

The Importance of Clean Feet – Nehemiah 12:27-47

I. Introduction:

- A. Just before Jesus' final earthly Passover, He gathered His disciples together for a catered meal.
1. This was Jesus' church, just as we believe Calvary Baptist Church is a church of Christ.
 2. So, the events of that night relate to us in several ways.
 3. Of course, those men had shared hundreds of picnics, fellowship meals and pot lucks, but this was special.
 4. This was the Passover, but it was unlike any the disciples had ever had before.
 5. There was some special instruction that night – for which the men were still not prepared.
 6. There was the Lord's supper, and then Jesus did something unusual.
- B. When the supper was finished, Jesus arose and took off the wonderful seamless robe which He usually wore.
1. He was probably bear-chested; perhaps He was wearing only some underwear.
 2. That was probably surprising to the disciples in itself. Had they ever seen Him this way before?
 3. As they gaped at him, Jesus took a large towel, wrapping it around his waist.
 4. He picked up a bowl and went to the large water pitcher, filling it.
 5. Then He began with the man at the end of the table, pouring a little of that water on his feet, rubbing and massaging it over the arch & soles of those feet, washing off dust & dirt, before drying them with the towel.
 6. When He had finished with several of the brethren, He came to Simon Peter.
 7. *“Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?”*
 - a. *Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.*
 - b. *Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt **NEVER** wash my feet.”*
 8. But *“Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”*
- C. There are several important lessons in this and the rest of **John 13**, but I'd like to consider just one.
1. *“Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”*
 2. Was the Saviour telling Peter that he was a lost man if he didn't get his feet clean?
 3. I don't believe so. Christ was speaking of *“having a part with Him”* in some other way.
 4. When Peter heard Jesus' answer, he replied, *“Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.”*
 5. He wanted to maintain the relationship he had with Christ.
 6. But *“Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean....”*
 7. In the Textus Receptus Greek, Jesus essentially said, *“He who has been **thoroughly BATHED** is every bit clean, but from time to time, he still needs to rinse his feet in order to have fellowship with me.”*
 8. All of which is to say, *“He who has been cleansed by saving grace is thoroughly righteous in the sight of God, but he still needs to be washed from the effects of daily contact with the world and sin before he can be useful in my service.”*
- D. What has that got to do with Nehemiah 12?

II. The first few steps in this chapter's dedication service involved **PURIFICATION**.

- A. **Verse 30** – *“And the priests & the Levites purified themselves, & purified the people, & the gates, & the wall.”*
1. Before this wall could be dedicated to the service of God it had to be made *“clean.”*
 - a. But the Levites didn't hook up their power sprayers to the nearby faucets, firing up their little motors.
 - b. They didn't get out their buckets and brushes, throwing soapy suds against the walls.
 2. A couple priests apparently shook water from special basins over the people and then over the gates and segments of the walls.
 3. But before this they took steps to purify themselves.

- B. Studying the Old Testament we see three primary things which defiled people and objects, rendering them unfit for the service of God.
1. For example, if someone came in contact with death, he was declared to be unclean, and he was not permitted to enter the tabernacle or temple.
 - a. If his mother died, and he was responsible for her burial, he was unclean until certain steps were taken.
 - b. If, in the unlikely event, a bird died and fell onto his head, he was made ceremonially unclean.
 2. A second cause of uncleanness was leprosy.
 - a. No leper was ever permitted into the temple.
 - b. It was rare, but if a leper no longer showed the symptoms of the disease, there were steps he had to take before a priest could declare him clean again.
 - c. And there were varieties of leprous molds which made even houses to be contaminated and unclean.
 3. And the third major cause of uncleanness was more general – sin.
 4. People known to be sinful were not permitted into the temple.
 5. Remember, too, that leprosy was often used to illustrate sin, and death is the eventual result of sin.
 6. These three things are all linked together in the Bible.
- C. Look at **verse 45** – *“And both the singers and the porters kept the **ward** of their God, and the **ward** of the PURIFICATION, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son.”*
1. The word *“ward”* is most often translated *“charge”* and speaks about guarding something.
 2. There were people whose religious responsibility was to keep *“impure”* people out of the temple.
- D. Perhaps these walls and the gates of Jerusalem were thought of as unclean because of the death of so many Jews years before.
1. History tells us that the Babylonians and later the Romans bashed babies against those walls to kill them.
 2. Even though these new walls were not a part of those events, simply being a part of this sin-cursed world contaminated and defiled them.

III. And with that we come to the blood of the RED HEIFER.

- A. I cannot tell you exactly what those priests in **chapter 12** did to purify themselves, the Levites and the walls.
1. There is no information here and none of my reference materials say a word about this chapter.
 2. But the Bible does speak about modes of purification in other circumstances.
 3. So for the sake of the lesson, I’m going to apply **those** scriptures to **this** scripture.
- B. Numbers 19** describes the sacrifice and purpose of **the Red Heifer**.
1. Whenever the ashes of the previous heifer were exhausted, Israel was to be scoured to find a very special animal.
 2. It could be from two to five years old, but circumstances usually required a younger animal which had been specially groomed for this purpose.
 3. It could never have been used for manual labor – it could never have worn a yoke to pull a plow or wagon.
 - a. The Jews went on to say that even if a piece of cloth was laid across its back it was rendered unfit for this service.
 - b. For the first few months or years of its life, it lived a life of ease and luxury.
 4. It was to be without blemish – it must not have anything which made it less than absolutely beautiful.
 - a. It couldn’t have a torn ear, a scar on its leg or a slight limp.
 - b. And if two white or black hairs came from the same follicle anywhere on its body, it was disqualified for this sacrifice.
 5. So as you can see it was probably raised for this purpose, and it was examined, literally, with a fine toothed comb.
 6. It was an extremely valuable animal, and its cost was paid out of the treasury of the nation.
 - a. The man who owned this heifer might have become quite wealthy, if he didn’t give it of his own free will.
 - b. Probably every cattleman in the nation watched for this kind of animal in his herd.

- C. Ultimately, the chosen Red Heifer was to be slain as a sin offering & was burnt – but not in the usual fashion.
1. First, was to be totally consumed by the fire – skin, flesh, blood, bones and organs – not just certain parts.
 2. And the sacrifice was to be made outside the camp, not in the tabernacle or temple as was the usual case.
 3. Also into the fire were to be thrown cedarwood, hyssop and some scarlet material.
 4. After many hours in the flames, when nothing remained but cooling ashes, those remains were to be carefully collected and laid up *“without the camp in a clean place.”*
 5. Then as required, a clean priest was to take of those ashes & sprinkle them upon *“living”* or moving water & then dip some hyssop into the mixture, before shaking it over the person or object which was to be purified.
- D. Of course every Old Testament sacrifice was a type or picture of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.
1. This was no exception.
 2. And every aspect of this sacrifice was significant, even though the Bible doesn't clarify each point.
 3. We can summarize some of them.
 4. First, this sacrifice was essentially perfect – as was the sinless Son of God.
 5. Then it was slain outside the camp as was Christ – outside the walls of Jerusalem.
 6. The cedar might signify eternity; the hyssop – perhaps Christ's humanity; the scarlet – blood or divinity.
 7. Everyone involved in this sacrifice was made unclean by their participation.
 8. And the effects were long lasting, being employed after other burnt offerings had done their work.
- E. The **blood** of the Red Heifer – or more specifically, the **ashes** of the blood – mixed with water were used for purification purposes by Israelites who had come in contact with certain contaminants.
1. It had other purposes, but this was its primary function.
 2. I think we can say that the blood of the Red Heifer was not directly used for the salvation of those people.
 3. Other sacrifices, like the Passover, and the more common sin offerings and burnt offerings better illustrate the sacrifice of Christ for salvation.
- F. This takes us forward to Jesus' cleansing of the disciples' feet.
1. Peter may be saved; he may be a disciple; he may desire to serve the Lord now that he is one of his own.
 2. But still – *“Jesus answered (Peter), If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”*
 3. And the same applies to us.

IV. Application:

- A. Our day-to-day lives, put us in touch with dozens, if not hundreds, of things which are unworthy of the Lord and which render us unfit for His service.
1. If we don't see it that way, it's because of our pride, or we are blind to God's holiness.
 - a. Our God is thrice holy and this world is thrice fallen and condemned.
 - b. And none of us are holy in ourselves.
 2. Even if we haven't looked on a provocative picture or tapped our feet to some ungodly music today...
 - a. Still, we may have lost our temper or we've gotten a little jealous.
 - b. We heard a man swearing, but we didn't rebuke him.
 - c. Most of the day we were more worldly-minded than spiritual, and we prayed very little.
 3. Our feet have marched through spiritual muck and barnyard manure.
 4. *“Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”*
- B. Keep in mind that these were no ordinary men, spending their lives in ordinary duties.
1. These were the most important, and perhaps the most godly men on the face of the earth at that time.
 2. But the godly need to be washed as much as the wretched backslider.
 3. And if those disciples, apostles and otherwise good men, refuse to be washed, are they really godly?
 4. The Lord has taken the basin and prepared the water, but Peter has to be willing to receive it.
 5. There is a necessary blending of God's application with our willingness to be purified.

- C. In Nehemiah's day, there must have been a designated priest, who got up early that morning and brought his own lamb or bullock to the temple to be sacrificed.
1. Perhaps he washed his hands and rinsed his feet at the brazen laver.
 - a. As he had many times before, he put his hands on the head of the sacrifice.
 - b. Then either he, or another priest, slit the animal's throat and the blood gushed out.
 - c. Some of it was caught in a bowl to be put on the altar, but some splashed out soiling the man's clothes.
 2. After he changed his clothes, that priest prepared for the national purification ceremony by mixing some of the ashes of the Red Heifer with water as it was poured into one or two basins.
 3. Perhaps while still in the courtyard of the temple, he solemnly dipped a bundle of hyssop into the water and shook it over the other priests and Levites, as they humbly acknowledged their sins before God.
 4. Then walking out and onto the nearby wall, others took over for him, walking down the walls in opposite directions sprinkling the water that he had prepared over the people down below & over the walls & gates.
- D. What if one of the Levites refused to dip his head, permitting that priest to sprinkle that water over him?
1. Do you think Nehemiah or Ezra would permit that Levite to participate in this dedication service?
 2. Everything must be done decently and in order.
 3. That was essentially what the Lord Jesus was saying to Peter.
 4. *"Your contact with the world has made you unfit for my service."*
 5. *"Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."*
- E. We live in the midst of sinful defilement. It is impossible to avoid.
1. We need continual cleansing – foot washing if you'd like to call it that
 2. Or perhaps it might be better to call it – the washing of the Red Heifer.
 3. Whether we are priests or Levites... whether we are a wall or an inviting gate... we need to be clean in order to be of service to the Lord.
 4. Those purification services were a major part of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem that day.