead of me. The old wheels go very slowly when the conscience is defiled. Years ago I heard Eric Roberts give this beautiful illustration of a great liner just completed.

There it is on the stocks and you can see it's half clear and clean and beautifully shaped and covered with new paint. The ceremony is performed and down the slipway that great liner goes into the river. It remains there for some months, perhaps a year while all the internal fittings are done and so on and at last it is ready for its maiden voyage.

And every bit of power generated by those mighty engines is transformed into speed as it cuts a clear, clean way through the waves. But it is known that after time, how long I don't know, it isn't making the same speed. It's lost some of its rapidity.

You might think what it needs is a new engine or a refit but they know what's wrong. Do you know what they do? They put it into dry dock. What's happened is this.

Beneath the waterline where other people can't see it, after a time thousands of barnacles have affixed themselves. And it isn't the engine which is wrong. Nothing wrong with that engine at all.

It is simply barnacles below the waterline. And so they put it into the dry dock and hundreds of men get to work chipping off those barnacles. And when they've done it, they give it another coat of paint and back into the water it goes just as speedy as it ever was.

And you know, there are so often things that have affixed themselves to our consciences below the waterline. Others don't know about them. We sometimes don't always see them very clearly but there they are, things that have happened, attitudes which have been adopted, things that haven't been straight, things that haven't been loving, things that haven't been pure, things where the flesh has expressed itself and we haven't called them sin.

And there they are, a great accumulation of barnacles, some going back quite a long way, some quite recently affixed. I need the power of the Holy Ghost, you see, that's what I need, I'm so needy. And that I believe perhaps is at the moment part of the great hunger for the Holy Spirit's operation, it isn't solely that, but it could be people are conscious of lack.

Therefore fill me, baptise me with the Holy Spirit. But wait a minute, friend, what's caused the lack? Jesus never intended you and me to have lack. He that cometh to me shall never hunger.

He that believeth shall never thirst. I tell you what the cause is, barnacles. And we could be begging the issue by wanting a mighty new power when the Holy Spirit himself wants you to see the barnacles.

And what he wants to do is to put us into dry dock so that the barnacles that have been there can be seen and acknowledged. And then Jesus, in his wonderful way, takes off the barnacles and back you go into the service with the old joy as never before, the old freedom, of course you're filled with the Spirit. Oh my dear friends, of course we believe and want to be filled with the Spirit all the time.

But that will not be so if the real trouble with us is when all is said and done is barnacles. Attitudes, wrongs, troubles in which you've pointed at the other person. And remember those three fingers we were thinking about last night that are really pointing back at us.

Oh, these are the barnacles. And so what a terrible hindrance such a defiled conscience is to serving the living God. Now this verse goes on to tell us further however, the real burden that's upon the conscience is not, it doesn't say it's sin, but what it calls dead works where the conscience is to be cleansed from dead works.

Now in the New Testament there are three thoughts of works mentioned. There are wicked works, pretty obvious what they are, straight down the line sin. Then opposite to wicked works there are good works.

And they're not random acts of good work, of good that we might do. Ephesians 2 talks about good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. That path of loving service, that path of devoted love to others in this and that sphere which God has appointed for us.

But in between wicked works and good works you've got this thing called, these things called dead works. They're not called wicked works and they're certainly not called good works because they have not been foreordained that we should walk in them. They are called dead works.

They are works which are bereft of the life of the Spirit. Now, I can only tell you what I understand to be meant by this phrase dead works. It occurs elsewhere in the New Testament in one place at least.

I would define dead works as the things we feel we ought to do to be better Christians and to be more used of God but which things we've never managed quite to do. It would be most interesting if you pass around a sheet of paper, sheets of paper, and everybody put down the things they feel they ought to do if they were to be better Christians, more pleasing to God and more used of Him. And we could collect them

up and have a look through.

The things you feel you ought to do. Well, I imagine much more prayer would be high on the list because we just know that our prayer life is so utterly deficient. Sometimes we have no time in a busy day to pray at all.

When the end of the day comes we're dog-tired, oh, to be a man of prayer. Put that down. Then a man of the word.

Just little snippets from Daily Light. Is that enough to feed the soul? Sometimes not that. Oh, to be a man who gets down to God's word.

I'd really have something for some people. So we put that down. Then there'd be various standards of humility and love for other people that we must attain.

And then, of course, we should be overflowing witnesses with always tracts on hand to pass out to people. Always ready to testify. This is obviously the thing.

If I was that sort of person I would really be pleasing to God and God would use me. And so we could go on and on. I haven't mentioned all the things.

Some of them are quite subtle, quite extraordinary. Only the Lord can show you what are one of these things which he calls dead works. But the trouble with these things is this.

Because we feel these are the sort of things we ought to do to be better Christians, we are burdened by them. For the fact of the matter is we never quite succeed in doing them. It's that whole conscience again.

You say, well, I'm going to spend a quarter of an hour in my quiet time. You've got it going at a quarter of an hour. But conscience says, you know, it ought to be a half an hour.

Oh well, alright half an hour. And you've managed to extend it to a half an hour and then, bless my soul, you meet somebody, he says he spends an hour. I say, I can't wait.

You never quite succeed in attaining those standards and keeping those promises and being the sort of person that pleases God. And the result of the attempt to do those things is simply to burden your poor old heart as it wasn't burdened before. There are many dear children of God and we're going about burdened with the standards we've not attained and the promises we've not kept and the souls we've not witnessed to and the prayers we've not prayed and a whole lot of other things we've done and the net result is to burden our poor old soul.

I believe that man at the pool of Bethesda began to hate that pool because although it seemed to offer him life, he could never get into it in time. And I believe for him it would be better for him not to have a pool at all than having one never being able to get. It might be better for us not to have made these promises but having made them and knowing they ought to be done, never really fulfilling them and I'm sorry to tell you you aren't going to fulfill them.

There is nothing for us this way but self reproach and a poor old heart and conscience tag us under a bigger load than ever before. In any case these dead works make Christ of none effect as Paul says in Galatians. For he says if righteousness, being right with God, comes by the works of the law and at bottom that is what these things are, Christ died in vain.

He said I thought all was going to come to you by my cross but apparently you've got another way of pleasing God. And I'm making him of none effect. And the actual doing of them is so dead.

Oh we do do them. We do manage to do some of them but when they're done from the motive of by these means being more pleasing to God then the life of the slave of him is all so heavy going. And if the truth were known I'm not getting nearer to grace but obviously further from grace for grace is offering me for nothing what I'm trying to get by my effort to be a better Christian.

Worst of all these works, these dead dead works do not deal with barnacles. You can do all these things and be utterly blind to the real trouble of barnacles. Sins are problems.

Bible reading doesn't take away sin. Prayer doesn't take away sin. And all these things, these great activities are passing by the deepest need of our heart.

Alright then this verse goes on to tell us that which does cleanse the heart, the conscience, from dead works. And that is the blood of Christ. How much more shall the blood of Christ cleanse our consciences from dead works.

And then it refers us here to an Old Testament ritual. One of the most interesting ones in the Old Testament. I've hardly ever heard it preached upon.

And there's only one book on my shelves that really sets out to expound it. Though of course a general commentary would. But there's no book that makes much of it.

And yet, here it is right in this verse. And it gives us the most beautiful picture of what is meant by the blood of Christ which cleanses the conscience from dead works. You see it's only too possible for the phrase the blood of Christ and the blood of the Lamb to be little more than a cliché to us.

In fact, because it's thought to be a cliché, you will find that even in evangelical groups each new hymn book drops out just so many more hymns about the blood of Christ. Because after all it's only a cliché, belongs largely to mission halls and so on. But where God works in revival, the blood of Christ is all I see.

In East Africa, if there's one chorus which is sung more than another, and celebrates the victory of the Lamb, it is that chorus in Luganda in English, glory glory hallelujah. Glory glory to the Lamb, oh the cleansing blood has reached me. Glory glory to the Lamb.

Well, if it is regarded as a cliché, it may be our fault in not explaining what we see that blood to mean. And here we have in this verse one of the most beautiful Old Testament pictures of what the blood of Christ means. It talks about the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, and by so doing sanctifying to the purifying of the flesh.

And this is a reference to Numbers 19. You can turn to it, we're not going to go through it verse by verse, but it's a tremendous theme. I'd love to take it just as one study, but we won't be able to in this series.

In short, this was the thing. God created, as I said yesterday, an artificial uncleanness, a ceremonial uncleanness. There was nothing actually defiling in the thing, but God decided we're going to regard it as ceremonially defiling, an artificial uncleanness.

And it was this, that if a man touched a dead body in one way or another, even just passing by and making some contact with it, or even a bone in a field, he was regarded as ceremonially defiled. And can you

believe it? Until he was cleansed from this ceremonial defilement, he was excluded from the camp. And perhaps more important than all, he was excluded from the ministrations of the tabernacle and from worship.

And in as much as in those 40 years in the wilderness, a whole generation was dying out, it is reckoned that a hundred people a day die in the wilderness. A hundred funerals a day, a hundred sick people being tended, people were all the time being defiled by contact with death, and therefore excluded from their religious privileges. And thus it was God provided a way of cleansing from the ceremonial defilement which would be as readily available as the defilement was contracted.

It was an artificial uncleanness, and of course the cleansing, the remedy, was an artificial one. But though in themselves they were only ceremonial, what I call artificial, using Basil Atkinson's phrase, they nonetheless were used and created in order to point to a real uncleanness, and a real cleansing. This was how God was educating his people to understand the gospel when it should be revealed with the coming of the Lord Jesus.

And some time ago, God lit up to me that phrase, the ashes of a heifer. And in the Bible which I was using when I first saw it, I underlined it. The ashes of a heifer.

Well I must tell you what the cleansing was, before we come to that. The priest was told to take a red heifer, a red cow, absolutely red, take it into a valley, slay it, take its blood and sprinkle it before the tabernacle, and then go back and put a great bonfire under the carcass, and burn and burn and burn until every last bit of that carcass was reduced to ashes. Then another man would gather up those ashes.

Perhaps there would be several barrels full of them. And they would keep it in a special place because this was to be the cleansing medium. And whenever a man knew he'd touched death and therefore was regarded as unclean, he could go to one who was clean and ask him to do this service for him.

And the one who was clean would go to one of those barrels and take a little bit of those ashes, he would mingle it in running water, and on the third day he would sprinkle upon his friend the ashes of the heifer mingled with water. Then he would do it again on the seventh day. The ashes of the heifer mingled with water.

And then on washing his clothes he was regarded as clean and could return to the camp and certainly to his religious privileges. And as I say, that word ashes came home to me, because those ashes are a picture to us of the blood of Jesus Christ. Ashes! Ashes! The ashes of a heifer! You can't burn ashes.

They are what is left when the fire has done its work and gone out. They are a testimony of a fire that's finished its work. And that, dear friends, is a picture of the real meaning of the blood of Jesus Christ.

That blood speaks of the judgment of God against him having been burnt out in the bosom and breast of our Saviour as he hung upon the cross. As he wailed my God, why hast thou forsaken me? The fire was burning. The fire of God's anger against sin was burning.

It's still burning. But wait a minute. I hear a word.

It is finished. The flames go out. And then a Roman spears to his side and the blood came.

When the flame went out, the anger of God against sin was exhausted. And the blood is like those ashes. It's a token of the fact that judgment has been met.

That the work has been finished. It has been exhausted. And all that is left of that great judgment bearing of Jesus on the cross is the ashes.

The blood. It's a token of a work that's been done that's enough to cleanse the conscience and put every last one of us in the perfect relationship with God without us having to add anything that we do to make it efficacious. We all know daily light.

And one day, well I know you know daily, you know about daily light. To me the most extraordinary thing about this collection of daily scriptures to be read each morning, each evening, and you can get the book in the bookstore, is the wonderful juxtaposition of texts. When the Baxter family, a generation or more ago, compiled it, they were a grown family and father would tell them the leading text for the next morning.

And all the family would return to their, go to their bedroom, and in their own morning devotions the next morning would seek other linked texts from other parts bearing on the leading text. And so they put them together and they stored them up before the Lord and revised them. And we have bequeathed with this beautiful book Daily Light on the Daily Path.

And one of the most unique things is the extraordinary juxtaposition of these texts. And sometimes the juxtaposition is too powerful for words and hardly needs a word of explanation. Very often God's given me messages from others just by seeing on that page one verse put against another.

One morning or evening the verse at the top of the page was, Who knoweth the power of thine anger? From Psalm 90. There's a question. Who knows the full blast and power of the holy hatred of God against sin? Next verse.

And about the night power. Jesus cried with a loud voice, Lama, Lama you know the word, perhaps you don't, which being by interpreted means, My God, my God, why? Just the two together. I saw that only one had ever known the full power of the anger of God against sin.

No human has known it. But Jesus did as he hung on the cross. But he not only knew the full power, he exhausted it.

Nothing is left but the ashes, the blood. A token of something done. A victory won on behalf of the feeblest saint that puts him right with God.

That's the reason why so often hymns about the blood have got a lilt about them. Rather rhythmic. Some people think they're irreverent.

Would you be free from your burden of sin? There's power in the blood. But it's right. Hymns about the cross, the Good Friday hymns are solemn.

But hymns about the blood have the note of victory. It's finished. It's done.

Satan has lost his mortal power. It's swallowed up in victory. For the blood has never lost its power.

Now this is that which applied to that burdened conscience sets him free. It is that which is the answer to the sin, the barnacles first of all. For if we walk in the light that is willing for God to show us those

barnacles, the blood of Jesus will cleanse us from all sin.

But not only does the blood of Jesus cleanse us from sin, but it cleanses us from all the burden and accusation of the futility of our efforts to overcome the deadness caused by our sin. It cleanses us from dead works. For if I come to Jesus for the cleansing power and where I am, and what a bad time I've had, I find at the foot of the cross, without any effort of my own, taking the place of a sinner, the back door, the beggar's door, as we've sometimes said, I'm brought into the banqueting house.

And I get for nothing through the blood of Jesus what I was vainly trying to get by my efforts. The result is I don't need to go on that weary treadmill any longer. I've got my blessing, my fullness of the Spirit, by another way, by the blood of Jesus.

And I'm relieved of all those things that were only accusing me and burdening me. Supposing you'd lost 50p, and you were looking everywhere for that 50p, and you pulled the tea out and the chair out and so on. Everything you were doing and making an awful fuss about that precious 50p.

What would be the first thing you would do when you found it? You'd stop looking for it. Ah, what relief! And if I'm looking for peace, but in the way of dead works, what a burden! I'm pulling away the furniture, but if at the foot of the cross I find through the blood of Jesus what I'm looking for, I'm relieved of that painful burden of my dead works. But of course, the blood of Jesus has to be applied.

Though the ashes of the heifer had to be sprinkled on the person, they had to be mingled with water. I think you can if you like. I think sometimes it's right in typology, water is sometimes a picture of repentance.

John baptized with water unto repentance. If that's the right interpretation of the water, this is applied when I call sin sin. Not when I ask to be cleansed, but when I confess sin as sin, then automatically the blood of Jesus is applied to my guilty conscience, after it is sprinkled on my guilty heart.

Satan in confusion, terror strike, departs. But more usually, perhaps in typology, water is a picture of the Holy Spirit, and that's true too. But I shall see the blood and see its application to me, save as the Spirit opens my eyes.

Charles Wesley's great hymn on the Holy Spirit says, of the Holy Spirit, to the Holy Spirit, to thine the blood to apply. And give us eyes to see that he who did for sinners die has surely died for me. There you are struggling and striving, and sometimes the dear Holy Spirit comes and he gives you eyes to see.

It's been done! If you call sin sin, then you needn't start laboring away and making promises. You're as clean as the blood can make you. You cannot be any whiter to the eye of God than what that blood makes you when you and I call sin sin.

And the wonderful thing is the precious blood of Jesus Christ is ever available. Ever available! They always put those ashes of a heifer in a place where it was easy to get to. So there was no great long journey.

And those ashes of a heifer lasted a long time. Jewish tradition says they only had, only needed to slay six red heifers in the whole of their history. Picture of a much more glorious fact, that the blood of Jesus is ever available.

It isn't just once, and that's it. If further defilement comes, then it's again, these Israelites, I guess, were getting defiled again and again. But no problem, no problem, there was the ashes of a heifer.

They didn't have to go mourning. And they could have them sprinkled upon them. Ever available.

As the Miss Havagal's hymn says, precious, precious blood of Jesus ever flowing free. Some people have taken objection to the thought of the blood of Jesus ever flowing. And they've changed the words there.

But I like it. It gives me the idea of something that's available, right my way. I know I do get defiled.

I do get a guilty conscience. And then I struggle and I feel worse after struggling. But no problem.

I needn't be down for any longer than it takes me to get to the foot of the glass cross and confess sin. No, not take me to get to the foot of the cross and ask to be cleansed. Don't ask to be cleansed.

Confess the thing that's wrong. Confess the state of mind. Confess how you've been struggling.

And the promises will not only be forgiven our sins but cleansed from all unrighteousness. In other words, I know I'm saying things that many of you know and have lived by for years. This is not new.

But it is to some. May I say something that meant so much to so many of us. The blood of Jesus Christ is the standing provision for the constant cleansing of the believer so he needn't go on with any hangover of guilt, any self-incrimination.

He can look God in the eye and his brothers and he can share his testimony. That's the way you break the devil's spell when you're prepared to give a new, up-to-date testimony to a friend as you walk along. To the power of the blood to put you so completely at ease and at rest with God.

You really are. We have boldness to enter, not only cleansing here, but to enter the holy of holies of God's sanctity, the most intimate place. How? By our victorious life.

I don't know mine's victorious or not. Far from it. I get in if I get in at all by the blood.

And how does the blood apply? Well, I admit I'm not victorious. If you're all that victorious, don't you need the blood and you won't get in. But if you're prepared to say, I'm not all that victorious.

In fact, it's been the very opposite lately. Just fine. Just fine.

The blood of Jesus is your way. Anticipating all that need. It's lovely when it works out with your husband or wife.

My wife beats me to the cross usually. She gets there first and leaves me standing. And I say, well I was wrong too.

It's lovely when it works out that way. You say, you know, we're a wonderful couple. We have never had any problem.

Nothing comes between us. Glory to God. If because you're so perfectly compatible, you don't have any problem.

But if you see a beautiful union, the real thing, they'll tell you not because we're all that compatible. Not because things don't go wrong. What you see in our home.

And the warmth of which you feel which helping you has come from the cross. We've been to Jesus for the cleansing power. I remember years ago turning on the car radio in America and hearing a negro spiritual singing, I've just come from the fountain.

My heart is so clean. And where the blood of Jesus is applied, then God is pleased to give all those other qualities of love and forbearance which we've just been confessing at his feet, we lack. Ever available.

Precious, precious blood of Jesus. My last word is simply this. This verse not only talks about the defiled conscience.

Not only about the hindrance it is to the living works. The service for God. Not only the dead works are the real burden.

Not only about the blood of Christ. But it goes and ends by saying this. That when the conscience is cleansed from dead works by the blood of Christ, we are able to do what we weren't able to do before.

Serve the living God. We're not now doing it in the oldness of the letter. But the newness of the spirit.

We're not doing it in order to get blessed and be more you. Making these promises to that end. But because of the foot of the cross we've got what we needed.

And now we're serving out of love and not out of duty. You can't hold some people back. They're so free.

They're available for any old thing. In the house party or back home. It's because they know this wonderful liberty and they're serving now.

In the newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. Wesley Nelson's book and by the way that's a book that I personally owe a lot to. It's in the book store.

I meant to tell you about it. Wesley Nelson, a dear brother in America, great friend of Pam and mine. Captivated by Christ.

And he says in that book, you don't go, the sheep doesn't go to the still waters to find the shepherd. It's the shepherd who finds the sheep out in the wilderness and having found him then leads him to the still waters. You don't have to make up your mind to have special forms of devotion to find your shepherd.

You're out in the wilderness. That shepherd is going to hear your cry. He's going to find you and then he's going to lead you to the still waters.

To those things, devotions and activities and service which are exactly appropriate for you. In other words, the means of grace are not ways to Christ. Oh no, they're not.

Bible, prayer, etc. Ways to Christ? No, no. But those things are ways.

Christ rather is the way to those things. When he's found me afresh, my Bible is. When he's found me afresh and cleansed me, I can pray as I couldn't pray before.

When he finds me afresh, I'll start witnessing. So the witnessing and the praying is not the way to Christ, but Christ found where I am or him finding me where I am leads me to these things. And I'm under grace and I'm living and serving the living God in spontaneous joy.

Amen and amen. Praise the Lord. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Thank you Lord for bearing shame and scoffing rude and thank you for the extraordinary power there is in that blood, not only to cleanse from sin, but to cleanse from the burden of the futile attempts to overcome the effects of our sin, the deadness in ourselves and bring us into peace. May some of us this morning, as the old hymn says, cast our deadly doing down, down at Jesus' feet and stand in him, in him alone gloriously complete. Interpret these things to each one of us, we pray thee.

Amen.

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