

Sermon 25: Hebrews 9:11-14: The Blood of Christ

OUTLINE

The greater redemption bought
The greater blood offered

INTRODUCTION

The blood of Christ is a precious doctrine to the believer. Many of our favorite hymns have the blood of Christ running through them. Alas and did my Savior bleed? Nothing but the blood. There is a fountain. And so it should be. Though today many are revolted at the centrality of blood in the bible. We who for the most part have never had to slaughter our own meat are squeamish at the thought of OT worship. We too quickly make God in the image of superstitious and ghastly notions of idolatry portraying Him as bloody hungry. Through the influence of Liberal theology the idea of a Father committing cosmic child abuse and performing child sacrifice is a common misrepresentation of the gospel where Father and Son with one will, because of love for sinners, agree to the plan of the Father sending a willing Son to pay for what sin deserves. The blood of Christ is mentioned 3 times more often than the cross of Christ; and 5 times more often than the death of Christ. It is linked with so many of the major doctrines like our redemption; justification; propitiation; reconciliation; sanctification; and more. A blood trail from the first slain animal that God used to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve runs through the Bible. Through the sacrifices of the patriarchs; the 7 of each clean animal taken on Noah's Ark; the ram that died instead of Isaac; the Passover lamb; the many sacrifices of the tabernacle. Blood is spilled because the wages of sin is death, and sin must be paid for. This blood trail leads us to the new testament to the testimony of the last prophet of the OT where John the Baptist calls Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. His blood He tells His disciples is what will establish a new covenant and sprinkle and consecrate a new people unto God. Every week we deliberately remember His body and blood. This blood was shed in a sacrificial substitutionary death upon the cross, and now finally every other sacrifice that had been done by God's people which had pointed to this one, which were inadequate could finally be put away. No more priesthood; no more tabernacle; no more animal sacrifices all of those things had been leading up to this moment.

The author of Hebrews in the portion before us turns our minds towards this emphasis. We have been talking about the priesthood and the tabernacle and the covenant; the portion before us 9:11-10:18 is an extended discussion on Christ's sacrifice in relation to these things. Today as we look at v11-14, on the back of what he has already established about Jesus greater priesthood; in a greater tabernacle securing greater promises now details that a greater redemption is secured by the offering of a greater blood. So our two points are greater redemption bought, v11-12; and greater blood offered, v13-14.

The greater redemption bought

V11-12, 'But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus

securing an eternal redemption.' The author of Hebrews in v11 rehearses some of the points he has already made, as he wants to come to the point about Jesus blood. He reminds them that the Christ, the promised one of the OT has appeared as a high priest. Of course, he is referring to Jesus as a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. His new and better priestly ministry has established the good things that have come, namely the new covenant and its benefits. The future salvation that will arrive with the judgement of all enemies and the new creation has already begun to be poured out in the salvation of God's people. This high priest has secured these good things that have come by entering the heavenly presence of God; by the means of better blood securing an eternal redemption. The author is elaborating on how the priestly work of Jesus is greater and how the results of His greater work are greater. A few details stand out in v12.

'he entered once for all into the holy places.' Drawing on the parallel of the high priest on the day of atonement going into the holy of holies, he draws our attention to the reality of Jesus bodily resurrection and ascension into heaven. Now there is an error we need to avoid here, an error the seventh day Adventists have fallen into. We can overdraw the parallel between the day of atonement and Jesus entering heaven. We need to appreciate that there cannot be a spiritual equivalent of what happens in lev 16 going on in heaven. Some have wrongly created a two part ministry for Jesus. They draw a parallel with Jesus dying to the sacrifices being made outside the tent; but then because the high priest goes inside and there is the sprinkling and the smearing and the sanctifying of the furniture of the holy of holies and then the holy place, they imagine that there are spiritual equivalents happening in heaven. Because the SDA have this two part view of Jesus priestly activity they believe that Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down, but then in the 1870s He stood up, and started sprinkling His blood and it was only then that a gate to heaven was opened and all the Christians who had believed on Jesus before that were not saved, but only now since the 1870s, those who are SDA have a way into heaven. That is their historic teaching on this matter. No, although the day of atonement ritual has many parts where you have first the sin offerings, and everything get cleansed; then the scape goat; and then the burnt offerings, we should not try to over draw the parallels. It was because the blood of animals was inadequate; rather think of the sacrifice of Christ as an atom bomb that obliterates all before it. The emphasis before us in this section is going to underscore that because His death was so efficient; and His offering so perfect; a single offering was enough. What you should put next to the day of atonement by way of comparison is the day Jesus died. Jesus dies and instead of a long drawn out drama with many parts, the veil is simply torn in two; the earth quakes; some of the OT saints are resurrected; Jesus ascends into heaven, and it is finished as He said. The power of His sacrifice was so great, it was a case of once and done. His resurrection and ascension is God's authenticating vindication of Him as a conquering priest who has effectively made payment for sin.

So notice then the language of once for all. Not once for the Jews and then once for the Romans and the once for the Greeks. Jewish sins break God's law and bring the condemnation of God as much as Gentile sins. There is only one way that any sins can be paid for. And because of the effectiveness of Christ's death, He only needs to die once for sin. The all that Jesus single death saves is all those who in history both in the OT and NT who have placed their faith in Him, either through types and shadows or now revealed. The all involves those

present and those future. The all means not just Jews but people from all nations. Jesus is the universal solution for sin, not one solution of among others. And His entering into the heavenly tent; God's direct presence indicated a success in His sacrifice that no other sacrifice has wrought. His ascension; God opening the door to His direct presence is proof of the effectiveness of His sacrifice.

'not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood.' Lets remind ourselves why blood was important. Lev. 17:11 says that life is in the blood. This is not a medical statement talking about DNA, or the oxygenating power of blood; no the blood was a representation of the life of an animal or person. To pour out your blood is to give your life. The blood of animals was accepted as a sacrifice before God, not because He is hungry like a vampire; not because of a belief in blood magic. No, the animal was a type of Christ. An unblemished animal representing Christ's perfect sinlessness was set aside to die instead of you. The wages of sin is death. You sin is so serious that you deserve to be judged and die. But God is merciful He does not delight in the death of sinners so He makes a way for sins to be forgiven and the sinner not to die. He establishes a principle of substitution. Since Adam and Eve sinned and the first sacrificial animal was killed. These deaths have pointed forward to and anticipated the death of one who would finally and sufficiently pay our sin debt. The animal's blood was not a payment equal to the debt but an IOU that God accepted until Christ because God always intended to pay our debts Himself by the death of a better sacrifice. Jesus blood/life is the only payment sufficient to pay your sin debt, Peter reminds us of this, 1 Pet. 1:18-19, 'knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.'

'thus securing an eternal redemption.' The combination of blood and redemption of course takes us right back to the Exodus where God promised to redeem His people, Ex. 6:6 which climaxes in the judgement of the Passover. The word for redemption means a ransom to deliver from bondage. A payment to set one free. B. B. Warfield says that instead of the usual meaning of buying back, and resuming ownership; he thinks that the emphasis, is more buying from, in other words from slavery and bondage. Jesus by His blood paid the ransom, Mark 10:45, 'For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' We were in the house of bondage; the devil was our Pharaoh; we were enslaved in sin; we were worse in being under the condemnation of death because of our sins—our bondage a punishment due to our sins. We were not just victims but willing criminals against God's law. The Passover was not only a punishment against the Egyptians for their idolatry, it was also a saving sacrifice for those of the house of Israel who had participated in the sins and idolatry of Egypt. In that 10th plague as the angel of death swept through the land, if any Israelite household did not apply the blood taking refuge under the blood of the substitute lamb, they too would suffer the same judgement as Egypt.

Jesus who is the lamb of God who was slain and has ransomed a people for God from every nation is greater than the OT Passover lamb. Israel would return to the house of bondage. Regularly during the times of the judges they were oppressed. Both northern and southern tribes were exiled from the land and taken into captivity. The OT animal sacrifices did no secure an eternal redemption. But Jesus has. The sins that could cause God to cast us out, have

all been paid for; the enemies that could overcome us and steal us from His hand have been defeated. No animal blood could secure what He has secured for us. The author of Hebrews goes on now to speak of His blood.

The greater blood

V13-14, 'For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.' The author uses a familiar argument in arguing from the lesser to the greater. If animal sacrifices could cleanse the body, then the blood of the Messiah, who is perfect, who offers Himself; and by the eternal Spirit cleanse not merely the bodies but consciences of us and set us free for a better priestly service. Lets unpack these ideas.

Firstly, we can see that the author in addition to the blood sacrifices also has certain other rituals in mind. The sprinkling of defiled person with the ashes of a heifer comes specifically from numbers 19. This is a chapter that deals with a special ritual that cleansed the people of Israel from the defilement of touching dead human bodies. To touch a dead animal made you unclean until sunset, but touching a dead human being made you unclean for 7 days. Human death because it is the judgement upon sin was given this value, and symbolically it needed cleansing because of its association with sin. Records show that this sacrifice was only done maybe every 50 years as it provided enough water for this ritual to last a long time. Several aspects of the ritual point to Christ as so many other parts of these rituals do. This sacrifice is unique because it is a red heifer not a bull. A heifer is any female cow that has not had a calf. Red perhaps because of its association with blood; or because of its association with the earth, both blood and dust point to the true humanity of Christ. A heifer was unmated, Christ was unmarried. It was offered as a whole burnt offering, as Christ gave all of His life and all of His death for us. The sacrifice had wood, hyssop and scarlet yarn burned with it, these three items were used when cleansing one from leprosy. The sacrifice is unique in that the blood was not offered on the altar but sprinkled 7 times before the tent in the place the worshipper would ordinarily stand to cut the throats of his sacrifices to the Lord. The sacrifice bore the uncleanness of death and was taken outside the camp, just as Christ bore our uncleanness and was killed outside the camp. Anyone who touched a dead body, and mourning loved ones always would as they tended the bodies of their loved ones, would be unclean. Their uncleanness would last 7 days if they applied the water for uncleanness on the 3rd and 7th day, the 3rd is thought to remind us of Christ's resurrection, and the 7th His return. The two moments when death is overcome by our Savior. This reality would no doubt have been very burdensome to the Israelites and underlined the realities of sin and death. This water could remove a symbolic uncleanness attached to death, but it could do nothing to remove the stain of sin and death. It was purely external. It sanctified the flesh and created ritual cleanness but this is irrelevant to the guilt of sin and the power of death.

This ashy water which only cleanses the body is compared with the blood of the Messiah. The blood of a human being not an animal. The blood of a king not merely a man. The blood of the promised one, our prophet, priest and king. We know that He is God and man. No one better has ever bled. He became a man so that He could bleed.

The next phrase 'through the eternal Spirit' has a few interpretations. Some take it to mean that He suffered in Spirit, but this leads to all sorts of awkward ideas around Christ's divine nature and impassibility. I think that Calvin had the best approach. Christ endured an event that is beyond human nature to endure. He underwent the wrath of God. There is no way for us to penetrate the agonies that bore down on Christ. To see Him in Gethsemane with His blood sweat; having to be ministered to by angels in preparation for the cross; terrible abuse at the hands of men; and then all that was entailed in taking the guilt of our sins upon Himself and suffering the wrath of God. We stand silent and wonder. But as we try and ponder how this could be we see that just as the Holy Spirit enabled Jesus throughout His ministry, the Spirit likewise upheld Christ during His cross work for us. What no human being can endure, to stand before God as a criminal of on judgement Day, Christ has to stand in that position, and it appears that the Spirit enabled Him to bear it. I suspect that this made it worse not better. Imagine for a moment your hand would burn at hotter temperatures because it was strengthened. Your nerve endings would have to endure a deeper experience of burning because it was strengthened. Jesus offered Himself up through the eternal Spirit, it is beyond our ability to quantify what He went through, we stand silent before the mystery.

Incidentally, this is also a proof text for the deity of the Holy Spirit. Only God is eternal, and here the Spirit is identified as eternal.

The next detail to note is, He 'offered himself.' He was both the offerer and the offering. The word for offer has sacrificial connotations and has to do with Him bringing Himself as the sacrifice. Feeling every agony He had to constantly agree to continuing to all that was happening as He went through being accursed for us. The best offerer and the best offering that had ever occurred and can ever occur in human history looked like a falsely accused man murdered helplessly. But the scandal of the cross is its glory as the one who had every right to take our lives in judgement gave His own life to save us from judgement.

Next we see that He was 'without blemish.' This underscores His identity as the Passover lamb; the red heifer, the sacrifices of the OT. Peter who lived with Jesus through 3 ½ years of His ministry and was witness to all said, 'He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth,' 1 Pet. 2:22. A sinless second Adam, born under the law, and He never gave into temptation, He obeyed and fulfilled God's law winning the reward. But more than that He was also sinless to be a sin offering for all the sins we have committed. His sinlessness fits Him to be our representative and our substitute, filling up a positive righteousness, and to become a sin payment. Being without blemish are some of the most precious words concerning Christ.

He offered Himself, 'to God.' God was the judge whose law had been violated. God was the offended party who was to be paid reparations. Christ, was a sacrifice offered to God. Not to the devil as a bribe to free us from prison, but to God as judge to make the required payment so that God would be just and the justifier.

And what is the result of this payment? Two things. He purifies our consciences of dead works. He does not merely cleanse us outwardly making us ritually clean but He cleanses our consciences. Your God given conscience is the voice of God's law to your soul, intended to guide you into obedience, when in sin it

warns and condemns. O how often it has condemned us. when we are able to pretend to others that we are good, its screams our guilt to us. how often have we stood accused by our consciences and we have no response, how often have we known the depth of our sin beyond what any other human being can see in us. we have to harden our hearts and sear our consciences because no one can sustain a life of living in light of their consciences. We are all liars, sinners, deceivers, hypocrites, we have sinned inwardly, outwardly, publicly, privately, and your conscience is a witness to all. When we pray and search our hearts to find sin, our consciences are waiting with a long lists of offences. And it is the job of conscience to say, you are guilty, justice is coming, you don't have a chance. Everything you have ever tried to stop your sins, failed. There is nothing you can do to remove the stain of one sin. You don't just sin, you are sin! And then the OT sacrifices although offering partial covering and temporary relief need repeating. This repetition only acts to reinforce the problem and never solve it. Imagine being able to be able to look up into the face of God with a feeling of peace that every sin is paid for, that the condemnation you used to live under is gone. This is the great gift of Jesus sacrifice. Sin, those works that are the deeds of the spiritually dead; those actions which end in death; those empty worthless vain things we did, cleansed, forgiven, and no accusation of conscience because we know the judge is fully satisfied by the sacrifice given. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

But there is more, we are not only cleansed we can also now serve, 'to serve the living God.' That word serve is the word used to describe priestly service. OT priests were sinners, they could only be ritually clean, but the sacrifice of Christ is able to take the wretched, sinful, fallen, things that we are and truly cleanse us for service in the presence of God. We know our deep unworthiness, but where sin has abounded His grace has abounded all the more.