

A Bath We All Need

Ezekiel 36:16-38

Halifax: 11 September 2005

Introduction:

Each Sunday,

- God calls us to gather as His people to renew our covenant with Him.
 - We assemble together to thank Him for sending Jesus to die for our sins...
 - To confess our faith in Him...
 - To listen to His holy word...
 - To recommit our way to Him...
 - and to pray to Him, looking to Him for His help.
- Each week we renew our covenant with God,
 - But today we have the opportunity to see the sign and seal of initiation into this Covenant applied to a covenant child...
 - Elisabeth Darla Mosher is to be baptised today.
 - With this sign of baptism,
 - we see a visible display of what happens to God's people when they are first brought into the fellowship of His people...
 - The very first thing is that they must be washed.
 - The washing with the water of baptism is an outward picture of the washing away of our sins that Jesus does for all His people.
 - No one can come into the great church of Jesus Christ unless he is first washed.

Today, I want to break from our regular sermon series in Matthew and speak to you about baptism.

- I have selected Ezekiel 36,
 - a passage from the Old Testament that looks forward to baptism.

As most of you know,

- the Old Testament was written before Jesus came into the world.
 - It tells about how God called Abraham out from among the peoples of the world and promised to make him a great nation.
 - God graciously promised that He would be God to him and his descendants after him.

- This was the greatest of all privileges because it meant that God was going to pardon their sins and somehow make them fit for His company.
- They were to be a people who belonged to God and that lived in sweet fellowship with Him forever and ever!

And though God was faithful to raise up a great nation from Abraham, the nation of Israel...

- and though God was faithful to remember His promise to be their God...
 - as the generations went by,
 - Israel took their privileges for granted and hardened their heart.
 - Like the nations around them, they turned to false gods.

Ezekiel was one of the many prophets that God sent to His people to speak to them about their rebellion.

- Ezekiel lived about 1500 years after God had established His covenant with Abraham to be his God.
- In chapter 36 of Ezekiel's prophecy,
 - we find Ezekiel speaking to Israel about how dirty they have become in God's eyes...
 - but He does much more than that...
 - He also shows them how God has promised to give them a bath to make them clean!
 - In verse 25, Ezekiel tells them that the Lord says,
 - "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean."
 - In other words, God is going to give His dirty children a bath—and when He does, they will be clean!
 - God is going to wash away their sins!
 - Isn't that wonderful news!
 - They were too polluted by their sins to live in God's presence, but God was going to take the initiative to clean them up.
 - Water is used as the sign of cleansing because everybody uses water for that purpose.

But you might wonder:

- "What was the Lord talking about when He said He would sprinkle clean water upon them and make them clean?"
 - What was He going to do?

Well I will tell you what He was talking about...

- He was talking about the washing that Jesus Christ was going to bring to God's people some six hundred years later!
 - You see, Jesus is the Son of God, sent from heaven to cleanse His people from their sins.
 - I am sure He is talking about Jesus because Jesus is the only One who is able to wash away His peoples' sins!
 - He alone can make a sinner clean.
 - The Bible says,
 - Acts 4:12: Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.
 - Jesus is able to do it because He is the only one who has a sacrifice to offer to God that can wash away sin.
 - Hebrews 10:11-14 says:
 - Heb 10:11-14: And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.
 - When Jesus died on the cross,
 - He offered **Himself** as a sacrifice to take away His peoples' sins!
 - This offering of His body is the great provision of God for the sins of the world.
 - The whole Bible points to it!
 - This is the cleansing that Ezekiel was talking about that would make people clean!
- And so we find that when Jesus comes into the world,
 - the sign of a person's connection with Him is baptism—
 - washing with water!
 - John the Baptist was the man who introduced Jesus into the world,
 - and he introduced Him by commanding the people to be baptised.
 - In their ceremonies, Israel already had various baptisms (ceremonial washings by sprinkling with water) that were performed,

- but these could only cleanse them outwardly for the worship of God at the tabernacle...
- Hebrews 9:9-14 contrasts these washings at the tabernacle with the washing that Jesus accomplishes...
 - Heb 9:9-14: [The worship at the tabernacle was] symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—*concerned* only with foods and drinks, various washings [or baptisms], and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for 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 shows that all the Old Testament baptisms were not able to make us clean,
 - they were only there to point to the cleansing that He would bring...
 - And that cleansing is the cleansing that makes us clean.
 - That is the cleansing that the Holy Spirit speaks in Ezekiel 36:25 when He says:
 - “I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean.”
- So John the Baptist presented Jesus as the One who had come into the world to make people clean in God’s eyes.
 - He baptised the people because he was telling Israel that the King of Glory had come and that He would take fallen, corrupt, sinful people (such as we all are in God’s eyes),
 - and make them righteous!
 - He was going to take what was dirty and defiled and make it clean and pure!
 - Nobody but Jesus could do this!
 - That is why John introduced Him into the world with the sign of baptism.
- And that is also why Jesus commanded that everyone who wants to be His disciple must begin with this sign.

- After Jesus had offered His sacrifice,
 - and after God had shown that He had accepted that sacrifice by raising Jesus from the dead,
 - Jesus commanded His disciple to go into all the world and baptise the people in His name.
 - God has given Jesus authority over the whole earth,
 - and that means that every single person is commanded to come and be baptised in His name.
- Now of course, Jesus does not mean that we should simply get wet!
 - He means that every person is commanded to come to Him with his or her sins and say,
 - “Wash me Lord.”
 - Baptism is only an empty sign if it is not done with faith that looks to Jesus for the promised cleansing.
 - In fact, baptism without corresponding faith is a mockery and will incur an even heavier judgement than no baptism at all.
 - You see, baptism is God’s promise to cleanse you through Jesus Christ,
 - but if you do not trust Jesus to do this cleansing...
 - if you take the approach of pretending you don’t need to be cleansed,
 - or if you take the approach of trying to do it yourself by your own goodness,
 - or if you just simply don’t want to be cleansed,
 - you will not receive the promise.
 - God’s promises are always received by faith.
 - So I want you to understand that every one of you is not only commanded to be baptised,
 - but you are also commanded to have faith that corresponds to baptism with that baptism...
 - You are to look to Jesus to wash you so that you become clean in all the ways the Ezekiel speaks about in verses 25-27.
 - Now this is the thing that I want to dwell on this morning...
 - I want to show you from this passage just what sort of cleansing it is you are to seek from Jesus...

I. First, you must look to Jesus to wash you from your filthiness and your idols.

A. You see that in verse 25:

- The Lord says,
 - “I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”
- 1. You become filthy when you break God’s commandments.
 - a. It involves everything from sexual immorality to the nasty words you have spoken to your parents.
 - Before God, it is sin that makes you filthy and defiled.
 - b. You were made in God’s image and placed in His world to be beautiful—
 - to show forth love and purity and excellence!
 - to glorify Him as His servant, doing all that pleases Him.
 - Not in an ugly, uniform kind of way,
 - but each person with his or her own gifts and personality living in beautiful harmony with every other person in a world of perfect love and service.
 - That is what God made us to be.
 - c. But now God looks down into this world instead of beauty He sees filth!
 - He sees bitterness and envy and resentment and perversity and greed and oppression and all sorts of ugly things...
 - He looks at us and He sees that the world is defiled because of our sin.
 - He is repulsed by us.
- 2. And not only does He see filth, He also sees idolatry...
 - a. Instead of loving and worshipping the true God in the way He has commanded,
 - Idolatry involves making up our own religion...
 - as if God didn’t even exist...
 - as if He were a Mr. Potato Head deity that we could stick on whatever we want...
 - You dream up your own God, or dream up how He wants to be worship in your own head...
 - b. You also worship idols when you make gods out things that are not God...
 - You can make money your god, or being popular, or pleasure, or even morality!

- They become your gods when you serve them instead of serving God...
- for example, when you will disobey God in order to get rich...
- But God has told you to have no other Gods before Him—

B. The result of filthiness and idolatry is that God rejects you.

1. Adam and Eve were put out of the garden of God when they sinned because they defiled the garden by their sin...

- That is why we live in a world of thorns and weeds and pain and death.
- God has cast us out of His garden because we were too filthy and idolatrous to live there...
- We were like weeds that had to be taken out.

2. But in Ezekiel, God is addressing something even worse!

a. In His great mercy, God had planted a new garden and had called Israel to enter that Garden...

- That is, He gave them the land of Palestine and promised that He would again dwell in the midst of them.
- It was a place where He would restore His people to what they ought to be so that they could dwell with Him forever.
- They were to shine forth for Him for His pleasure and in the sight of all the world in that land!
- God would be their God and they would be His people!

b. But here in chapter 36, Ezekiel is reminding them that God had recently expelled them from land because of their filthiness and idolatry.

- God looked down on the land that He had given them,
- and instead of seeing people there that were looking to Him to be purified,
 - He saw a people that were rebelling against Him...
 - He saw filthiness and idolatry!
- They had defiled the land like Adam and Eve...
 - only this time it was even worse because God had so graciously called them out from the world to restore them!
 - They had spurned His mercy!

3. My friends, we are all in deep trouble because we are all guilty of filthiness and idolatry.

- a. Not only are we sharers with Adam in the sin that caused us to be expelled from the Garden of Eden...
 - But as a people who live in a land where the gospel has been known...
 - where we have heard God's call of mercy...
 - We are also guilty of the sin of Israel.
 - God in His mercy has called us out to serve Him through Jesus Christ,
 - and we have filled our land with uncleanness and idolatry.
 - b. How can you possibly cleanse yourself?
 - You are dirty in God's eyes and fit only to be cast out and rejected forever.
- C. But the good news here is that God promises that He will cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols!
1. That is what we see in baptism!
 - God sprinkles us with pure water and we are made clean!
 - Not by the water of course,
 - but God is showing us what Jesus Christ does for all who come to Him to be cleansed!
 - He cleanses them from all their sin!
 2. This refers to the forgiveness of your sin!
 - a. You see, God is a holy God and He would not be true to Himself and to His holy justice if He did not take vengeance on what is sinful and defiled.
 - It is not a defect in God that He rejects sinners and consigns them to Hell—
 - It His glory!
 - It is not that there is something wrong with Him,
 - It is that He is beautiful and perfect and undefiled!
 - He always acts according to justice...
 - If He were slack, then He would no lose His beauty.
 - b. But in His great mercy, God has made a way to forgive our sins without compromising His justice...
 - He sent His only Son from Heaven, Jesus Christ,
 - to come and take all the punishment that our sins deserve on Himself.
 - That is what Jesus did when He offered Himself on the cross.

- c. And now God promises that whoever believes in Jesus will be saved...
 - Jesus washes away all your guilt by the sprinkling of His blood...
 - In this way, He makes you clean so that you might dwell with God.
 - Forgiveness of sin come through Him.
 - Hebrews 10:22 speaks of how our guilt is washed away by Jesus.
 - It ties baptism together with the cleansing accomplished by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus so that we can draw near to God:
 - Heb 10:22: “Let us draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”
 - The cleansing from guilt that is signified by baptism is given to you by Christ when you look to Him.
 - As soon as you believe, you are cleansed from all the guilt of your filthiness and idolatry.
 - God no longer holds these against you because Christ washes your record clean!
 - God is no longer repulsed by you, because Jesus gives you a clean record.

TRANS> So you see in the first place that you must look to Jesus to wash you from your guilt and defilement of idolatry and filthiness.

- Now let us consider the second aspect of cleansing you are to seek from Jesus...

II. Secondly, you are to look to Jesus to wash your heart.

A. I would ask you now,

- “What good would it do to be forgiven by God if you remain in rebellion against Him?”
 1. That is certainly a good question.
 - If you don’t even want to serve God,
 - if you love your idols and you love your rebellious ways...
 - if you are so corrupt that you don’t even want God’s ways,
 - the last thing you would want to do is dwell with Him.
 2. And it is true that your rebellion goes very very deep!
 - It is not just a surface thing—

- It is not that you are really good on the inside, but you just do bad things sometimes.
 - No, God says that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked so that we cannot do good...
 - He says that the imaginations of man's heart is only evil continually.
 - The truth is that nobody has a good heart.
 - You may be a person who likes to help other people or feels sorry for others when they suffer...
 - but there is not one person who has a good heart in this whole fallen world except Jesus.
 - Everyone's heart is by nature in rebellion against God...
 - It is not in submission to God, it is not wholly committed to pleasing Him.
 - In fact, it is a heart that wants to murder God if only it could.
 - You may not think you are that bad, but that is part of the deception...
3. And so the Bible counsels you to get a new heart.
- Back in Ezekiel 18, Ezekiel says something very remarkable! He says:
 - Ezek. 18:31: Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?
 - This is remarkable because it is impossible!
 - It is like asking you to jump over house or something...
 - How can you get a new heart?

B. But this is exactly what our Lord promises to do for us when He baptises us.

1. Look at verse 26!

- Ezekiel 36:26: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.
- a. Jesus not only came to wash away your guilt, but also to cleanse your heart!
 - He came to give you a whole new direction—
 - To turn you back to God, not just outwardly,
 - but from the core of your being!

- b. Here (in verse 26) it is spoken of as taking out the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh.
 - The heart of stone is a heart that is unresponsive to God.
 - It refuses to bend or respond to God.
 - It is cold and dead.
 - But the heart of flesh is warm and alive!
 - It hears the voice of God and rejoices to do His will!
 - It takes delight in God's ways and finds its greatest joy in serving Him.
 - c. Isn't that marvellous?
 - No one but God can do this!
 - It is a miracle when a person's heart is changed to love the true God!
2. The Bible talks about this often!
- a. In 1 Cor 5:17, Paul speaks about the great change that occurs when you belong to Christ:
 - 1 Cor 5:17: Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.
 - You become a new creation!
 - Your heart is oriented toward God.
 - b. Jesus speaks of this as the new birth.
 - In John 3:3, He says,
 - "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."
 - The new birth is another way of speaking of getting a new heart.
 - Jesus describes the new birth as being born of the Spirit because it is God's Spirit who gives you the new heart...
 - The Holy Spirit is the one who makes this change in a person...
 - When John the Baptist was baptising,
 - He said,
 - "I baptise you with water, but He (Jesus) will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."
 - Water baptism is a picture not only of the cleansing from guilt by the blood of Christ,
 - but also of the cleansing of the heart by the Holy Spirit....

- It pictures the washing of regeneration that takes a rebel and makes Him a devoted servant of God.
- You cannot see this washing, but you can see the effects of it.

c. When this happens to you... when you are given a new heart...

- you are not perfect...
- But your whole direction is changed to where you start living for God.
 - You are restored to your original purpose of living to please Him.
 - You come to Him truly seeking to be restored to all that God's wants.
- It means that your whole life now belongs to Him so that it doesn't really matter what happens to you any more...
 - It God wants you to serve Him in health, very well; if in sickness, very well.
 - You are no longer here to do your own will, but to do His will.
 - Though you fall into sin and stumble,
 - you turn back to God in repentance and continue on.

3. And indeed I should say...

- It is this very cleansing of your heart that causes you to turn to God in the first place.
 - If you hear God's call to repent and believe on Jesus with a stony heart, you will always refuse Him...
 - You may come along outwardly for a little while, but you will not truly give yourself to Him until your heart is changed...
- And so I say, if you want to come to Jesus for His cleansing,
 - come to Him not only to be forgiven, but also to get a new heart!
 - You cannot come to Him for forgiveness unless you also come to Him for a new heart.

TRANS> So now we have seen two aspects of the cleansing that we are to look for from Jesus Christ...

- cleansing from guilt and the cleansing of our heart...
- Now let us look at the third

III. Thirdly, you are to look to Jesus to wash your life.

- A. I have just been emphasising that true cleansing is not a surface thing, but something that goes to your very heart.
- But now I want to emphasise the opposite truth...
 - namely...
 - that the true cleansing that Jesus gives is not something that happens deep down in the heart where nobody can see it!
 - It does happen there, but when it happens, it also shows up in your life!
1. There is a strain of what I sometimes call “deep-down-in-the-heart-Christianity” that is all too common today!
 - a. You see it when people’s faith is so deep that nobody can see it...
 - There are a lot of people who make a profession of faith and are sure that they are Christians,
 - but whose lives remain the same.
 - They live pretty much as they always lived.
 - b. There are also people who claim that their religion is a very private thing—
 - Well, it may be, but it is not the religion of Jesus Christ.
 - The religion of Jesus Christ is one that shows itself in many ways...
 - It brings forth fruit on the outside!
 - c. Jesus Himself taught that a tree is known by its fruit...
 - He said that just as a good tree will bring forth good fruit, so a person with a new heart will bring forth good deeds...
 - and, just as a corrupt tree will bring forth corrupt fruit...
 - so a person with a bad heart will bring forth evil deeds.
 - Jesus said, “By their fruits you shall know them.”
 2. Ezekiel talks about the outward change that comes when we are truly joined to Jesus Christ in v. 27:
 - a. Here, the Lord says:
 - Ezekiel 36:27: “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep my judgements and do them.”
 - b. Your “walk” is what we might call your lifestyle...
 - It has to do with the way you live in this world...
 - And here Ezekiel is saying that when the Lord washes you,
 - your life will be cleaned up with the rest of you!

- c. Let none of you suppose that your record or your heart has been washed if your walk is not cleansed.
 - You are only deceiving yourself!
- B. What are some of the changes that will occur in your life when you are cleansed?
1. Well, one of the first changes is that you will confess the Lord Jesus with your lips.
 - a. Romans 10 indicates that wherever there is true faith in the heart, there will also be outward confession...
 - It says:
 - Romans 10:9-10: If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
 - b. The true Christian religion is clearly not a private affair!
 - In Matthew 10, Jesus goes so far as to say:
 - Matthew 10:32-33: Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.
 - Now understand that He said this to those whose lives were endangered by their confession!
 - If they would be rejected for not confessing Him, how much more will those who refuse to confess Him in our society!
 2. As second change is that you will become a worshipper of God.
 - a. A person who has been washed from his sins is going to be filled with gratitude,
 - and that person will delight to gather with God's people each Lord's day to praise His name.
 - That person will hunger to hear God's word preached,
 - and will delight in the fellowship and prayers of God's people...
 - And he or she will also devote himself to the personal study of God's word and to personal prayer.
 - b. If you have no desire to worship God,
 - you have no reason to think that you have been cleansed by Jesus Christ.
 - I do not say it is impossible—for you may have temporarily slipped...

- but you certainly have no basis for assurance that you have been cleansed.
3. As third change that will appear in your walk is in your everyday life with your neighbour...
- a. You will stop lying and start speaking the truth...
 - b. You will put off stealing and slothfulness and start giving and serving others...
 - c. You will put off anger and bitterness and put on forgiveness and mercy...
 - d. You will put away cursing and speak peace...
 - e. You will no longer be drunk with wine, but will be filled with the Spirit...
 - f. Instead of fornication, you will become chaste and pure.

TRANS> The point is, when the Lord Jesus comes to cleanse you, you will be cleansed!

- You will not be perfect until His work is brought to perfection on the day of resurrection...
 - But you will be forgiven and you will be transformed from the inside out!
 - You will be renewed day by day.
 - God gathers you out of the world and brings you into joyful fellowship with Jesus Christ and with His people.

Conclusion

Now I know that most of you have been baptised.

- If you have not, then you need to be...
 - But whether you have or not,
 - Everyone of you needs to look to Jesus Christ for the cleansing that is represented in the sign of baptism.

It will do you no good to have the outward rite if you do not have the true cleansing of Jesus Christ that comes by faith in Him.

- He calls you to turn from your own ways and come to Him!
 - You can try as long as you want, but you will never be able to wash away your sin.
 - Jesus is the One God sent to do that, and He is the only One who can do it.
 - He does not command only certain people to be washed...
 - He commands everyone to come...
 - And He declares that whoever refuses will be damned.

- If you have not been cleansed by Him, you are without hope, shut up to an eternity of misery and destruction.
- And so I urge you to repent and come to Jesus and be washed!
 - He will not reject you if you will!