

The Blood of Christ
Hebrews 9:11-18

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the blood of Jesus Christ is something that is frequently referred to in our song lyrics, and we may notice that it also gets mentioned a fair bit in the scriptures, and we may hear our fellow Christians talk about *“covering something with the blood of Jesus, or pleading the blood of Jesus...”*

And so we are so used to hearing this phrase the blood of Jesus that it’s just become part of the language of our Christian faith and we don’t give it much thought...

Or perhaps we’re new to the Christian faith and we find this phrase the blood of Jesus a bit confusing, or even a bit disconcerting... after all many of us get a bit squeamish about blood...

And so it is necessary and good that we focus on the blood of Christ in our service tonight because it is something that we are either overly-familiar with or we are overly-anxious about,

and neither familiarity or anxiety is the proper response to what Good Friday and Christ’s sacrifice call for.

So – why all this blood?

Well, Hebrews 9:18 gives us a clue - it says *“even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood”*

So, what exactly is a covenant – and why is blood needed to activate it?

Well brothers and sisters, a Covenant is a specific type of relationship between two parties, and it is distinguished from other kinds of relationships, such as friendship, employment, contract, doctor-patient etc... by the following characteristics.

First, it is a bond. There is an actual real connection between the two people or parties involved, whether they like it or not.

For example, when I was three years old my parents naturalized me as a citizen of the United States. So even

though I don't have any interaction or "relationship" with the gov't of the U.S. there still exists a legal bond between them and myself which is my citizenship.

So a Covenant is a relationship where there is a bond involved.

But a Covenant is also a bond, which is sovereignly administered. Meaning that one party involved decided to initiate and create that bond.

With my example of citizenship, the Gov't of a country in which you are born declares that you are a citizen of that country – you don't choose it, you don't decide to accept it or not – it is sovereignly administered.

But a Covenant is also a bond, sovereignly administered which deals in life and death.

And that is where a Covenant relationship becomes so very different from what we understand and experience as relationships in our modern world.

It is a strange and foreign concept for us to imagine that we would have a relationship with something that is of life and death importance.

But friends that is our relationship with God – that is what the scripture reveals to us – that we have a Covenant relationship with God.

He created us, without asking us if we wanted to be created... that is a Sovereign bond. And He is our source of life – without God there is only death.

And so blood is involved in the establishment of a Covenant relationship to represent and drive home the reality that life and death is at stake in this relationship.

And within a Covenant the issues of life and death always center around loyalty and obedience to the Sovereign party resulting in life and blessing, but unfaithfulness and disobedience result in death.

This was reflected in the way people made oaths and promises to each other in the ancient world.

For example, when a King would make a Covenant with one of his Governors – they would cut an animal in half, blood was shed – and together walk between the two halves of the animal and the governor would swear allegiance to the King and the King would promise protection and blessing.

But the significance of making this oath in between the two halves of the animal was to state, if I break my oath, let it be done to me as it has been done to this animal. If you were disloyal you paid with your life – your blood would be shed.

Now when the writer of Hebrews says that the first covenant had to be put into effect with blood, on the surface it appears as though he is referring only to the covenant that God made with Israel and Moses and how this was started with sacrifices – and there are lots of references to that in this passage from Hebrews.

But if we read through the Old Testament we also see there is a covenant with Abraham, with Noah, and we can make a case there was a covenant with Adam and Eve as well...

So which one was the first covenant? They all were. They were all first in that the first way that God initiated them was through the blood of animals.

To emphasize and drive home the life and death nature of our Covenant relationship with God an animal's life was sacrificed – blood was shed.

That's obvious to us from the Mosaic Covenant, and we see those sacrifices also happening with Abraham, and also with Noah - and even with Adam and Eve.

But this is also where we learn why an animal's blood was spilled.

It was in order for God to make clothes for them, to replace the fig leaves which they had covered themselves with out of shame once they had disobeyed God's command.

So there are two things to learn from this friends – first, our disobedience costs. The blood of innocent animals pays for our sins – because, and this is the second thing – God in his mercy and grace allows us to offer a substitute instead of paying with our lives.

Breaking a Covenant relationship was so serious it requires us to pay with your life.

Now – at this point most of us would say, well I’d rather not be in such a relationship thank-you very much. I wouldn’t want to promise that when I’m aware that I probably won’t be able to live up to it and have to pay such a high price.

I get that - but unfortunately friends we are created, and God is the Creator. We exist out of his desire and will – not our own and we are in this covenant relationship with God already, like it or not.

And the good news friends is that God is well aware of our inability to stay loyal to Him. That is why right from when

Adam and Eve sinned he has been making provision to have mercy and grace on us by having some sort of substitute to offer instead.

Animal blood was shed instead of our own.

But, it had always been God’s intention that this provision of a substitute payment would point forward to the time when God himself would become one of us – and offer human blood to pay for human unfaithfulness.

Then friends, the consequences of the covenant relationship – which we humans have broken – would truly be satisfied. Human sin paid for by Human blood... the covenant violation is paid.

This is why we say the blood of Christ cleanses us and forgives our sins...

But then at the same time – a new covenant is established in the shedding of Christ’s blood. Because a covenant is not put into effect without the shedding of blood...

So by offering his life as a sacrifice, Christ makes a new Covenant relationship with God the Father, one that can never be broken because Christ is God himself –and God will not be unfaithful to Himself.

This is what we trust in, put our faith in, hope in because instead of an animal substitute – we now have a human substitute - who keeps the covenant on our behalf and we get the credit for it.

This is what it means to be covered in the blood of Christ.

So brothers and sisters – tonight as we focus on the Blood of our savior, do not be impatient, do not be anxious – but allow the Holy Spirit to build your faith and trust and move you to act upon the cleansing power of Christ’s blood and live your life through it – covered in it faithfulness.

Amen.