

## INTRODUCTION

We are celebrating moms today. I heard a true story of a mother who was also a physician. She was driving her preschool daughter to day care and her daughter had dug her stethoscope out of her bag. The mother watched in the rearview mirror as her daughter placed the earpieces in her ears. The mom swelled with pride as she thought, "My daughter wants to follow in my footsteps and become a doctor." Then her daughter spoke into the stethoscope and said, "Welcome to McDonald's, can I take your order?"

We're in the section of Hebrews that compares the old sacrificial system and the temple with the new covenant that was brought by Jesus. The idea of a blood sacrifice fills the pages of the Bible. The word blood is found over 400 times. Someone has said that no matter where you cut the Bible, it bleeds. And the New Testament book that mentions the word "blood" more than any other is the book of Hebrews. It appears 21 times in just thirteen chapters. It appears four times in the five verses we're reading today.

You probably recognize the source of the title of my message. It comes from one of my favorite hymns. Let me tell you the story behind the music. In the decades following the Civil War, America was experiencing a spiritual awakening born after the turmoil of a nation divided. Elisha Hoffman was an evangelical Presbyterian pastor in Ohio who had served as a private in the Union Army. One of his chief gifts was writing hymns. He wrote over 2,000 hymns including "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms." But his favorite subject was the cross.

In 1878 he wrote the hymn we sang earlier in Celebration worship. "Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you fully trusting in this grace this hour? Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?" I borrowed a phrase from the chorus for my message title, "Are you washed; in the blood? In the soul-cleansing blood of the lamb; Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow? Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?"

So let's dig into Hebrews 9:11-15 to read about the soul-cleansing power of the blood of Jesus.

"When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."

The discussion of the blood of Jesus continues in the rest of Hebrews 9. Next week, I'm going to preach a special message entitled The Scarlet Thread in the Bible. I'll be tracing the story of blood atonement all the way from Genesis to Revelation.

God has always blessed the preaching of the blood of the cross. The year was 1949. A fresh young evangelist named Billy Graham broke onto the scene because of a successful crusade in Los Angeles. It was scheduled for three weeks, and it lasted eight weeks. Thousands were saved. Billy Graham gained national attention. Not long after that crusade, a professor from Cornell University wrote a letter to Billy Graham. He said, "You are gifted, and have a great power of persuasion. But I have some advice. If you expect to be used worldwide, you're going to have stop talking about the blood. It is out of date and no enlightened man of the Twentieth Century will swallow it." Billy Graham said, "I determined at that moment to preach more on the blood of Jesus Christ than ever before."

I want to share with you four aspects of the soul-cleansing power of the blood.

## **1. THE BLOOD OF JESUS REMOVES THE STAIN OF OUR SIN**

In our passage we read that the Old covenant sacrifices only cleansed the priests outwardly. Jews became more concerned with outward cleanliness than inner purity. In Matthew 23 Jesus said to the hyper-clean freaks, "You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean." (Matthew 23:25-26)

You've probably heard about the sacrifices of bulls and goats, but the idea of the ashes of a red heifer may be new to you. In Numbers 19, God gave the Israelites instructions on how to purify themselves if they had touched a corpse. They were told to take the ashes from a red heifer, which would include the animal fat and the ashes from the wood. Then they were to add water to the fat and ashes. We read that today and say, "Wow, God sure gave them some mysterious, weird instructions!" But when you think about it, it makes perfect sense. It may sound strange to us today, but does anyone know enough chemistry to tell me what you get when you mix animal fat, wood ashes, and water? Soap. God was simply saying, "Do yourself a favor, if you've touched a dead body, use soap and water and you'll be healthier."

But even during the Old Testament times, God warned them that there's a difference between outward, ritual purity, and inward spiritual purity. God said through the prophet Jeremiah, "Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Sovereign Lord." (Jeremiah 2:22)

Outward cleanliness is important, but we all have a stain of sin no soap can remove. Compared to God's holiness, even our good deeds are described as filthy rags. So, what must our lies and sinful deeds look like to God? But thankfully, He doesn't cast us aside because we have a dirty heart.

Soap can clean the body, but the blood of Jesus is the only element in the universe that can cleanse our souls. It works from the inside out. The Bible says, "But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7 NLT)

A hillbilly woman with nine children had one of her boys fall into a tar barrel and she was working hard to scrub him clean. She said, "I declare I think it would be easier to get rid of you and just have another one than to clean you up!" In our sinful, stained condition, God could have said, "I'll start over with another planet." Instead He sent His Son to die for our sins so we can be clean. That's why He says to you, "Come on, let's have a relationship. Though your sins be as scarlet, I can make them white as snow."

## **2. THE BLOOD OF JESUS RESTORES OUR SEVERED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

Our sin not only stains our soul, it separates us from a Holy God. The people couldn't approach God. Only one man, once a year, could approach God—and he had to make sure he was carrying the blood of the lamb. A thick curtain in the temple separated the entire population of the world from the Holiness of God.

Let's go back to Adam and Eve again. They had a wonderful relationship with their Creator because there was no sin in their lives. There was no separation. I love that passage from the first chapters of the Bible that says God would come into the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening and would walk with Adam and Eve. I have a hard time imagining what that would look like, because I can't conceive of what God actually looks like walking, because the Bible says "God is not a man" but somehow the presence and the glory of God was there walking along with Adam and Eve. Isn't that a beautiful picture of relationship and fellowship? I wonder what they talked about? Maybe God said, "Adam, how are you doing?" And Adam would say, "Doing pretty good, Lord. How are you doing?" God says, "I'm always doing okay." Then maybe God would ask Eve, "How are you doing?" And she would say, "I'm fine, Lord. Adam gives me a little trouble every now and then, but nothing I can't deal with." They had a wonderful relationship, so intimate.

But all that changed. When Adam and Eve sinned, that beautiful relationship was destroyed and they suddenly found themselves separated from God. The New Testament teaches that our sin has alienated us from a Holy God. The Bible says, "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:12-13)

When the High Priest sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, their sins really weren't forgiven; they were only covered for another year. It would be as if you owed money to a loan shark and you went to him and said, "I can't pay all the amount, but I'll give you a dollar, it's all I have." And the loan shark says, "Instead of breaking both your legs, I've got you covered for another year. But the size of your debt just got larger. And there will be a payday someday."

When Jesus died on the cross that curtain in the Temple was torn in two. It was a powerful message from God that there was no longer a separation. We now have access to our Creator through the blood of the cross.

A physician friend of mine told me a heart-wrenching story that happened in an emergency room during his residency years ago. One evening they brought in a teenage boy who had been critically injured in an automobile accident. They were doing everything they could to save his life. His parents soon arrived at his side. My friend learned that his parents had been separated for two years, but hadn't divorced. They hadn't spoken to each other in many months, and the tension in the room was as thick as a knife. But here they were face to face on each side of the body of their dying son.

The boy was barely conscious and had been intubated and couldn't talk. But my friend said that before he lost consciousness he reached up and took the hand of his father and placed it in the hands of his mother. The boy didn't make it, but from that night onward, the parents were reconciled. But oh, what a high cost of that reconciliation.

That's exactly what Jesus did for us. We were alienated from God, and just before He died Jesus took the hand of His Loving Father and reached down and took the hand of sinful humanity and brought us back together—and then He died. When you truly understand the depth of the love of Jesus and the cost He paid, it's impossible to walk away from that kind of love!

### **3. THE BLOOD OF JESUS RANSOMS US FROM OUR BROKEN PAST**

The last verse in our text says, "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free." (Hebrews 9:15)

Probably the most famous kidnapping for ransom case in American history happened in 1932. The 20-month-old son of Charles Lindbergh was kidnapped and the kidnappers demanded a ransom of \$250,000. \$50,000 was delivered, but the child was found dead. Four years later, Richard Hauptmann was electrocuted for the crime, but he denied his guilt up until his execution.

The Bible teaches that the blood of Jesus was a ransom payment for our sins. "For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God." (1 Peter 1:18-19 NLT)

Jesus paid a ransom, but to whom did He pay it? Some suggest the devil was paid off at the cross, but nothing could be further from the truth. *Jesus didn't owe the devil a dime.* All sacrifices were made to God alone. Remember when I said the sin of the Israelites kept piling up, just collecting interest? There had to be a payday someday, and that happened on the cross.

God demands a perfect sacrifice, a lamb without spot of blemish. None of us qualify. But Jesus became sin for us.

Gordon MacDonald is a former pastor and Chancellor of Denver Seminary. He relates an interesting dream he once had. In the dream he was at a party with a bunch of strangers, but everyone had a nametag. He looked in a mirror and his said, "Hello, my name is Gordon." And underneath his name it said, "Adulterer." Another man had a name tag that said, "Hello, my name is John, Liar." Another said, "Hello, my name is Jane, Gossip." Another one said, "Hello, my name is Mary, Drunkard." The room was packed with people all wearing nametags naming one of their sins. Then in this dream, Jesus walked into the room, and without saying a word, He walked around and started pulling the nametags off the people and putting them on His robe. He did this until He was covered in nametags.

And that's what Jesus did on the cross. He became sin for us. So we don't have to live according to our broken sinful past. But one of the tools of the devil is that he wants to make you feel guilty about sins of your past that have been forgiven.

Some of you are on a life-long guilt trip, and that's one trip you should cancel. Too many Christians lose their joy and effectiveness because they spend all their time looking in the rearview mirror, regretting all their past mistakes. The reason that rearview mirror is so small and that windshield in front is so large is because where you've been isn't nearly as important as where you're going!

#### **4. THE BLOOD OF JESUS RESCUES US FROM A HOPELESS FUTURE**

The blood of Jesus has power to cleanse us from sin; it restores our severed relationship with God; it ransoms us from our broken past. Those are all things that are present blessings. They are true today. But there is a future aspect of the power of the blood. Every person without Christ faces a hopeless future. But for those of us who have been saved by the blood of the Lamb our future is full of hope. The Bible says, "And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation." (Romans 5:9 NLT)

There was a terrible night in Egypt many centuries ago. God had told the people to kill a lamb and to roast it. Then they were to take the blood and rub it on the sides and top of the door of their house. Then the family was supposed to go inside, under the blood and eat the lamb. It was an act of faith and obedience. That evening a terrible judgment passed over the entire land. But wherever the death angel saw the blood on the doorway, he passed over those homes. For those families who obeyed and trusted God, they were safe under the blood of the lamb.

But for those families who didn't follow God's simple instruction, there was death in that home. That was God's way of teaching us that one day every one of us will face His judgment. But when He sees the blood of the Lamb (Jesus) applied to your heart, judgment will pass over you.

## CONCLUSION

So what are some of the personal applications we can take from these four truths? First, the blood of Jesus is a powerful weapon against the enemy. Satan hates the blood of Jesus. As the song says, "There is power, power, wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb. In the future, a generation of tribulation saints will resist the devil and the antichrist because the Bible says in Revelation 12:11, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." That's the way we overcome the enemy as well. When he comes tempting and attacking, remind him that you have been made clean by the blood of the lamb.

The second application is this: Because God has covered your sins with His blood, then you should forgive yourself. When you place your faith and trust in Jesus, you are set free from the guilt of the past and the judgment of the future. Your sins are gone!

Do you know where the deepest spot under any ocean is? It's the Mariana Trench, northeast of the Philippine Islands. It's over 36,000 feet deep. To give you an idea of its depth, if Mt. Everest could be placed into the Mariana Trench there would still be a mile of water covering the tip. It's so deep that if you dropped a ten-pound dumbbell from a ship on the surface it would take it over an hour to sink to the bottom. We know more about the surface of Mars than we do the Mariana Trench. The water pressure at that deepest spot is 15,000 pounds per square inch; that's the same pressure created in barrel of a 12-gauge shotgun when it is fired. It's totally dark there. Only a few small shellfish live there in the thick darkness, and excruciating pressure.

You may be thinking, "Pastor you're getting pretty deep here." No pun intended. Well I want you to go deep in your mind, because according to the Bible there's something else there at the bottom of the Mariana Trench. It's my sin and your sin if you've come to Jesus for forgiveness.

The prophet Micah says, "Who is a God like you?...You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19) God cast your sins in the depths of the sea and placed a "no fishing" sign there for the devil.

Peter Billhorn was another hymn writer who lived in the last years of the nineteenth century and he wrote these words in 1890: "I will cast in the depths of the fathomless sea; All your sins and transgressions, whatever they be, Though they mount up to heaven, though they reach down to hell; They'll be cast in the depths, and above them shall swell; All the waves of forgiveness, so boundless and free, I will cast all your sins in the depths of the sea."

So are you washed in the blood? In the soul-cleansing blood of the lamb? If you are, then your soul is clean before the Lord and your sins, past, present, and future, are buried in the deep, dark, depths of His loving forgiveness.

Bearing shame; and scoffing rude; In my place; condemned He stood; Sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

## OUTLINE

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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