

## ***Blood Redeems***

In the name of him upon whom the Lord laid the iniquity of us all, dear friends in Christ: Six weeks ago we began following a trail of blood that runs through the Scripture. Along the way we've investigated the many functions the Lord ascribes to blood as he lays out for us his plan of salvation.

We learned initially that blood accuses. Just as the blood of Abel cried out to the Lord for justice, so also the blood of those we've wronged in any way speaks against us. Its damning evidence cannot be ignored by the just Judge of all mankind. Nor can we ignore it. Upon hearing the blood of our victims cry out each one must confess, "I have sinned. I am guilty as charged."

From there we learned that blood is the carrier of the life of every creature. The Scripture locates the seat of the human soul not in the heart, not in the brain, not in the liver or any other organ, but rather in the blood. And if a soul is sinful – as all of ours are – then it's in the blood that the sin resides too. This was the basis of the whole Old Testament sacrificial system. The penalty for sin is the forfeiture of life. And the life was in the blood; so that's what got poured out on the Lord's burning altar: the blood of the sacrificial victims. The Lord received to himself the life the Law demanded – but he also took upon himself the sins that the lifeblood carried.

Next we learned that blood connects us to other people, those we call our blood relatives. We saw that each of us is the product of the union of two distinct and separate bloodlines, those of our father and mother. Your own blood – like your life – comes from both. That's where you got your sinful nature too, your predisposition to rebel against God in every thought, word, and action. It came from two corrupt bloodlines, which means you were born an enemy of God and you were destined for eternal destruction. And so you would have remained had you not by the blood of Christ been connected to him and brought into the family of God. In Baptism you were adopted into his royal line of blood.

Continuing on our Lenten journey, we saw the role blood played in covering or, as we say, *atoning* for sin; how on the annual Great Day of Atonement the blood of a sacrificial goat was poured out on the top of the Ark of the Covenant so that the Lord looking down upon his Holy Law contained within the Ark would see that the life the Law demanded for sin had been received and the debt was paid.

From there we stepped briefly onto a converging blood trail found in the Scripture, this one revealing a number of images and foreshadows of Jesus Christ and his saving role as the bearer of sin and the sacrificial victim. To bring them to our attention, each one was marked by blood or by blood's red color.

Coming closer to our goal, last week we learned that the blood of Jesus the Lamb of God cleanses and purifies us – not externally, but on the inside. If the blood of the sinful nature contains the old life that must die, then so also does the blood of the new nature born of God contain the godly life that will never die. Our goal as Christians is to continue to let the blood of Jesus cleanse us so that more of the new nature may be seen.

Then, approaching journey's end, last evening we heard how the blood of Jesus testifies to us; testifies that Jesus did indeed fulfill all the Scriptures concerning the promised Savior, that he suffered for the sins of the world, and that he died as the atoning sacrifice. The blood that flowed from his pierced side testifies to all of it. But just as importantly, the blood of his Holy Supper testifies to each one who drinks of the cup that Christ's atoning work is not just true in a general sense, but that it's for *you*. In the cup he gives *you* his life.

This evening we arrive at the end of the bloody trail we have been pursuing. As we do, we see all of these functions and attributes of blood coming together to show us the full extent of what's going on in the cross and passion of Jesus. Especially significant is the attempt of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, to wash his hands of the blood of Jesus. He refuses to accept the blame for ordering the death of a man he knows to be innocent of the charges brought against him. The trouble is that he can't escape the blame. He is the man with the legal authority in the case. It's his job to uphold the law. But he's afraid to do what he knows is right. The Jewish leaders have filed too many complaints against him with the Roman Emperor. If the Emperor were to hear now that Pilate lost control of a simple legal case, that a riot broke out and civilians and soldiers were killed or injured because of his inability to keep the peace, it would cost him his job, his honor, and maybe his life. On the other hand, by doing what he does and turning Jesus over to the will of the crowd, he shows himself to be a weak and incapable ruler. In the end, he lets an innocent man die to save himself. And he washes his hands to try to justify himself of his crime.

But washing his hands with water doesn't remove the blood of Jesus from them. Like Lady Macbeth who conspired with her husband to kill King Duncan in Shakespeare's famous play, no amount of washing can eliminate the bloody stains from Pilate's hands. The whole Christian Church accuses him whenever and as often as the Creeds are confessed and we say that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate".

On the other side we've got the crowd stirred up by the Jewish religious leaders. Together they are only too happy to accept the blame for the death of Jesus. But they too are attempting to save and to justify themselves. They have reasoned that if Jesus continues to live, his followers will declare him to be the messianic king. That would lead to a war of rebellion against Rome – a war they fear cannot be won. They too believe that their positions and their lives are on the line. And they have justified the false charges they've brought against Jesus by saying it's better that one man die so that the nation can live on. Also some of them are convinced that Jesus is a heretic and blasphemer who deserves to die; but they know such charges won't be upheld in a Roman court. They justify their lies about Jesus thinking he's worthy of death, even if he's not guilty of the charges they bring against him. Either way, when Pilate washes his hands of the matter in a futile attempt to avoid the blame, the crowd and religious leaders respond, "His blood be on us and on our children!" They mean that they will gladly accept responsibility – as indeed they should: they are every bit as guilty as Pontius Pilate. The trouble is they don't realize that what they are accepting is the blame for the most horrendous crime in human history: the torture and murder of God's only-begotten Son.

It would be a mistake, however, to blame only Pilate and the Jews who called for Jesus' death. If you have sinned, and you have more times than you can know or count, then the blood of Jesus is on your hands too. We don't normally think in such terms. We may be aware of how we have hurt or offended other people, but rarely do we think of the Lord himself as the target of our sinful actions. But all sin *is* ultimately directed against the Lord. They are acts of rebellion against him and his will for our lives. And again, we're not just speaking of overt sins, conscious acts in violation of God's Holy Law, but also sins of neglect and indifference. In the

judgment Jesus will say to the goats on his left, “I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was naked, a stranger, sick, in prison, and so on, and you did not attend my needs. And inasmuch as you did not do it for the least of these my brothers, you did not do it to me.”

The blood of Jesus is on the hands of every person. We are all guilty of his death. And water won't wash it away, no matter how hard we try. The question is “What should we do about it? How can we who have the blood of Jesus on our hands, who helped kill the Author of Life and the Lord of Glory, how can we be saved?”

There are two options: Like Pontius Pilate and the Jewish leaders and the crowd, we could try to save ourselves and justify our actions. We could plead ignorance. “I didn't know.” And if that's the route we take, then the blood of Jesus condemns us.

But if on the other hand we acknowledge our part in this terrible crime, fear the wrath of God, recognize our inability to save or to justify ourselves, and confess our guilt, then the same blood of Jesus speaks on our behalf. It cries to the Lord for mercy. It gives us life. It atones for our sins. It testifies God's forgiveness to our troubled consciences. It marks as belonging to the Lord. It purifies and cleanses us. It connects us to Christ and to all the other members of his royal family. In short, the blood of Jesus redeems us from all our sins and makes us heirs with him of everlasting life. The precious blood of Jesus does all that.

Therefore deeply sorrowful for the blood of Jesus on our hands, may this be our daily prayer: “Also on our heads, on our hearts, on our minds, on our souls, and on our lips, let his blood be on us and our children.” In Jesus' name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***