

Ex30,17-21 Tabernacle Series #4 - basin

Sermon

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Ex30,17-21

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Series: Tabernacle #4

Theme	Wash yourself every day
1	You were set apart but still not without sin
2	You have hope in your struggle.

Congregation / believers / disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ,

It is early in the morning. Zechariah, one of the priests, is on his way to work. He enters the tabernacle, there is nobody there yet.

Before he begins his work, he has to do something first he cannot just start his work he has to wash his hands and feet first. He walks over to the basin, gets some water, and washes. Strange. Did he not wash his feet at home perhaps?

The first believer arrives with his animal. The priest slaughters the animal, burns it on the altar, and sprinkles the blood on the sides of the altar.

Then the next one comes.

But he has to wait a moment.

The priest walks to the basin again, and repeats what he did earlier: he washes his feet and hands again.

Most of the activity was around the altar, but in between you saw the priests walk to the basin.

The basin was a big bronze bowl that held a lot of water, enough to cleanse the priests many times. It was the only object in the tabernacle that God did not give dimensions for. Apparently there was some freedom in the design. If it was big it probably had spouts at the bottom, so that the priests could let the water flow out and wash their feet and hands in the water.

A surprising detail is given in Ex 38: the basin was made of the copper mirrors of the women who served at the entrance of the tent. Was it meant to be reflective so that the priests would see himself? I don't know.

The whole day the priests went back and forth, washing their hands and feet at this basin.

1. Set apart yet sinner

What was the basin for?

Why did they do this?

Well, they would die if they did not wash their hands and feet.

(pause...)

That's what God had told them.

Why is that?

The first surprising thing is that these priests were needed to work in the tabernacle in the first place.

The believers brought their sacrifices to the tabernacle but could not put them on the altar themselves. God had appointed special people to do this work.

Priests had to be sanctified, set apart

Aaron and his sons had been set apart to serve in the temple. They had been literally and visibly set apart: the work in the tabernacle was the only thing they did; they did nothing else, they did not have a piece of land or a business. They lived from the parts of the offerings God assigned to them.

They were also the people who lived closest to the tabernacle.

Their unique position was visible in the clothing they wore: special linen robes and tunics, a turban on their heads and a sash around the waist. The high priest was even more special: he wore the breastplate with 12 stones, representing the 12 tribes, on his heart and a special diadem on his turban.

(This special dress served to give them dignity and honor: Ex28,40)

They were consecrated (made holy and dedicated) for their service in the tabernacle in a special ceremony, which we read in ch 29.

Moses anointed the basin and washed Aaron and his sons, their whole bodies. Then he dressed them in their special clothing and anointed them.

A bull and two rams were brought as sin offerings and burnt offerings. The blood was put on the right earlobes, thumbs, and big toes of each priest and sprinkled on the altar. Their whole bodies were holy because the extremities on their most important side (the right side of their body) was cleansed with blood.

You can see that great care was taken to make the priests holy and to ordain them for this task.

The consecration involved sacrifices and sprinkling of blood in order to take their sins away. This ritual took 7 days. A sacrifice was brought for them every day.

This was done because God called them to a special task: to represent the people before God.

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Then the altar was purified and the entire tabernacle and all the furnishing were anointed. Everything was pure and dedicated to the holy God of Israel, so that he could dwell in the midst of his people:

"So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. [45] Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. [46] They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God." (Ex 29.44-46)

The priests were a constant reminder that believers were called to come and have fellowship with God but that this was not something to be taken for granted.

The first consecration that lasted a week was followed up by other sacrifices for the priests and for the people. Every year the high priest had to make atonement for himself, his household, and the whole community of Israel.

"In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been." (Lev 16:16)

On top of all this, they had to wash their hand and feet many times, every day: before the priests entered the Holy Room of the tabernacle and before they brought a sacrifice, they had to wash their hands and feet at the basin.

So why all these washings?

This was a constant reminder of the need for holiness.

It was not enough that they had been consecrated when they began serving in the tabernacle. They had to wash themselves every time when they approached God on behalf of the people.

But there was a difference: the washing was not total. They only washed their hands and feet. Their position, their anointed status did not change, but they had to cleanse themselves from the contamination with sin. The sacrifices went through their hands, and they used their feet to walk into God's house. They had to respect the holy character of his house.

Daily cleansing

This tells us that there is a daily contamination of sin. For the priests it was their own sins and the sins of the people they represented. They became unclean when they dealt with the sinners who came in to bring their sacrifices.

They had to cleanse themselves before they went inside to place the bread on the table of presence. Also when they went inside in the morning to tend the lamps or in the evening to light the lamps on the lampstand, they had to burn incense on the altar.

In their activities in the tent of meeting they represented the people of Israel before God, just like when they burnt the sacrifices on the altar outside.

They had to be cleansed from any sin and contamination before they did these things.

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A continual cleansing, daily, no even more often, several times a day, was necessary for the priests because they represented the people.

Necessary?

The washings the priests needed to perform so often told every believer that approaching God was not a casual affair. It was not something to be taken lightly.

The priests had to be consecrated and made clean at the time when they became priests, but they had to **wash** and be **kept clean** whenever they went in to minister.

We can think today 'it's a good thing that life is not so complicated any more. All those ceremonies - I'm glad we don't have to perform them any more.'

Indeed, it is wonderful that drawing near to God is as simple as folding your hands in prayer. Things have become less complicated. We are closer to God now!

But don't miss the lesson in all this: all these regulations, all the sacrifices, and all these washings taught them respect for God's holiness. We need to learn that lesson, too.

To say it in the words of Ps 24:

*"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? [4]
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an
idol or swear by what is false." (Ps 24.3-4)*

When we approach God we need to realize that he is the holy God and that it is a privilege that we sinners can come to him. It is a miracle that he accepts us! We need to respect his holiness if we want to approach God in a way that pleases him.

The priests and the believers were consecrated and had received atonement for their sins through the annual sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. They were right with God. God had accepted them.

But their work never became a casual affair. They had to wash themselves before every activity they performed on behalf of the people. If they ignored God's command or if they forgot that they were ministering before the holy God and forgot to wash, they would die.

'Don't talk about sin'

Sometimes you wonder: does the church not talk too much about sin?

Especially after Jesus has come: 'Can we stop talking about sin, please? He has taken it away. He has dealt with it. That's it.'

That's not it!

This is the message of the basin:

If you think this way you forget God's holiness and the privilege that you can come to him. You take forgiveness for granted and you ignore that you remain a sinner.

This is a temptation for all of us: to walk past our sins and ignore them. To assume that God is OK with everything we do as long as we come to church and perform our prayers.

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Well, God was not happy just with the fact that the priests showed up for work every day. He did not count the sacrifices they brought and say 'Oh, how wonderful that you are doing so much for me.'

Instead, he was watching whether they were washing themselves. They died if they didn't.

Learn

The gospel teaches us two things:

- 1) First, Jesus died for all our sins on the cross. God has adopted believers as his children. And we can say with Paul: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Believers came to the altar and saw their sacrifices go up in flames. They knew: God accepts this sacrifice as a sweet aroma. He has accepted me. Not because of this animal, which cannot possibly carry all my sins. But because of the savior he is going to send.'

When we believe in Jesus and approach God in his name, we may know: "we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebr10,10)

This is essential for you and me: we must be in Christ Jesus through a living faith. Then we are saved and we can stand before God in the righteousness of Jesus. Our position, our standing before God has radically changed. You can leap for joy: 'God will not remember my sins any more!'

- 2) But the altar was not the only thing in the courtyard. The priests who brought the sacrifices had to wash themselves every time. So, second, we need to remember that being in Jesus means that we cannot step over our sins, think it's all taken care of, and just move on.

Our position has changed but we need to be cleansed of the daily contamination of sin. Do not ignore it, but come to God with a repentant heart and he will accept you because of the sacrifice of Jesus.

What it means is this: the sacrifice of Jesus was made once for all and is the basis for our confidence. On a daily basis we must grab hold of it and ask God to apply it to the sins we have committed. Again. And again. And again. Every single day.

The apostle John brings these things together in his 1st letter.

(PLEASE LOOK THIS UP)

In chapter 1 he rejoices in the new position we have received: we have fellowship with God:

"our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. [4] We write this to make our joy complete. [5] This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (1Jn1,3-5)

Then he tells us that we should not deny the reality of sin in our lives. Don't act as if it's not there, but confess your sins:

[6] If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. [7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we

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have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. [8] If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. [1] My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. [2] He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1John 1.6-2.2)

Here you see that the altar and the basin belong together. These two objects in the courtyard reflect how our Christian lives work: there is the certainty of being accepted by God in Jesus Christ because of his sacrifice and there is the need for daily cleansing because we remain sinners.

2. You have hope in your struggle

It seems as if the message is only serious: realize that you are a sinner, don't take things for granted.

But do you see that the basin helps us in our struggles?

You know you are a Christian. You have been baptized and you have professed your faith in Jesus at some point in your life.

But now, what does your daily life as a Christian look like?

Are you impressed with your own obedience? Are you the perfect example of a servant of God?

When we see our daily sins and see them really well, when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes for the true reality of our lives, we wake up and are shocked: there is so much in my life that is unholy!

I do not give God the glory for everything in my life. When other notice things I've done well, I may say 'it's not my work' in false modesty. But do I openly give God the credit?

I don't give the Lord Jesus my undivided love every minute of my life.

I know I need to read the Bible and take time for him but my devotions and prayer life are lacking.

I say Jesus is my highest desire and I'd like him to be, but it is very difficult not to be distracted by my worries, my work schedule, by papers I need to write for school, and by things I'd like to buy and own?

I want to, but I can't possible give my whole heart to Jesus. It is just impossible.

So where does it leave me?

Am I a real Christian?

How is it possible that there is so much sin in my life? That my dedication to Jesus is lacking?

I can begin to doubt whether I am a true Christian.

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Well, then the basin has a message for you and me: our sins do not have the final say in our lives.

God also shows you that he is gracious. The basin gives hope: God did accept the priests and the sacrifices of his children.

The basin was a symbol of the washing away of sins with the blood of Jesus. When they asked for it humbly and applied it to their lives God forgave them and cleansed them. He will do the same for you.

You have been accepted by God. Believe it. It is true because of Jesus Christ. And his blood continues to wash away your sins every day.

Your commitment to Jesus

The daily renewal of our lives is a gift Jesus hands you. Repent and turn to him and his blood will wash you completely.

And he does more: he has promised his Holy Spirit who will wash you even more. Through his power you begin to fight against any sin that is left in your life.

When you actively fight these sins and the Spirit gives you the victory, you receive even more encouragement and affirmation: God is truly at work in you.

James teaches us that if we leave sins unchecked and let them continue to live in our hearts we are running away from the basin. He writes :

"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. [5] Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? [6] But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." [7] Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. [8] Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." (James 4:4-10 NIV)

James is saying the same: come to the basin.

God will not accept you if you tolerate sins, let them be, and embrace them as your way of life. If you take it easy and don't care about the sins you commit. If you go along with others and fail to realize that you are different because God calls us to be priests for him.

Do not be double-minded but wash your hands. Admit your sins and humble yourself before God. Resist the devil when he tempts you, even when he seems too strong for you.

God gives you three beautiful promises in these verses:

- Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
- Come near to God and he will come near to you.
- Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

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That's what the water in the basin does. Because it speaks of Jesus and his power to protect you against the devil, to cleanse you, and to give you fellowship with God.

Amen