

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The New is in the Old concealed: When I see the blood...

Today's talk continues the theme started last week looking at subjects introduced to us at the beginning of the Bible and developed and expanded as we go through the Old Testament into the New Testament. We consider today the absolutely central place shed blood has in the Holy Scriptures.

It is true that in today's highly sanitised world we find blood a distasteful, unpleasant subject. Have you noticed that even meat bought from a supermarket has little absorbent pads at the bottom of the pack to soak up any juice and blood that seeps from the joint of meat? Most of us are happy to eat meat but somehow don't like to be reminded of where it came from! It is far, far more sobering to realise that all through the Bible we are told time and time again that mankind's condition is so desperate that only the death of a substitute is sufficient to remedy the situation. This is not in any way whatsoever an attractive idea. I object to the suggestion that my condition is so bad, my sin so dreadful, that the only remedy, the only way of rescue for me is based on the sacrifice of another. But this is the reality! This is a principle emphasised throughout the Bible and then spelt out very plainly in Hebrews "without shedding of blood there is no remission [or forgiveness]." Hebrews 9:22.

I want to refer to several scriptures as we talk about this subject, but the first I would like to read is found in Exodus 12. "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire - its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD'S Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you'" Exodus 12:3-13.

The children of Israel were slaves in the land of Egypt and Pharaoh the ruler was not prepared to free them. God had already worked nine miraculous signs in the sight of Pharaoh and he had still not relented and freed the slaves. God now works this final and dreadful sign to punish the Egyptians, but as always, God also provides a way of escape. The threatened judgement was certain to fall; the first-born in each family would be killed. Earlier Pharaoh had decreed that each boy born to the Israelites had to be drowned; now their own families were at risk! But there was a way of escape open to any Israelite or Egyptian who would obey God's clear instructions. As we read, they were to take a lamb, inspect it carefully for three days to ensure it was free from blemish and then sacrifice it and place the shed blood on the posts and lintel of the door. God says, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" The family inside the house was sheltered from God's deserved judgement by the blood of the lamb. The Apostle Peter writing centuries later tells his readers that they were redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Peter 1:19. Paul writes "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." 1 Corinthians 5:7. Quite clearly the picture of the Passover in the Old Testament points on to the reality of Christ's death in the New Testament. Jesus was the perfect "Lamb of God", proven to be free from blemish over the entire course of His sinless life.

Notice as well how precisely the picture of the Passover Lamb is fulfilled in the death of Christ. If we had continued reading in Exodus 12 we would have come to the instruction in relation to the lamb, "nor shall you break one of its bones" Exodus 12:46. If we turn to John's account of the crucifixion we read; "Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out." John 19:32-34. It was normal practice for the Romans to break the legs of those crucified if the soldiers wanted to hasten their death. This could not happen to the Lord Jesus. Instead, to ensure that Jesus was

really dead a soldier pierced His side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out. Thus unwittingly the Roman soldier fulfilled the picture of the Passover Lamb.

Notice as well that it is God who had said, "When I see the blood I will pass over you". The family sheltering in the house didn't have to understand what was required; they just had to be obedient to God's word. It is only God, in His absolute purity who can measure the offence and dishonour caused by sin, and it is only God who can value the shed blood. It meets every claim of His holy throne and answers the offence and debt of my every sin. So God doesn't, as it were, sweep sin under the carpet and pretend it hasn't happened. Instead He provides a righteous answer to it. "The blood of Jesus Christ, [God's] Son, cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:7. I am sheltered from the coming judgement in just the same way as those families in Exodus 12, are you?

Shed blood also had to be placed on the Mercy Seat situated in the holiest place in the tabernacle, the tent where God had promised to meet with His own people. If in the Passover the emphasis is on the shelter afforded by the shed blood, in the type or picture of the Mercy Seat the emphasis is on the need for God's holy and righteous demands to be satisfied. Is it possible for God to express His love towards sinners and at the same time remain true to His own holiness and righteousness? Surely love and forgiveness could be extended towards guilty people only at the expense of righteousness? Or does God's holiness forbid the expression of His love?

The only possible answer is in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. There, at the same moment God's holiness was righteously satisfied and His perfect love to mankind was most clearly demonstrated! This I believe is the clear teaching, pictured for us in the blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat. The Mercy Seat was the lid of the Ark, essentially a box constructed out of incorruptible Acacia wood and covered in pure gold. I believe the Ark is a very clear and powerful picture of manhood and deity, perfectly and uniquely expressed in the Lord Jesus. The Ark contained among other things the Law of God, and the Lord Jesus could say, "Your law have I hidden in My heart". The Mercy Seat itself was formed out of one piece of pure gold and, rising out of the lid at each end, were the "cherubim of glory" (Hebrews 9:5), those mighty angels which represent God's holiness and judgement. Their eyes are fixed on the pure gold of the Mercy Seat, exactly where the blood had to be sprinkled!

Let's read the Bible again, this time in the New Testament. "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation [or a mercy seat] by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Romans 3:21-26.

Notice in the middle of this reading we have the word 'propitiation'. I added the phrase "a mercy seat" which is what some translations use. "To propitiate" means "to satisfy", "to fully answer" and this is exactly what the Mercy Seat did. It is the same word as propitiate! To maintain His righteousness and at the same time express His love, God has set forth Jesus Christ as a mercy seat; a satisfaction! God's holiness is satisfied and my debt of sin is satisfied. It is no wonder that Peter in his epistle speaks of the "precious blood of Christ" Silver and gold though valuable cannot even begin to compare with the intrinsic worth of the blood of Jesus. Every possible blessing that you or I possess as believers on the Lord Jesus has been secured through the pouring out of His blood.

But there is also another idea associated with the Mercy Seat. This too is pictured in the Old Testament and fully answered and developed in the New Testament. On the basis of that blood God could meet with His people. What tremendous value is placed on the shed blood! Not only are we sheltered by it from coming judgement, not only does it meet and satisfy the demands of God's holiness, but it also enables God in all His purity to meet with His people. But it was a very restricted freedom of access in the Old Testament!

Only once each year could one man from the nation of Israel enter the most Holy Place which signified the very presence of God. This man was the High Priest and he could only do so after having carefully followed a very elaborate procedure laid down by God. Vital and central to this was the sacrifice of an animal whose blood was taken into the Holiest Place and sprinkled on the Mercy Seat.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament picks up this theme and contrasts the restrictions of the Old Testament with the freedom we have as Christians to freely enter God's presence. One man, once a year could enter the Holiest Place for a few minutes, and only after following a carefully prescribed ritual of sacrifice and washing. Or as it is written in Hebrews, "But into the second part, [the Holiest], the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing." Hebrews 9:7-8.

By contrast we have a great High Priest who has entered, and can remain in the Holiest forever. "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." Hebrews 9:11-12. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were endlessly repeated. Fresh blood was constantly spilt, the blood of goats and calves could never secure lasting access into God's presence. But now, Jesus with His own blood has entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. The words used are "once for all" and "eternal redemption". Jesus can forever minister in the presence of God as our High Priest.

And He is not there alone as was the case formerly! In the next chapter of Hebrews we read "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Hebrews 10:19-22. What a contrast to what we read about in the Old Testament! Think of the trepidation in the heart of the priest on the Day of Atonement as he prepared to enter the Holiest Place! Had he carefully completed all the required washing and ritual? The price for not doing so was the loss of his life! We can have boldness or confidence to enter God's presence but the price for our liberty is still the loss of life; not ours but another's!

We have "boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus" This is a marvellous freedom and privilege that we have but what a fearful price was paid to secure it! Surely the price paid tells us just how much God wants us to approach Him. At the very beginning of time, Adam and Eve could commune with the LORD God in the Garden of Eden. Their sin ended that relationship; they were lost, lost to God. In Proverbs we read of a time prior to creation and Wisdom, a picture of God, "rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men." Proverbs 8:31. To restore that relationship, or rather to bring us into a much more intimate relationship, God sent His Son Jesus to deal with all that separated us from God and introduce us to God as our Father. We cannot begin to measure how much God wants us in His presence! We cannot for one moment imagine why God wants us in His presence, but He does and He has made such freedom available to us at tremendous cost.

This is a contrast that is emphasised time and again by the New Testament writers. The blood of the sacrifices in the Old Testament were animal sacrifices, animals who had no choice or understanding in the matter. Their blood had value in the sight of God, only in so far as God looked beyond it to a greater and perfect sacrifice: that of His own Son. He was a willing and perfect offering, whose unique and perfect life fitted Him to be the final and eternal sacrifice forever, completely meeting our need and God's righteousness.

And the extent of what has been achieved is remarkable as well. "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Colossians 1:19-20. The value of Christ's sacrifice and blood is such that all things on earth and in heaven can be reconciled to God, because peace has been secured through the blood of Christ's cross. Notice though that there is a realm occupied by Satan, his demons and those who reject God that is never reconciled.

But there is still another picture in Leviticus to do with blood and that is in the way the priests were consecrated or set apart for God's service. Among the other rituals that had to be carried out, a ram was sacrificed and its blood was placed on the right ear, thumb and big toe of the priest. We can read about this in Exodus 29. How are we to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear? Clearly we can only serve God in this way if we have been redeemed and set apart or consecrated by precious blood. So again what is foreshadowed or pictured in the Old Testament finds its perfect answer in the New Testament. "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Hebrews 9:13-14.

At the very simplest level, when we read in the Bible about our ears, hands and feet surely it is speaking to us about what we hear, what we do and where we go. Any service undertaken for God must first of all be by those who have been redeemed or purchased by precious blood, but also it must be by those who have some sense of the value of Christ's sacrifice and have been consecrated, set apart by God for His service. So great care is needed as to what we listen to, what we do or allow in our lives and where we go. If I understood more of the value and preciousness of the blood that was shed to save me, my life would be more readily available for service. It would truly be a consecrated life!

The Apostle John in his first letter writes about the fellowship and light into which we have been brought. He writes almost with amazement of the fact that he and the other disciples walked and talked with the Son of God. He shares this knowledge and experience with us so "that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" 1 John 1:3. But John also acknowledges that we can fail and commit sin.

Sad though this is for a true Christian, it need not be cause for complete despair! "If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" 1 John 1:9. How can this be? The answer is found in verse 7 of the same chapter: "The blood of Jesus Christ, [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin" 1 John 1:7. The value of the blood never diminishes!

So we have seen from the Scriptures the vital place shed blood has in God's dealings with us. Only by it can we be redeemed, forgiven, saved and sheltered from deserved punishment. Only in the blood of Jesus can the seemingly opposed moral attributes of God, His hatred of sin and His love of sinners be fully answered and fully expressed. By it God can meet with His people, and we can have free and confident access into His presence, assured of the welcome that awaits us there. The blood alone can set us apart for service that is pleasing to God, and should we still fail and sin, the eternal value of Christ's blood is such that, upon confession of our sin we are forgiven and cleansed, and our enjoyment of God's presence is restored. Where would we be, what would we do without "the precious blood of Christ"!

That leads me on to the last Scripture that I want to read with you this week. "To Him who loves us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Revelation 1:5-6. Also, "'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign over the earth.' Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!' And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!'" Revelation 5:9-13.

What will the future hold? There are so many things that we may still have to face that thankfully we at present know nothing about, but here in the Bible are told about something certain and sure. Just as the Apostle Peter could write about the wonder of our redemption through precious blood, he also wrote about "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:4-5. A glorious future stretches ahead of us, and as the verses we have just read from Revelation tell us, we will never forget the price paid to secure our blessing, nor the One who paid that price!

And if in heaven we will never forget the Lord Jesus and His love which was stronger than death, isn't it right that we remember Him and worship Him today? Before Jesus went to the cross, He gave His disciples the bread and wine, and asked them to remember Him in this simple way. "'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.'" Luke 22:19-20. These symbols of His suffering and death are freely available to constantly remind us of the great sacrifice of our Saviour. He has done so much for us; the least we can do is not to forget Him. We have opportunity today to gather around Him and remember Him and thank Him for His sacrifice. Will you remember Him today?

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