

2014_04_17 Maundy Thursday
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

The Blood of Christ in the Book of Hebrews:
7 – THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT
Hebrews 9:15-22
INI

Grace to you from Him who is our Great High Priest, who mediates a New Covenant in His own blood, and peace to you in His blood, a blood which cleanses us from all sin (Hebrews 1:1-2) Amen.

It was His last will and testament. The words Jesus spoke to His disciples that night were the express will of a man about to die. “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for you for the remission of sins.” Jesus uses the Greek word: *diathaekae*. This word could be translated “covenant.” Yet this word also had the meaning: “testament” – in the sense of a last will and testament. This is the word you would use if you were legally expressing the desire to convey an inheritance.

The word “covenant” could be misunderstood. We think of the type of contract that two sided. We would be wrong to think of this we were to think in terms of an agreement between two parties. But the word “testament” helps us understand that there is only one person acting. God’s covenant of salvation is one sided. He alone is acting and His last will is to convey an inheritance through His Son.

The words Jesus spoke to His disciples that night were the legal will of a man about to die. A last will is something conditioned upon death. You don’t receive your father’s inheritance until his death. As long as your father is alive, it is only a promise. And until it is expressly stated, it is not even that. In the Last Supper, Christ expressly stated His will to convey an inheritance; it was covenant conditioned upon and validated in the shedding of His own blood.

Tonight we consider the blood of the covenant – that is to say, we consider God’s one sided testament given in the blood of His Son; a last which conveys God’s inheritance in death.

We turn to the sixth in our series dealing with the blood of Christ in the book of Hebrews, chapter 9...

Hebrews 9:15–22

¹⁵ And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

¹⁶ For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. ¹⁷ For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. ¹⁹ For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,

²⁰ saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.” ²¹ Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. ²² And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

God had made a covenant with the people. But the first covenant was a two-sided agreement. The covenant made with the people at Mount Sinai was two-sided. We read in Exodus 24:

Exodus 24:3 So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the Lord has said we will do.”

It was a two sided agreement. God’s side of the agreement was the priesthood and the tabernacle. This was God’s gracious promise to sanctify them as His priestly people. He granted them access to His presence through the tabernacle sacrifices. This was God’s promise to forgive their sins, to make them holy, and to go with them as they entered the land of promise.

The people would have their own end of the agreement. It would include the ten commandments as a legal expression of all God expected of His people.

In fact, this side of God’s covenant applies to all of us who are born under the law. The ten commandments are a legally and spiritually binding agreement. They are an expectation that we will live up to our end of the bargain if we want God’s favor.

At first we are confident. We say: “All the words that the Lord has said we will do.” But what happens to Israel when the strain of this sinful world tightens its grasp. What happens when our Lord asks us to stay awake one hour? How far does Peter get in his self-confidence? In under a couple hours after receiving His Lord’s warning, he’s asleep. In such a short time our sinful flesh grows drowsy and our works just can’t hold

up our end of the bargain. We are left sinners; bound to serve our sinful flesh and frustrated with an agreement we can never make good on.

However, God will hold up His end of the bargain. He will keep the promise of the priesthood. He will sanctify Israel as His holy, priestly people. And He will do so with blood. It is enacted with blood, for “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (v.22).

Moses looks out over a sea of people. He has come down from the mountain which quakes with fire. They wait in silence for him to speak. He holds the words of the holy covenant. So Moses speaks ... “Thus says the Lord... ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. ...’” He reiterates the covenant stipulations. And He seals it with blood.

Moses builds an altar and sacrifices oxen. Then he takes the blood and separates it: half he sprinkles on the altar; and the other half he brings before the people. Today, the only time in all the history of Israel, the blood will be placed upon God’s people and they will be consecrated as His own priestly kingdom. Blood will join the people to the words of the covenant and to altar of God’s grace. One by one, each member of every tribe, of all the nation of Israel: men, women, children, every person is sprinkled with blood. And with a final word, Moses speaks: “This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you.” (Ex. 24:8)

Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? “This is the blood of the covenant.” Yet Jesus speaks these words with fulfillment and new meaning. He speaks this word to those who betray Him, who deny Him, who stumble and flee before Him. Jesus does not wait for us to pledge our obedience before speaking. Rather He institutes this covenant as His one-sided agreement, a last will in His own death. He lifts the cup, saying: “this is My blood of the covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

16 For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. 17 For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. 18 Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood.

A last will and testament is the expression of a legally binding desire to convey an inheritance upon death. And so God’s inheritance is dedicated – that is, “established, inaugurated, made valid, enacted” with blood.

By the shedding of blood. Literally, the pouring out of blood. And notice, what does it mean "to shed blood." It is not strictly to die. In the consecration of the people in Exodus 24, the shedding of blood is the application of it. It is the separation from what is dead and the offering of blood that constitutes the ritual. This means for us that the shedding of blood is not only Christ's death on the cross; but is also the application, the pouring out, the use of His blood in the service of the Sacrament. "This My blood of the new covenant which is shed" – which is poured out for you.

Hebrews 9:15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death.

Jesus Mediates a covenant contingent upon death. And He applies the benefits by the offering of His blood. Because the death is already taken place, this is no longer a promise of something to come, but actual forgiveness and the reception of the inheritance today, tonight, in a few moments.

To gain Christ's inheritance is to gain all that belongs to Him. All things good and right and beautiful become ours in His death. His death bears the curse of our sins, He accepts the penalty the covenant which we've broken, He suffers hell on the cross.

And by His death and resurrection, Jesus inaugurates the benefits of His inheritance: the forgiveness of sins, sanctification, resurrection, eternal life. All that belongs to Christ belongs to us now. And it is an eternal inheritance: made full in our own death and resurrection.

It was His last will and testament. The words Jesus spoke to His disciples that night were the express will of a man about to die. "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for you for the remission of sins." But they also express the will of a man who is going to live. This is a living memorial through which Jesus is ever present here with us tonight, mediating the benefits of His sacrifice to us; For through the Word and Sacraments, our High Priest mediates His inheritance.

This is the blood of the covenant.

Amen.