

Cleansed by the Blood - Refined by the Fire

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of inner cleansing through the blood of Jesus and the refining process of suffering in the Christian life.

Scripture: Matthew 5:27, Mark 11:22, Hebrews 12:3, 1 Peter 4:1, 1 John 1:5

Topics: "Spiritual Purification", "Heart Cleansing"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the importance of walking in the light and addressing the darkness within us. He emphasizes the need to cleanse our hearts from unforgiveness, covetousness, and lust in order to truly have fellowship with God and minister effectively. Bieber highlights the cleansing power of Jesus' blood for forgiveness of sins and the refining fire of God to purify us from unrighteousness, urging believers to embrace the process of purification and discipline as a means to share in God's holiness.

Transcript

Most of us have had the experience of the man who has his friend arrive at midnight and had no food to set before him. We've had to go to the Father and bang on his door and beg and plead for bread to give to these hungry people who come to us in their needs. And every time, after we've demonstrated how desperate we are for this bread, the bread has come.

But what if we go to the Father's door at midnight, and pound on that door as we have a thousand times before, this time the Father comes to the door without any bread and says to us, "Before we talk about giving bread to the hungry who come to you, there are some things in your life that need to be made right."?

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not walk according to the truth... 1 John 1: 5-6

"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness..."

What does it mean to walk in darkness?

We are walking in darkness when we are going about our ministries, serving people, helping people, but all the while something is happening inside:

We are beginning to compromise our motives.

We are becoming Pharisees.

And deep within we know this ourselves - we are turning into those white-washed sepulchers, which outwardly appear beautiful but inwardly are unclean full of dead men's bones.

For instance, we claim to have fellowship with God while we walk in darkness when we "minister" with an unforgiving heart.

And Jesus answered, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it and you will. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." Mark 11: 22-25

Whenever Jesus talks about faith he also talks about forgiveness. These two are interlinked. How can we possibly have a clear channel to the Father and have a polluted channel to our sister or brother? The two go together.

And yet, how often as we go about our ministries, grudges and bitterness collect in our hearts. Yet we proceed with our ministries as if that is an innocent matter. Until the Lord himself has to put his finger on our self-deception, warning us- that we are walking in darkness, and our lives are in danger.

We are also walking in darkness when we try to "minister" to people while nurturing a covetous heart. This deceit causes many a professing believer to stumble in the darkness, unaware how dark things are.

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up to him and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments; 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. " At this saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

The fact that he ran up to Jesus and knelt before him indicates how eager he was. This man deeply hungered for the kingdom of God, and he believed he was prepared to do anything, serve in any way in order to get it.

In utter love, Jesus puts his finger on the one thing in his heart that keeps it unclean - his covetousness. This covetousness is going to have to be rooted out if this man is going to be able in any kind of consistent, genuine way to serve God.

"... go, sell what you have, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven;

and come, follow me."

Note how this same drastic dealing with covetousness carries over into the life of the apostolic church.

Why should the Holy Spirit be so severe with Ananias and Sapphira as to take them right out of this life just because they lied over a bit of money?

Because the ministry of the apostolic church would have been blunted at its outset if this covetousness which made its appearance in Ananias and Sapphira had been tolerated.

We can talk all we like about the power of God, but as long as the bottom line of our corporate or individual lives is money, we are walking in darkness.

Finally, it is impossible to have fellowship with God and minister to others while walking in the darkness of a lusting eye.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not to commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better if you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body be thrown into hell." Matthew 5:27-30

Our culture is so full of lust.

And the nit-picking Pharisees since the beginning of time have been such self-righteous prudes that we don't want to be like they are. In reaction to heir prudishness, we allow lust to grow like an innocent weed in our garden.

Jesus was no prude.

He drew near to people whose sexual life was a mess, and showed them God's mercy. But he also made clear that if we are serious about having the kingdom of God, these innocent looking weeds of lust have to be rooted out of our lives even if we are maimed in the process.

But here's the problem: what happens when we find these dead men's bones in these white-washed sepulchers of our hearts are stuck there

- we really want to get rid of them

- we go in there and start trying to pull up these dead men's bones inside us

but ... they won't budge!

I try, and I try to get rid of this resentment ... or this covetousness ... or these thoughts of lust, and nothing happens.

"Lord, I know that you desire truth in the inward parts, and I am crying out to you to create a clean heart within me and renew a right spirit within me."

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and

cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Here is a twofold promise: If we walk in the light, if we open the door to this white-washed sepulchre, which is our heart, to God, he'll come in and cleanse this thing -

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

... and the fire of the Lord will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

First, the blood of Jesus will cleanse us from sin, if we walk in the light.

So we open the door of the white-washed sepulcher, and ask God - cry out to him - to come in and clean it up.

We confess our sins.

We cry out for forgiveness.

And as we do this, God causes us to begin to see the true meaning of Calvary.

- we begin to see that is God Himself who comes down and suffers and dies for us

- we begin to see what anguish God Himself goes through as his treasure of treasures, his only Begotten, hangs bloody and bruised and forsaken on that tree.

God is in this!

Then he takes the blood of this death and covers us with it - covers our sins.

And to encourage us to know we have been forgiven...

Jesus invites us to his table week after week...

He takes this cup and raises it in thanksgiving to the Father then passes it to us: Drink this.

This is my blood of the new covenant shed for your sins.

Your sins are forgiven.

They have been atoned for in my death.

You're all right now. Be at peace.

Ah, but what about this bent inside us toward unrighteousness? This twist in our nature? This warp inside our hearts which constantly goes toward resentment?

And bitterness? And covetousness? And lust?

And all these other things?

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

How does he cleanse us from all unrighteousness? By means of fire.

The same Jesus who washes us clean with his blood, and baptizes us with his Spirit, now begins to baptize us also in fire.

Don't look for purgatory on the other side of death. Purgatory is this side of death.

Yes, that the rich man who ignored the needs of Lazarus died and was in flames. But there is no hint that those flames were purging him. The purging flames come in this life.

So those areas of our lives where we refuse to repent - we're not going to give this thing up... we're going to go the way we want to no matter what - begin to feel the flames of cleansing.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions but by the will of God. 1 Peter 4:1,2

Beloved, do not be surprised by the fiery ordeal which has come upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share in Christ's suffering, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God...

1 Peter 4: 12-17

Now there are the flames which come to us a holy privilege - suffering as a Follower of Jesus - suffering that participates in the sufferings of Christ.

But there are also flames that come to us to purge, and correct, and to burn out this evil twist in us.

Jesus was sinless. He became sin for us. And he didn't have to suffer those flames to get purified. And yet, he went through this baptism of fire and he learned obedience through the things which he suffered.

We follow him on through this baptism of fire, but not only do we learn obedience through the things which we suffer, we also experience purging... cleansing... correcting... chastisement.

Somehow, in the flames, this evil twist begins to straighten. And this chronic bent toward evil in our hearts, which is just part of us, starts to separate and float to the surface of this mess in us, and runs off into the atoning blood.

The cowardice is burned out.

And the covetousness.

And the lust.

And the resentment.

All these things begin to burn out.

Consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so you do not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? -

"My son; do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines he whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which you all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. Hebrews 12: 3-10

Who of us hasn't known these flames? And who of us isn't going to experience more of these flames? And more and more in the days to come?

May God help us to quit gritting our teeth and saying, "Okay, if it has to be, it has to be," and begin to move toward the flames that cleanse us the way our Lord moved toward his cross.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Just as surely as we have to go to the Father's door and knock on that door repeatedly for bread to give the hungry people who come to us, we also have to go continuously to the Son for inward cleansing.

Our ministries will never survive, nor will they bear much fruit, if we go through our lives tolerating uncleanness within.

May God help us to bring our sins to the cross today. Confess them.

Not somebody else's sin - ours.

And ask for forgiveness.

May God also help us bring our sin-warped nature to the cross, and yield to the baptism of fire in whatever way he chooses to send it.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins - with the blood - and cleanse us from all unrighteousness - with the fire.

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