

November 3, 2024

“THE BLOOD OF CHRIST”

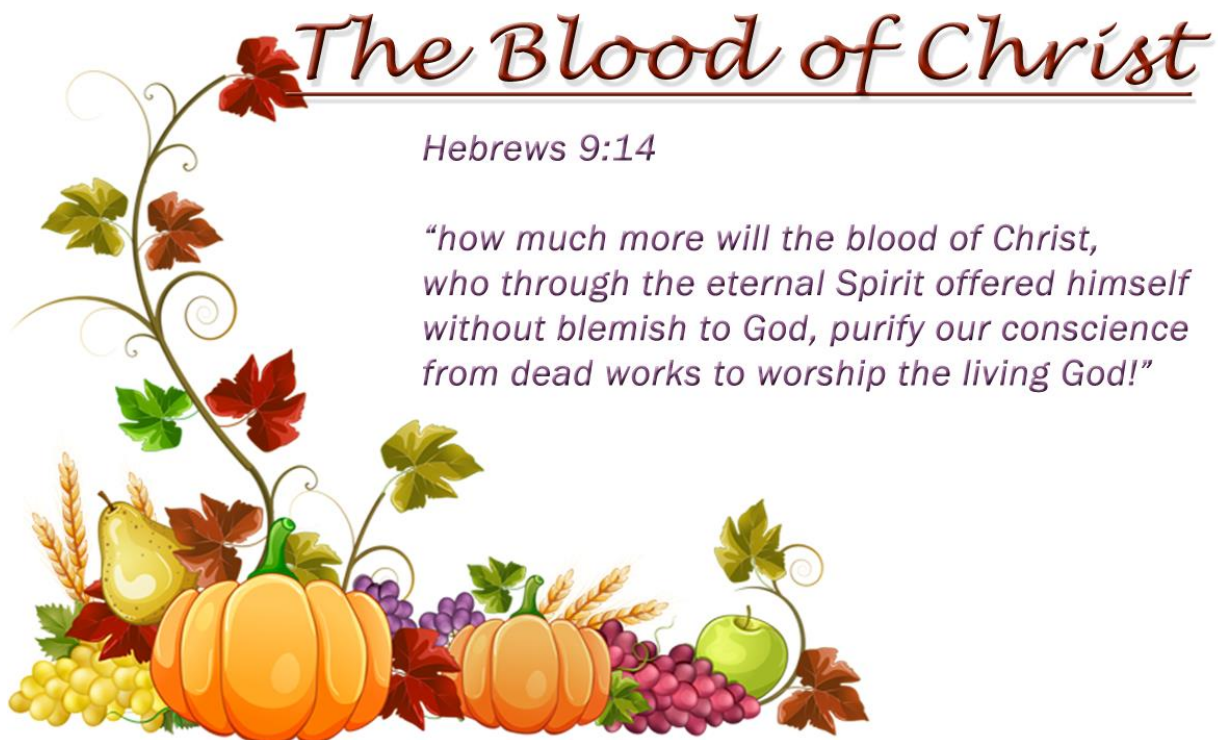
Hebrews 9:11-14

¹¹ But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation),

¹² he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified,

¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!



Special Music: “The Blood of Jesus”

Hope Darst

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj5Lp2EZH-l>

STONES OF BLOOD

Geela struggled with the wooden bucket of hot water. Her age was getting the best of her and the weight of the bucket caused her to stoop even more than usual. She had to step carefully to avoid tripping on her ragged robes. Setting the bucket down she surveyed the room. What a mess. While Geela was thankful that the priests paid her to clean up such messes, this particular kind of gruesome chaos was not the normal fair for rooms in the Temple. Caiaphas had sent a young priest to find her so that she would be at the ready to take care of cleaning the room when they were finished, so she had been just beyond the door during the last moments of the savagery perpetrated on the rabbi from Nazareth.

Although she was out of sight, she could hear the words being shouted by the priests demanding that the accused admit to blasphemy. The sounds of the scourge as it ripped flesh from the body causing blood to spatter and fly about the room gave credence to the ugliness and determination of the accusers. The hollow groans that emitted from the young prophet became quieter with each lash of the whip until she heard the body fall to the stone floor.

He never uttered a word to his accusers and his moans came only because of the trauma to his body. The attending priests forced him to his feet and several men were brought forth to bear witness for the accusers, claiming that the bleeding man before them had claimed to be “The Son of God.” This was enough for the high priest, as the temple soldiers were called to drag the man before Pilate for sentencing.

As soon as they were gone, Geela was allowed to enter the room with her bucket. A young priest had stayed behind to give the old woman the instructions from Caiaphas, the high priest. She was to clean the room thoroughly from top to bottom being careful to remove any trace of blood, restoring the room to its normal condition as if nothing had occurred there. The priest handed her a cloth bag with the leaves from the hyssop plant that she was to add to her cleaning water. She found this a little confusing since she was a woman, and hyssop was normally used for ritual cleansing by the keepers of the Temple. But the young priest informed her that it was necessary for the initial cleansing of the room in order to purify it. Other priest would come later to finish sanctifying the room, but Caiaphas did not want them to be defiled by the room when they came in to perform the rites.

Geela said that she would comply, and the young priest left to join the others in the courtyard of the governor, Pilate. Looking about her, it was difficult to figure out where to start. There were bits of bone and torn flesh about the room, as well as the pools and spatters of blood. The stench was overwhelming. She tied her scarf over her mouth in an attempt to stifle the smell. It was nauseating to contemplate all that had happened here. How was this even possible?

She began by moving about the room, picking up the pieces of flesh and bone and placing them in a pot to be dealt with later. Tears ran down her face as she silently prayed for forgiveness, thinking that cleaning up the mess might somehow make her complicit to the circumstance in the eyes of God.

Geela had been a widow for over a decade and being without a husband had made life extremely difficult. When the Levites offered her the position to keep the outer rooms of the temple clean, she knew that it was an act of charity on their part. But she needed the money to survive, so she agreed. Most of the time, her duties were limited to dusting, sweeping, and mopping; nothing like was expected of her today.

She now needed to start on the bloodstains. She took out her scrub brush that she had brought with her, put the bucket of hot water in which she had put the hyssop leaves close to her, and carefully lowered herself to the floor. She was at the point in her life when getting down on knees to scrub the floor was not the hard part. No. The hard part would be getting back up on her feet when she was finished. She began to scrub the floor with hard circular motions to remove the blood from the stones.

Geela had actually experienced the teachings of the rabbi from Nazareth. On several occasions, she had been in the crowds to hear him speak. His voice carried authority. His teachings of grace and compassion were impressionable. His love for the people he encountered was obvious. The miracles that he performed were unexplainable. Geela has never heard him say anything that should have brought to bear the kind of punishment that she had witnessed. The entire matter left her confused and bewildered. She liked the rabbi and believed what he had said. What could be so very wrong about a message of loving our neighbors and seeking the truth in his words? How could a man who taught love

and grace be the subject of such cruelty by those who claimed to serve the Creator?

She continued to scrub the floor, having to refill her bucket with water from the cauldron in the fireplace in the next room. Getting up and down was difficult but she managed to do what was necessary. Every time she refilled the bucket, she made sure to replenish the hyssop leaves. Geela was meticulous in her work and the more she scrubbed, the more she prayed for forgiveness for her complicity in trying to erase the evidence of what had happened in the room. Her hands were wrinkled and white from the hot water and her knees were raw from moving about the floor. Her back ached, reminding her of her age and the pain made her more uncomfortable with each passing moment.

It took most of the day, but Geela scrubbed away the last of the blood. She emptied her bucket and removed the hyssop leaves. Refilling the bucket with clean water, she washed down the floor with her mop, removing the last vestiges and even the slightest hint of blood. There was not a trace of evidence of what had happened in the room earlier. The sun was beginning to set, and the Sabbath would soon be upon her.

She stood up and stretched her back, arms reaching toward the ceiling. What a difficult day it had been. Geela glanced out the window. In the distance, clouds were forming, but she could see people gathered around Golgotha, the hill used to crucify convicted criminals. There were three crosses today. She could not make out the features of the men hanging on the crosses, but somehow, she knew that the middle figure was that of Jesus the Rabbi. After all the pain and

suffering they had put him through in this room that was now clean, they had taken him to be crucified, a most horrible way to die. Was there no justice left in the world that even the priests that she so admired would do this to another human being? What purpose could it have served?

Again, she began to weep. Without a thought for her pain, she fell to her tattered knees and begged for God 's forgiveness. None of this was right! People had said this man was the Messiah, that he had come to save them! And yet, here he was, rejected by the very people he came to save, dying the death of a convicted criminal. She pleaded with God, begging for mercy. At that moment, darkness spread throughout the area, thunder cracked, and there was a loud crash somewhere inside the temple that sounded as if the very stones of the structure were coming apart. She rose to her feet and looked out the window again. A deep depression came over her revealing to her that the rabbi was indeed dead. Her tears flowed as she felt a deep sense of loss that she couldn't explain. People were shouting, crying, and running in the streets. Many of the priests had returned to the Temple after the sentencing and were now running through the halls in terror. Geela wished she was anywhere but where she was. The elderly widow was not about to spend another minute in the room.

But as Geela turned around to gather her bucket and brush, she saw something astounding. All the blood that she had scrubbed and mopped up had returned. It was almost as if she had done nothing to clean the room. The room was permanently stained with the deep red of the rabbi's blood. She uttered a confused prayer, and in the most amazing peace washed over her chasing away

all her fear. It was as if everything was as it was meant to be, that all was somehow right with the world. No amount of effort on her part would remove the evidence of the presence of the teacher that had been tortured in this room. The stones floor would remain stained. There was no doubt in her mind that this Jesus, this rabbi, this itinerant preacher from Nazareth, truly was the son of God.

“how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!”

What an odd story considering this season of thanksgiving. What an odd Scripture to ponder as we begin our march towards advent. Wouldn't this be a much better sermon during Lent or Holy Week?

During this season, the most asked question is “Just what are you thankful for?” That can be a hard question to answer when we look at the watch the news. Sometimes it is difficult to see the joys around us amidst the chaos. But if we sweep out the cobwebs of constant bad news and concentrate on what is in front of us, everything begins to take on a different shape. Blessings abound if we look in the right places.

But our scripture today, gives us some very important information about why it can be difficult to find things to be thankful for. Let's read that focus verse again and try to break it down.

“how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!”

What does the writer of Hebrews mean when they say, **“purify our conscience from dead works?”** What exactly are dead works? Why is it important to understand about dead works and what does knowing this have to do with embracing things to be thankful for?

First, let me say that we are all guilty of dead works. Dead works are the things that we accomplish without instruction from God. They are things based in self-righteousness. They are things that we do so that people will think we are better than we are. You see it on the internet all the time where people will take videos of themselves doing good deeds so that you will be impressed with their dedication of helping others. Dead works do not lead to enlightenment and are not a sweet fragrance to our Lord. They do not come from a place of humility, but instead come from a dark place in our heart filled with hubris.

It all boils down to motives. We all have to ask ourselves, “Are we doing this because it is what God expects of us? Are we doing this to be Christ’s hands and feet in the world? Are we doing this because our purpose is to example Jesus in the world? Or are we doing this because it will lift us above the common fray? Are we doing this to promote our own agenda? Are we doing this so that the light will shine a little brighter on us than on others around us? Is what we are doing bringing glory to God, or to ourselves? When we have finished, who are people point to, us or God?

“But preacher, what does it matter as long as people are being helped?” It all boils down to an understanding of Christian purpose. God’s purpose for us in this chaotic world is to draw people closer to him, not closer to us. Our purpose has never been nor will ever be to compete with God. God’s Love. God’s Mercy. God’s Grace. God’s Purpose. God’s Glory. God’s Glory, not our glory.

I love Isaac Watt’s hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” The second verse is my favorite:

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast

save in the death of Christ, my God!

All the vain things that charm me most,

I sacrifice them through his blood.

It is a natural thing for us as human beings to want credit for the good things that we do. The problem with that is, God doesn't work on a credit system. He isn't pleased with how many credits that we accumulate. He really doesn't need our money. He wants our hearts. He desires in us the hunger to do his will rather than our own will.

Let's go back to Geela for a moment. There she is scrubbing away at Jesus' blood on the stone floor. She is doing the best she can to meet the needs of the people who provide for her, the people who keep food in her stomach. These are priests that she admires, and she is really doing her best to accomplish what they have asked for her. But here's the problem. What is being asked of her is actually earthly desire to eradicate a spiritual issue. She could spend the rest of her life scrubbing at that blood on the floor so that the priests responsible don't have to be reminded of what they have done. But that isn't really her job. Redemption, and sanctification is Jesus' responsibility. And no matter how much she scrubs, she will never be able to remove the stain of what happened in that room.

We are not called to be the sacrifice for the sins of the people around us. That is Jesus' calling. He is the savior. We are simply not capable of scrubbing

Jesus out of anyone's life. If anything, we are called to bring people to Christ so that he can scrub the stains of sin out of their lives. In our efforts to replace him by taking matters into our own hands, we often make things much harder on those people that seek him. We get in the way.

I listen to preachers saying, "All I want to do is save souls for Christ." But they can't. Neither can you or me. We don't do the saving. When it comes to saving souls, our blood can't wash away the sins of people. Only the blood of Jesus can do that.

It is only when we come to that point in our Christian lives where we accept that conclusion that we can begin to be the hands and feet of Christ in the same world that crucified him. Let Jesus be Jesus. Let him be our savior.

" how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!"

Let Jesus, the unblemished sacrificial lamb of God, do the job that he was willingly called to do! Let his blood cleanse us of our hubris and unrighteousness. Let it flow over and cover our sins in such a way that it cannot ever be scrubbed away. By doing so, we point the way to our Heavenly Father and acknowledge the ultimate love he has for us.

When we ponder the fact that Jesus knew what was about to happen, how he would be tortured in that room, how he would be humiliated by carrying his cross, how he would be spat upon and cursed, and how he would ultimately be

nailed to the cross to die a criminals death, surrounded by the very people that he came to save, both those of his time and us as well, that is a permanent and fixed reason for us to always wear hearts of gratitude. When we think about the fact that Jesus covered our sins with his own blood before we ever committed a sin, that is a reason to be thankful.

I know that thinking about this moment in history is difficult for us. Thinking about what happened in that room and what followed is the stuff of nightmares. But... there is joy here as well. The joy of salvation. The joy of mercy. The joy of God's love exampled to each of us. The joy of being able to share that example with others.

As we gather this month, there is so much to be grateful for, so much to be thankful for. But above all else, we should be thankful for the love of our God who provides for us, even to the point of dying a horrible death on a cross. May we be blessed by the story of his blood given to sanctify us and the glory of the resurrection as he redeems us.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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