

2014_04_18 Good Friday
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

The Blood of Christ in the Book of Hebrews:
8 – THE BLOOD OFFERED ONCE AND FOR ALL
Hebrews 9:23-28
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.

The eighth in our series of texts dealing with the blood of Christ in the book of Hebrews comes from

Hebrews 9:23-28

²³ Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵ not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—²⁶ He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷ And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

One of my part time jobs in college was driving nursing home residents to and from medical appointments. Some clients I would transport once or twice and then never see them again. Then there were the dialysis patients. These were the folks on a regimented schedule whom I would see week after week after week.

Our bodies have a way of accumulating toxins without us doing much of anything. We are constantly accumulating harmful waste. This is where blood comes in. Our red blood cells are responsible for collecting and transporting harmful chemicals to organs that can dispose of them. They carry this waste to the kidneys for filtering. The kidneys filter these cells by removing waste, and, as the heart resounds, they reinsert healthy cells back into the blood stream. With every beat of the heart, a process purification is being performed.

Dialysis is the treatment prescribed when the function of a person's kidneys fail. It acts in place of the kidneys, by extracting and filters the blood through a dialysis machine. It is imperfect, however, since it never heals or cures the real problem. It only prolongs survival. And it can only prolong life for so long. The dialysis machine can never function in the same capacity as the God-given cleansing work of the kidneys. Without a transplant, dialysis can only do so much. Eventually, the toxins are too many; they built up until a person faces the sad reality of being placed on hospice.

1. The Ongoing Need for Cleansing

Under the Old Covenant, there was an ongoing need for cleansing. Like clockwork, God prescribed ceremonies through which the people and their worship would be cleansed and acceptable in His presence. Worship under the Old Covenant was concerned with cleansing. We considered this in our text last night: "According to the law almost all things are cleansed with blood." Even in worship, blood functions as a cleansing agent.

The Day of Atonement was an annual ceremony of purification. Once a year, the high priest was permitted to enter the tent and go into the area behind the curtain. Behind the curtain was the Most Holy Place. This was where the ark of the covenant was located and this was where God would meet with the high priest once per year in order to sanctify the people's place of worship.

Once a year, the high priest would go appear before the presence of God and atone for the sins of the people. And it was always with blood. He would sprinkle covering of mercy on the ark of the covenant; he would sprinkle the altar of incense, and he would sprinkle the altar of burnt offering. These were the places where the priests would mediate God's blessings and forgiveness.

But it was incomplete; it was imperfect. Year after year, more was always needed. And what does it tell us? A dialysis machine can never function in the same capacity as the kidneys.

There is a reality to death that is truly unavoidable. Sin has a way of accumulating toxins without us doing much of anything. It flows through our nature; it is in our blood. Sure, we can put it off: we can curb it; we can make it less noticeable; we can cover it with works that make us look fairly good, some of the time, in the eyes of others. Yet, it is always incomplete; more is always needed; it is like the dialysis machine trying to replace the work of the kidneys – it never cures the real problem, and apart from a transplant we know what will happen...

“It is destined for man to die once and then the judgment.” No matter how we contrive ways to prolong life, no matter what survival techniques, no matter what the response man offers to global warming, cancer, or kidney failure: the final destiny remains the same – death and then judgment.

The work of the high priest was always pointing to something greater: a greater cleansing. It was a copy, a model, an anti-type of something heavenly.

2. Christ Offers the Sacrifice that Cleanses Once and for All

There was more happening on the cross than could be seen by onlookers. They mocked and sneered. They supposed that if He were the Son of God, He would not be on the cross in the first place. “Let Him come down, and we will worship Him. He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him” (Matthew 28:42). Those who looked on, even the disciples, could not fully see what was really happening.

They did catch a glimpse however. The darkened sky, the quaking earth – this was a cosmic event. Christ was appearing before the judgment seat of God on our behalf. He enduring the agony of hell that He might bring us to heaven. The most we can hear of this in the Gospel accounts are a few words: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”

On the cross, Jesus took on our nature and, as Paul writes, “became sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Isaiah 53:5,7 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ... He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

This is the true meaning of the Day of Atonement. On Good Friday, Christ would make the incomplete ceremony complete. He would function in a capacity that no earthly ceremony or ritual could ever accomplish. This was the purpose of the cross; it was not a death to be avoided, but a sacrifice to be fulfilled.

24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

There was more to the cross than could be seen. For in death, Christ went behind the curtain, to appear in the Most Holy Place before His Father in heaven. And He did it on our behalf. There He presented His own blood to satisfy God's justice.

25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

All the sacrifices: hundreds of thousands, even millions of sacrifices – yet there was really only one. Really, they were all part of one sacrifice. There was one sacrifice and it upon this one sacrifice, God would weigh His judgment against all the world.

This is so far beyond calculation. This was more than a recounting of each sin and the proper punishment: Christ became the curse of sin for us. This means His offering of His own body and soul was to bear the curse; the full brokenness of this whole creation. For every sin, and the very nature of sin, Christ suffered. Ultimately this is what hell is: a creation completely forsaken by God; every one of us, without God and apart from even the least of His blessings eternally. This was the cursing of God's own Son.

As Paul writes *Galatians 3:13* *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),*

So we can see now why His blood would be so precious. For "it is destined to die once and then the judgment" – and Christ has died once for all and been judged for all. This atonement has no limits. It is unlimited: once for all sin, and once for all people.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (John 3:16). "Therefore just as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, resulting in condemnation unto all, so also one Man's righteous act resulted in the acquittal of life unto all men" (Romans 5:18). "He died for all ... committing to us this message of reconciliation: that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not crediting their sins against them." (2 Corinthians 5:15,18,19).

Once and for all. Christ appears in at the mercy seat in heaven itself for us. He presents His own blood as the cleansing agent: a pure and holy blood, proving His death to be more than a death of a man; this was the death of God's Son – giving His blood the power to cleans all the world. He offered His blood once and for all, so that He can cry out with utmost certainty: "it is finished."

And you can know with utmost certainty, that it is finished. You can know, because this blood has been applied to you. No need for more sacrifices, no need for more blood. No need for us to think our good works do anything more than acknowledge our freedom. It is with cleansed consciences that we are privileged now to enter the heavenly sanctuary and worship God in confidence and faith.

It is with this same certainty that we await the day of our own death. For “He will appear a second time, not for sin, but for salvation.” We will all appear before the judgment seat and Christ will stand before God on our behalf. His blood will avail and will bring us fully cleansed and redeemed into God’s holy presence. He returns to give you the full benefits of this salvation.

Dialysis patients were the most predictable and reliable clients we served. They were predictable since the treatment was required regularly on a set schedule: three times a week, same time, same place. Yet there was something else predictable in serving them. The dialysis would not last forever. Without a transplant, it was only a matter of time; Without a transplant, they were destined to die.

In Christ, a once for all transplant has been donated – His holy blood for us; His holy death and resurrected life for us. This means our life is about survival or prolonging death or avoiding the inevitable; our life in Christ is about living.

Romans 6:4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

We anticipate that resurrection glory, as we look forward to gathering this Sunday to celebrate the blood given once and for all that now lives.

Amen!