

I'll never forget the story of the war veteran who called his family and asked if he could bring a friend home who had lost an arm. The family was not very loving and made it clear that this would be a real convenience to them. So the soldier never went home. It was his own arm, you see, that had been lost. It was clear to him that he would not be accepted.

Do you feel unworthy to approach God as you are? We are all disfigured or unclean relative to the perfection of God, but the overwhelming message of the Bible is that we are accepted and looked on as righteous. But we may feel ashamed of our appearance in His presence. Isaiah felt that he had unclean lips in the presence of God. We find in Luke 8:42 that the woman with the issue of blood was ashamed to let Christ see her. She tried to sneak a touch of his garment.

Something that is interesting about Jesus' first case of healing, that of the cleansing of the leper in Matthew 8:1-17, is that people were not supposed to have any contact at all with those who were unclean in this manner. It shows the tremendous compassion and love of Christ here, because although he could have healed this man at a distance as he did the centurion's servant, he reached out and touched him. Think about having leprosy yourself, with people avoiding you at all costs, no one ever touching you or hugging you ever again. Think then what it must have meant to this man for Christ to touch him! At the last of the passage we read that he healed all that came to him to fulfill the prophecy, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.' The primary meaning of this is that our sins are taken away and, like the leper, we are cleansed from them so that God can receive us unto him.

We find Jesus healing again in Luke 7:11-17, where he brought back the only son of a widowed woman. We see that, just as in the healing of the leper, Christ responded by touching something that meant pollution according to the Jewish ceremonial laws. We also see the great power, power to raise from the dead, that Christ shows here and that is promised to us in the final resurrection from the dead. We see that Christ used this power not just when his own heart was broken, as in the case of Lazarus, but simply from the compassion that lived in his heart.

In John 13 we find the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Who can read this about the son of the Almighty God stooping down to wash the dirty, stinky feet of mankind and not see that God desires that we approach Him even though we are unclean? Peter tried to think of Christ as too good for such a menial task, but he learned better. We must also realize that God loves us enough to overlook the mess. Indeed it reminds me of a great Norwegian proverb, "That which is loved is always beautiful." We could modify this slightly and say, "That which is loved by God is always clean." There were so many things in the Old Testament that one could touch and become unclean. Once "unclean" an Israelite had to wash themselves ceremonially and stay out of contact with others. But it makes you wonder if there was anything that one touch and become holy? The only mention is of a grain offering Leviticus 6:18. But now, only Christ can accomplish this. Christ is the only perfect cleanser. If you notice, there is never any notice in the Bible of faith which "cleanses" us. Only the blood of Christ can do so. We must not fail to approach him, for He loves us so, and offers us this cleansing.

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