

West Valley Church
4/10/11

Elemental Faith
Water, part two:
Living Water

Water. All cultures associate water with cleansing and purification. One example of this is in India where, every 12 years, millions of Hindus flock to Allahabad, India, to take a dip in the Ganges River in what's called the "Purma Kumbh". The next one is in 2013. The devotees believe that simply by bathing in the Ganges at this event, one is freed from their past sins (bad karma), and thus one becomes eligible for liberation from the ongoing cycle of birth and death. A sin-cleansing step off the re-incarnation merry-go-round.

The problem is that people get hurt in the rush to the water. The last time, in 2001, 39 pilgrims (28 women and 11 men) were trampled to death and 57 were injured (keeping in mind that the number of devotees attending the fair was around 70 million).

A solution for this mayhem is what's been billed as "purification by proxy." A popular website called webdunia.com offers "virtual cleansing." "Pilgrims who want to avoid crowds, chaos, and travel costs can send a passport size photo to the site, which then provides virtual absolution." How? By carrying their photo to the river. Susannah Meadows, Bret Begun, Katherine Stroup, "Periscope," Newsweek (1-19-01)

The Hindus have it partly right: We *do* need washing, but only Christ can cleanse from sin, not a ".com" company or a dip in an overcrowded river.

We are in the second part of our series on water, in our longer, over-arching theme called "elemental faith." We are using the ancient Greek idea of the four elements – earth, water, wind, and fire. These are also biblical images that carry much meaning for us. The first series used the ancient Greek element of "earth" to help us get a biblical view of ourselves. The one we are in now is "water," and we are learning about Jesus Christ and what he can do in and through us. So last week we examined that statement that Jesus made about Himself when he said, "I am the living water." If you haven't been with us, I'd encourage you to go to our website and download the previous messages, either podcast or print. Take out your notes, because today we are going to learn how Jesus cleanses our lives, washing us with the water of his Word.

In the New Testament, the book of Ephesians, we find our key verses (5:25-26) - "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing

(or, having cleansed) her by the washing with water through the word.” (niv)

It’s that last phrase that we are focusing on today – the washing with water through the word. Now, that’s kind of a difficult verse to understand – here’s another translation that is a little more accurate, which will help us:

“Christ loved the church and gave his life for it. He did this to dedicate the church to God by his word, after making it clean by washing it in water.” (gnb) The reason that one is better is because the first translation makes it sound as if it is all happening at the same time, but the original language indicates that it’s two different things, two decisive experiences. In fact, the original language would reverse the order of those two, so it would say something like this: “Christ loved the church and gave his life for it. After making it clean by washing it in water, He did this to dedicate (or “sanctify”) the church to God by his word.”

So what does it mean to be washed in water and the Word? Well, it all starts (understandably) with Jesus Christ:

1. The Word Delivered.

Jesus Himself is the Word of God itself. Jesus is the Word, the command, the statement of God in the flesh. The Bible says in the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” (John 1:1-4, niv) In the Greek language the word for “word” is “logos,” and it’s a word with a rich history and deep thought. Greek philosophers, long before Christ, theorized that the Logos was the divine creative force and fundamental order behind the cosmos. To the Jews the Logos was the Creative Principle of God. So John wrote this in His gospel account of Jesus, essentially saying, “You’ve been postulating for centuries about the creative order of the cosmos, well what you’ve spent all this time trying to figure out is the Word of God Himself, revealed and fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.” See if what John said sounds right to you as I remind you what the Bible says: So, “In the beginning, God created...God *said*...” (Genesis 1:1, 3ff, niv) and “In the beginning was the Word...” (John 1:1)

That’s why the Bible says this about Jesus: “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:16-17, niv)

Jesus is the visual word of God. What God has said, everything God has intended, is revealed in Jesus. So Jesus IS God’s Word, and everything Jesus says and does

is the Word of God.

So the next question is, what has Jesus said and done that delivers God's Word to us? Jesus Himself summed it up in these words: "God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people, He sent him to save them!" (John 3:16-17,cev)

The Word, Jesus, was sent to save us. What did Jesus do to save us? He gave His life for our lives – the perfect life for imperfect people. The sinless life for sinful people, because of God's great love for us: "We are ruled by the love of Christ, now that we recognize that one man died for everyone, which means that they all share in his death. He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for him who died and was raised to life for their sake. Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 17, gnb)

The desire, the will, the expected, the intended, the spoken Word of God has always been to save you and me out of sin, so that we could be in relationship with Him, free from sin, living a high quality of life that gets better and better, being a blessing to others now and on into forever after we pass from this life.

Why? Because he doesn't want anyone to have to face judgment and death forever in Hell apart from Himself: "But the heavens and the earth that now exist are being preserved by the same word of God (Jesus), in order to be destroyed by fire. They are being kept for the day when godless people will be judged and destroyed. But do not forget one thing, my dear friends! There is no difference in the Lord's sight between one day and a thousand years; to him the two are the same. The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins." (2 Peter 3:7-9, gnb) In other words, God delivered his Word, Jesus, to us to be saved. And this same Word, Jesus, is holding back the inevitable destruction of this broken down world in order to give us time to respond to him! Jesus delivered this for us!

"Think how much more the blood of Christ cleans up our whole lives, inside and out. Through the Spirit, Christ offered himself as an unblemished sacrifice, freeing us from all those dead-end efforts to make ourselves respectable, so that we can live all out for God." (Hebrews 9:14-15, the message)

Jesus Himself, God's Son, has personally delivered the Word of God to us. Now, if the Word of God can cleanse us, then *we* must declare it to be true in each of our own lives. That's...

2. The Word Declared.

There is a part we play in this – not in our cleansing, but in accepting what’s been done for us. The Bible says that this clean living life is available to us now because Jesus Christ has personally delivered it to us. It is a free gift from God Himself, delivered personally to the doorstep of your life by Jesus Christ Himself. And as we said earlier this morning, He would have done that for you if you were the only one in all the world. He did it for you personally. But it wasn’t done for you regardless of your own acknowledgement. It sits on the doorstep of your life for you: “For sin pays its ways –death; but God’s free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23, gnb)

It is a free gift for you! That’s why God’s Word says in another place: “But by the free gift of God’s grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free.” (Romans 3:24, gnb)

But like any gift, the giver has given it, but the receiver must receive it. Right? I can give you a new car, but unless you take the keys and drive it home, it will just sit in the parking lot forever. You must accept it! The gift has been delivered to your doorstep. Jesus says: “Listen! I am standing and knocking at your door. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and we will eat together.” (Revelation 3:20, cev)

You must open the door and accept the gift. It won’t do you any good sitting outside the door of your life.

Are keeping up with this? Jesus has delivered the cleansing Word of God – His desire to set you free and be in relationship with you – He’s delivered that free gift right to your doorstep, but *you must accept it*. God’s Word is true whether you accept it or not, but it won’t do you any good; it won’t cleanse you like water, until you do accept it. And the way you accept it is by *declaring it to be true* in your own life:

“If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9, gnb) *Your* word, *your* declaration, combined with God’s delivered Word, saves you. But I need to caution you; even though you play a part in this, your part is powerless without God. In fact, God Himself enables you and empowers you to declare it to be true in your life, in the first place: “God’s Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God’s children.” (Romans 8:16, gnb)

God’s Spirit helps us to even be able to declare it. And faith is our declaring it. We accept what Jesus has done *as* truth, acknowledge it *as* truth, and then declare it to *be* truth for our lives. That’s what faith is. But our faith isn’t anything without

God: “In our union with Christ Jesus he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world. He did this to demonstrate for all time to come the extraordinary greatness of his grace in the love he showed us in Christ Jesus. For it is by God’s grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God’s gift, so that no one can boast about it.” (Ephesians 2:6-8, gnb)

So God enables us to declare His Word to be true in our own lives. Are you following this amazing thing that God’s Word, Jesus, has done? If You haven’t declared it, do so! God is right now giving you the power to declare it to be true in your life. I want you to look at what’s on the screen right now. Have you read it? Then if you want to declare or re-declare it, prepare yourself to do so now! If you mean it, read it with me: “I confess that Jesus is Lord. I say that I believe that God raised Jesus from death. Because by the Spirit of God I declare this to be true, I know by God’s Word that I am saved.” You’ve just declared what Romans 10:9 says.

Guess what? You have now activated the power of God’s Word in your life! Because “If we declare that Jesus is the Son of God, we live in union with God and God lives in union with us.” (I John 4:15, gnb)

In fact, that’s what baptism is – when we are baptized in water, we are declaring, along with the power of the Spirit of God himself, that His Word has become true in our lives: “By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life.” (Romans 6:4, gnb)

Baptism is a powerful event that combines your declaration with God’s Word and makes it true in your life. The Apostle Peter wrote in the Bible using the Great Flood as an example of the cleansing that God wanted to do for us by His Word: “You know, even though God waited patiently all the days that Noah built his ship, only a few were saved then, eight to be exact—saved from the water by the water. The waters of baptism do that for you, not by washing away dirt from your skin but by presenting you through Jesus’ resurrection before God with a clear conscience. Jesus has the last word on everything and everyone, from angels to armies. He’s standing right alongside God, and what he says goes.” (I Peter 3:20-22, the message) Remember our theme verse? We are cleansed with water so we can be purified by the Word. That’s why baptism services like the one we recently had are so important; it’s another way to declare God’s Word in our lives!

Have you ever flown to a foreign country and when you return they ask you if you have anything to declare? What that means is “do you now own something of value that you didn’t have before?” If you have believed the truth of what Jesus

has done for you, than you have something to declare – something of value that you didn't have before! Got it? That's washing with water through the Word. God Delivered it. We Declare it. You are getting some really, really good theology today friends! But it's not just ideas; this is true because God's Word, Jesus, is the Truth. And the Way. And the Life. But we're not done yet. Because it's been delivered and declared, it means we now have to make sure that...

3. The Word (is) Designated.

Jesus is the delivered Word of God; the Bible is the written-down Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God revealed, the Bible is the Word of God recorded (*repeat*). It is God's Word preserved for us through the ages of time so that we might have a testimony to the truth. It is the written Word of God. Jesus delivered it, the Bible records it. All that God wants us to know about what he says, he has dictated to men who, compelled by the Spirit, wrote it down to preserve it for us: "For no prophetic message ever came just from the human will, but people were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God." (II Peter 1:21, gnb)

The Bible is the God-directed recording of His Word. He spoke it – it passed through His lips, to His inspired servants, to recorded parchments and paper, to you and me. This is the most textually accurate book in all of history. The next closest ancient document is Homer's *Odyssey*, and the oldest known copy of that we have was written a thousand years after the original. Compare that to the Bible: in most cases the oldest copies we have are within a few hundred years to within a few decades of the originals. There is no book in all of history that is more accurate to the originals than this is. You can believe it from its source!

When one of my sons (Ryan) was around eight he had some interesting sources of truth. We were coming home from the grocery store one time when he asked, "Dad, do you believe in the Bermuda Triangle?"

"Son," I replied, "If you're asking me if I believe that this place exists, my answer is yes. If you're asking me if I believe all the mysterious stories about ships and planes vanishing, then no: I think that's all baloney."

"Well, Dad," Ryan said with a note of defensiveness "I believe in it. And I bet you want to know why."

"Yes, son I do." "Well, I was watching a Scooby Doo cartoon..." He was *sure* Scooby Doo was true. But you can't really trust that source. You can trust *this* source – the Word of God – it is reliable. And God has miraculously preserved it to be in your hands, so you can place it in your hearts:

"There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to

salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is *God-breathed* and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped for the tasks God has for us.” (II Timothy 3:15-17, the message)

That phrase “God-breathed” means first that it has passed through his lips. Try this: hold your breath. Now without breathing try to say something. It’s not possible! You must push air through your vocal chords if words are going to come out. Likewise the Word of God also contains the breath of God. And the breath of God is *God’s Spirit*: in Genesis in the Old Testament, God breathed life into Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:7). In the New Testament Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:22) So the Bible is not only spoken by God, it is filled with His breath or His Spirit. So it has power to do what it says: “My word is like the snow and the rain that comes down from the sky to water the earth. They make the crops grow and provide seed for planting and food to eat. So also will be the word that I speak—it will not fail to do what I plan for it; it will do everything I send it to do.” (Isaiah 55:10-11, gnb)

God’s Word has the Power of the Spirit of God in it. The Gospel – this Good News about God’s love for us that we have received and are to share with others – the Gospel is the Good News of God’s Word, and it has that power of God in it: “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God for the salvation of every one that believes.” (Romans 1:16, niv)

So, since we have this powerful Word of God, it should be our greatest desire and ambition to read it, know it, and apply it to our lives. The writer of Psalm 119 had the right attitude about God’s Word:

“You have ordered us always to obey your teachings; I don’t ever want to stray from your laws. Thinking about your commands will keep me from doing some foolish thing. I will do right and praise you by learning to respect your perfect laws. I will obey all of them! Don’t turn your back on me. Young people can live a clean life by obeying your word. I worship you with all my heart. Don’t let me walk away from your commands. I treasure your word above all else; it keeps me from sinning against you. I praise you, LORD! Teach me your laws. With my own mouth, I tell others the laws that you have spoken. Obeying your instructions brings as much happiness as being rich. I will study your teachings and follow your footsteps. I will take pleasure in your laws and remember your words.” (Psalm 119:4—16, cev)

When we have been cleansed by God or saved, then we can be filled with His Holy Spirit his breath, who purifies us and makes us righteous – makes us able to obey

His Word. It's the truth of God's Word, empowered by the Holy Spirit filling us that will make us holy, or sanctifies us. God says: "I will put my Spirit in you and make you eager to obey my laws and teachings." (Ezekiel 36:27, cev) That's what Jesus meant when he prayed that God would "Sanctify them (that's us) by the Truth – your Word is truth." (John 17:16, niv)

God's Word has been delivered, it must be declared, and it must be designated, or placed in us. That means we must read it, dig into it, and designate its place in our lives by submitting to the Holy Spirit.

When it comes to God's Word, it's been delivered, it must be declared as your own, and you must designate it in your life. It must become a part of you. You must submit to the Holy Spirit, and as he fills you, He empowers the Word you have placed in your life through reading and studying it. So that the last part will be true: in your life, it will be...

4. The Word Demonstrated.

God intends for His Word to become evident in our lives. Part of the purifying and cleansing that the Word does is that it makes us righteous – or causes us to live rightly, which is what happens when we live it out under the power of the Holy Spirit. We become righteous or holy, because it's been delivered to us, when we declare it and designate it, it is demonstrable in our lives! "Think how much more the blood of Christ cleans up our whole lives, inside and out. Through the Spirit, Christ offered himself as an unblemished sacrifice, freeing us from all those dead-end efforts to make ourselves respectable, so that we can live all out for God." (Hebrews 9:14-15, the message) Delivered, declared, designated, so that we can live all-out for God: the Word demonstrated!

When Jesus prayed for us that God's Word would make us holy, he has something in mind for it to do *through* us. Watch for Jesus' desire that the Word to be demonstrated in our lives as we look at his prayer for us: "Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world." (John 17:17-18, nlt)

God has always intended that we live out the truth of His Word – that it becomes real in us to the extent that it is demonstrated in our lives to those around us. James in the Bible makes this point emphatically: "My friends, what good is it to say you have faith, when you don't do anything to show that you really do have faith? Can that kind of faith save you? If you know someone who doesn't have any clothes or food, you shouldn't just say, 'I hope all goes well for you. I hope you will be warm and have plenty to eat.' What good is it to say this, unless you do something to help? Faith that doesn't lead us to do good deeds is all alone and dead! Suppose someone disagrees and says, 'It is possible to have faith without

doing kind deeds.’ I would answer, ‘Prove that you have faith without doing kind deeds, and I will prove that I have faith by doing them.’ You surely believe there is only one God. That’s fine. Even demons believe this, and it makes them shake with fear. Does some stupid person want proof that faith without deeds is useless? Well, our ancestor Abraham pleased God by putting his son Isaac on the altar to sacrifice him. Now you see how Abraham’s faith and deeds worked together. He proved that his faith was real by what he did. This is what Scriptures mean by saying, ‘Abraham had faith in God, and God was pleased with him.’ That’s how Abraham became God’s friend. You can now see that we please God by what we do and not only by what we believe.” (James 2:14-24, cev)

We please God by what we declare and what we do. Delivered in Jesus, Declared by us, Designated to us to be demonstrated through us.

pray

It’s our church’s mission:

Introduce People to Jesus

Equip People with a Faith that Works

Live as People with Purpose.

When we live out our mission on purpose we are demonstrating God’s Word. And you have the opportunity to do that by inviting folks you know to worship with us on Easter Sunday (invite cards)