

Blood Connects

In the name of him who is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters, dear friends in Christ: Thus far in our ongoing study of Scriptural blood images we've heard from the blood of those that we have wronged in some way, either by willful malice or simple neglect. It's blood that cries out from the ground like that of murdered Abel, accusing us of our sins before God and showing us our need to repent.

Then last week we investigated the carrying capacity of blood: how it ferries to the cells in your body the oxygen and nutrients they need to operate and survive, and how it also carries away the wastes that are the byproducts of those operations. It's due to blood's function of carrying around what's needed for life and also carting away of what's toxic to it that the Scripture locates life itself in the blood. And life belongs to God who gave it. This is why the ancient Israelites were forbidden to consume blood. Blood's capacity to carry life also sheds light on the whole Old Testament sacrificial system: how the blood – and therefore the life of the sacrificial victim – was poured out on the altar and offered to the Lord to satisfy the Law that demands death for sin, and how also the guilt of sin was carried along with the blood.

This evening we continue to track the Scripture's bloody trail to consider a third property of this remarkable and theologically loaded substance; namely blood's ability to connect. This is an idea we can literally relate to because it has to do with, well, relations. It's not uncommon to hear someone speak of their family bloodline or of their blood relatives. You understand they mean those to whom they are related by some level of common ancestry. Likewise if I refer to those who are your own flesh and blood, you know that I'm talking about the members of your immediate (and perhaps extended) family. We know also who to exclude from the list of blood relations. The man who married my mother's sister is my uncle – a relative; but we are not related by blood. Instead we are related by marriage.

But theologically, something wonderful and mysterious happens in marriage. Two people from separate and distinct bloodlines come together and are made one. As the Scripture says, "the two become one flesh." Their offspring (should the Lord bless them with such) are the products of the union of two bloodlines. They are connected to both by blood, so while they only have two parents, they have four grandparents.

And biblically speaking, it was necessary that the two bloodlines in marriage be separate and distinct. That wasn't necessary at first when the gene pool had not yet been corrupted to the degree it was later due to the degrading effects of sin. A question that scoffers love to throw at believers is "Where did Cain get his wife?" The obvious answer is that he married his sister or perhaps a niece. There was a lot of that going on in the early days of human history; there had to be. But at the time the Lord gave the Law through Moses it was changed (although I understand it's still common custom in certain states immediately south of Iowa which I will not name because I've been told it offends some people). Anyway, much of the 18th chapter of Leviticus is devoted to providing the list of marriages prohibited due to consanguinity, that is, shared blood: degrees of relation that are too close to allow marriage. Blood connects; but the connection is to be between lines that are far apart rather than too close.

And that brings me to Jesus whose parents' family trees could not have been farther apart. On his mother's side the bloodline could be traced back through her parents, all the way

through numerous generations to King David; and from him back to Judah the son of the Patriarch Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, who is the father of all the faithful; and from him back through Noah, ultimately to Adam, the first man, whose sin placed the whole creation and all of his descendants under the curse. That was Mary's side. On his Father's side, well, let's just say that the family line was a whole lot shorter ... and purer, uncorrupted, sinless, and perfect.

But as the writer of Hebrews points out, this distant connection between God and man in Jesus was necessary for our salvation. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through his death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." In short, to save us, Jesus had to become one of us: our brother in flesh and *blood*. He then had to live the life that we couldn't: as a fully human person and yet sinless, in perfect obedience to his heavenly Father. And then he had to give that life as a sacrifice of atonement on the cross. But at the same time he also had to be God so that his death for sin would be worth infinitely more than the life of any mere man and thus be sufficient to save us all. Jesus, God's Son, had to be connected to mankind by blood so that by his blood he could deliver us from the bondage of death.

And how exactly that works is shown to us in the event we know as the Passover. The people of Israel are enslaved by the Egyptians. They spend their days in wearisome toil under the cruel oppressor's rod. They work without rest seven days a week. And yet for all their work they gain nothing. The only reward that awaits them is a shallow grave in the sand. The whole thing is a picture of human life under the tyranny of Satan and the bondage of sin. No matter how much we work, we can never be free. We need a Savior.

Along comes Moses who has been sent by the Lord to deliver Israel. He tells the Pharaoh, "The Lord says, 'Let my people go that they may worship me'." Pharaoh scoffs at him. "Pffft. Who is the Lord? I don't know him. You want to worship him? Fine, but get back to your burdens – which I am increasing since you seem to have too much time on your hands."

In response the Lord afflicts the Egyptians with nine terrible plagues, each one causing more damage and suffering than those that came before it. Each time the Pharaoh relents, says he'll let the people go if only the plague will stop. And each time he changes his mind as soon as the Lord lifts the pressure.

Finally the Lord takes off the gloves. "With this next plague, the Pharaoh will surely let the people go." He directs the people of Israel to slaughter lambs and to smear some of the blood on the doorposts of their homes. That night while they feast on roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread, the Lord passes through Egypt and strikes down the firstborn of every home not marked by the blood. At this the Pharaoh has had enough. The lament of his people is too much to bear. He admits defeat. He lets the people of Israel go.

We know the story, but what's the deal with the blood on the doorposts? Why did the Lord tell the people of Israel to do that? The answer lies in blood's power to connect, which the people of Israel would have understood. They were shepherds, after all. And Passover takes place in the spring which is lambing season. And what sometimes happens is that in the morning when the shepherd goes to attend his flock, he discovers ewes that died during the night in the process of giving birth to their lambs. The poor little lambs are orphaned and will die without nourishment. The shepherd will also find ewes that gave birth to stillborn lambs. The obvious solution is to match the orphaned lambs with the ewes that lost theirs. The problem is

that the ewes won't accept them. They know it's not their lamb. If it attempts to nurse, she'll kick it away.

A good shepherd knows what to do. He places the blood of the lamb that died on the orphaned lamb. And now the ewe will accept it. She recognizes it as her own. The connection is in the blood – not of birth but of *adoption*.

That's what's going on in the Passover. People in their sin belong to Satan who is for all intents and purposes a dead ewe. Being linked to him can only bring misery, useless toil, and end in death. They need a living parent who can feed and care for them; but because of their sin, the Lord can't accept them as his own. With him the wicked cannot dwell. The solution is to take the perfect blood of God's firstborn and only begotten Son – the Lamb of God who died to take away the sin of the world – and to apply it to his people. That's what makes the connection. That's what sets us free from Satan, sin, and death, and makes us heirs of everlasting life in God's kingdom. That's what adopts us into the family of God. The blood of Jesus connects us to the Lord and also to all who are with us the sons and daughters of God by adoption through Jesus' precious blood. In his holy name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!