

Good Friday 2021

How Much More The Blood Of Christ

April 2nd, 2021

Hebrews 9:13-14

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Introduction:

Good morning Redeemer. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Hebrews 9.

Typically, on Good Friday, we would spend our time meditating on and unpacking the suffering, crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. But we're in a unique position this morning because that is exactly what we have been doing over the last few weeks.

We meditated on the suffering of Christ – suffering that was physical and emotional – suffering that was innocent and purposeful. We considered the horrors that Jesus endured for us and we saw the ways in which he proved himself to be the suffering servant that Isaiah pointed forward to. We declared I faith with the prophet Isaiah:

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows; (Isaiah 53:4a ESV)

Then we meditated on the crucifixion of Christ where – wonder upon wonders – the eternal, holy, beloved Son of God bore the curse for our sin. The Apostle Paul said:

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by **becoming a curse for us**—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13 ESV)

He bore our sin on the cross. And then, when he had borne the penalty for our sin to the exact amount – when he had taken the final gulp of the wrath of God – the Son of God died. In his death, he settled our debt. In Romans 3:26, the Apostle Paul pointed to the death of Christ and explained:

It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:26 ESV)

The penalty for sin is death, and God in His righteousness could not and would not simply overlook the debt that we owed. Our sin demanded an answer. The death of the Son of God is that answer. As Jesus cried out from the cross, “It is finished” God applied the final brushstroke to the masterpiece of His glorious plan of redemption. He demonstrated that He is the God who is just AND that He is the God who is the Justifier. He is holy love. We saw that, and we marvelled.

And finally, we saw that in his burial he identified with his people. He condescended into the complete human experience. Just as he entered into the womb, so too did he enter into the tomb. In every sense of the word, he showed himself to be “Emmanuel – God with us.”

That’s what we’ve witnessed over the last few weeks. We’ve seen the glory and the grace of God displayed in the cross.

We’ve seen this grace, but my question for you this morning is this: Have you tasted this grace?

Imagine walking into the most elaborate and expensive restaurant to enjoy the buffet. You’re walking back to your seat after loading your plate with a third helping. Your belly is so full, and your joy is so overflowing that you can barely stop smiling. But then, you happen to notice a solitary man sitting at a table near the back of the room. He has a plate full of food in front of him, but he looks like he hasn’t eaten in weeks. If you look closely, you can see the contours of his spine protruding under his shirt. His eyes are sunken. His demeanour is sombre. He looks as if he is on the brink of starvation.

So, you approach him, and you ask: “Are you okay?”

He looks up at you and nods his head up and down, but his eyes tell a different story.

You ask: “Are you hungry?”

“Famished.” He replies.

“What seems to be the matter then? Have you not paid for this meal?”

“Oh, it’s been paid for,” he replies, “but not by me. The same gentleman who paid for your meal and, as I understand, for everyone’s meal, picked up my tab and assured me that I could eat.”

“Well, that’s wonderful! Can I ask you then, if you are famished, and if the meal has been paid for, why haven’t you eaten?”

And then he looks up at you with genuine confusion and concern in his eyes and asks, “But I HAVE eaten. Haven’t I?”

I wonder how many of us this morning are famished?

The grace of God which has been lavished out generously onto our plate! Amen? Forgiveness has been purchased for us by the blood of Christ! Amen? And yet, all too many of us are like the starving man sitting at the buffet. The feast has been set before us. We see it. We understand it. And yet we find ourselves unable to “take and eat.”

Our passage this morning was written to address this problem. You may feel as if you are the only Christian in the world who struggles to experience the grace of God in your life, but you are not. And God has an answer for the Christian plagued by a guilty conscience. Look with me now to Hebrews 9:13-14. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴how 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 serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:13-14 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

It is often said – and rightfully so – that you can summarize the entire Book of Hebrews with three words: Jesus is BETTER! Hebrews clearly and unapologetically proclaims that all of the institutions of the Old Testament – the law, the temple, the sacrificial system – ALL of it pointed

forward to and has found its GLORIOUS fulfilment in Christ. In this way, the book of Hebrews really teaches us how to read the Bible for all that it's worth. As you read through your Old Testament, and particularly through the descriptions of the sacrificial system, it would be helpful for you to remember that these ceremonies functioned like dramas that teach a lesson. As one commentator describes them:

They pointed to the greater reality behind the shadow.¹

The priests essentially led a variety of OBJECT LESSONS that served to teach the people of Israel about holiness, sin and grace. In our text this morning, the author to the Hebrews highlights two of these object lessons and uses them to illustrate how Christ is the solution for the guilty conscience. The original recipients of this letter possessed a solid understanding of the Old Testament because they were Hebrews. But we are not Hebrews, and our knowledge of the Old Testament is not what it should be, so I want to take a little bit of time this morning to make sure that we understand the drama so that we can appreciate how Christ has fulfilled it and exceeded it.

Understanding the Drama

As I just mentioned, there are actually two Old Testament “dramas” in this text which the author brings together.

The first drama is one which you should be familiar with if you have been tracking along with us over the last few weeks. By referring to the “blood of goats and bulls” he is pointing back to the sacrificial system in general and, more than likely, the day of atonement specifically. Once a year, on the day of atonement, the high priest was able to enter into the holy of holies – the place where God’s presence resided. But the high priest could only enter the holy of holies after a careful series of sacrifices had been made for the sake of his own sin and the sins of his people.

This drama – the spilling of the blood of goats and bulls – served to remind the Israelites of two things in particular. First, it reminded them that they were sinners. Their sin separated them from their holy God. The consequence of their sin was death. There was no missing that in the bloody

¹ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews (TNTC)*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 187.

sacrifices. But secondarily, the drama also reminded the Israelites that God had mercifully made a way for sinful people to be cleansed and to come back into His presence.

Most of us are familiar with that imagery. We unpacked it at length just a few weeks ago. That being said, I suspect that few of us are familiar with the second drama that is referenced in this passage. What is he referring to when he talks about “the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer”? This line is alluding to and summarizing a practice that we find in Numbers 19.

The ritual is very unique, and it seems to serve a slightly different purpose than the other sacrificial and cultic rituals that we see in the Old Testament. One commentator describes Numbers 19 this way:

Its flavor and intention is priestly, but the chapter does not concern sacral persons so much as common people. The issue is one of ritual cleansing, answering a basic question in ancient, biblical culture: How may a person be ritually “clean” before the Lord?²

How can common, unclean people be made clean before the Lord? That’s the question that this drama is answering.

We don’t have time to read and explain the whole text but allow me to quickly summarize the ritual. It was instituted to solve a very practical problem. Israelites who had been in the presence of a dead body were considered “defiled” according to the law. For their cleansing, a spotless red heifer was taken outside of the camp and slaughtered. As Bible readers, this is familiar ground. The spotless animal died as a substitute so that the Israelite could be cleansed. We understand that.

But what happens next is somewhat foreign to us. We read:

And the heifer shall be burned in his sight. Its skin, its flesh, and its blood, with its dung, shall be burned. (Numbers 19:5 ESV)

And a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and deposit them outside the camp in a clean place. And they shall be kept for the water for impurity for the congregation of the people of Israel; it is a sin offering. (Numbers 19:9 ESV)

² Ronald B. Allen, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Genesis – Numbers)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 2, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 857.

The sacrifice is completed, but God is not done with the animal. Its ashes are set outside of the camp. These ashes will be a critical component of the final scene in the drama. We find the final scene in verses 17-18:

For the unclean they shall take some ashes of the burnt sin offering, and fresh water shall be added in a vessel. ¹⁸ Then a clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water **and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons** who were there and on whoever touched the bone, or the slain or the dead or the grave. (Numbers 19:17-18 ESV)

The ashes are mixed with water, and then a hyssop branch is used to sprinkle the mixture on the defiled person. But why? Why was this step included in the ritual? The sacrifice had already been made. The blood had been spilt. Wasn't that enough?

Listen closely: The sprinkling was necessary because, even after God has cleansed us, we often feel dirty. The sprinkling was necessary because the Israelites were people just like us – people who struggle to understand forgiveness; people who wallow in self-condemnation. That's why God instituted the sprinkling.

The Israelite saw the sacrifice – he saw the heifer that was slain, and he understood that this was the price that needed to be paid to make him clean. But in the sprinkling, the Israelite FELT the application. As the water was splashed on his face, he was reminded that the sacrifice of the heifer had been applied to him. The substitute had died in HIS place. There was no doubting that because the ashes of the heifer were literally dripping off of his brow. The sprinkling was a physical, tangible, demonstration of grace applied. He was clean!

This ceremony, by the way, is almost certainly what David is referring to in Psalm 51. This Psalm, if you remember, was written by David after his sin against Bathsheba had been exposed. He was guilt-ridden. He felt wicked and unlovable. In the Psalm he is repenting and pleading for forgiveness, when he says:

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalm 51:7 ESV)

David says, “I am racked with guilt! I am a filthy sinner! Bring that hyssop branch over here and splash the ashes on my face! I need to be clean!”

That’s the second drama.

So, here is our question: Why are these two dramas combined in this text? According to the author to the Hebrews, in Jesus, you are supposed to see the fulfilment of the ritual of the day of atonement and the sprinkling of the ashes of the heifer. But what does that mean? The answer is right under our noses when we look closely at the text. Let’s read this together again:

¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 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 serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:13-14 ESV)

As we consider the drama of the Day of Atonement – the blood that was shed so that we could have access to the Father – and as we consider the drama of the sprinkling of the ashes – the cleansing water that reminded the defiled Israelite that he was clean – we are prepared to understand what God has provided for us in Christ. The blood of Christ cleanses us from our sins and it also provides us with a CLEAN CONSCIENCE.

A Clean Conscience

If David who had just committed murder and adultery could experience cleansing with the sprinkling from the hyssop branch – then HOW MUCH MORE can the blood of Christ assure YOU of cleansing?! If water that was sprinkled externally could cleanse the conscience, then HOW MUCH MORE should the blood of Christ applied internally cleanse YOUR conscience?!

One of the things that Jesus accomplished in his death was he made a way for you, Christian, to be free from the voice of condemnation that runs on repeat in your head. You can have a clean conscience.

And that is VERY good news because your conscience testifies against you sometimes, doesn’t it?

This is a text that many of us need to commit to memory because we are TERRIBLE at forgiving ourselves! How many of us wallow around all week long with a recording in our heads replaying over and over: “I’m a loser! I’m a sinner! How can God love me?”

The scary thing is, we often go ahead and “baptize” those thoughts. We call it a healthy awareness of sin. We point to the Apostle Paul who said:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24
ESV)

And we say, “See! If Paul was allowed to wallow in self-loathing, then so am I.” But we seem to forget that the very next verse begins:

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:25a ESV)

And then, in the next verse, Paul proclaims:

There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1
ESV)

Christians, as we bow at the foot of the cross this morning, it is RIGHT for you to be aware of your sin. Yes. And it is RIGHT for you to spend a moment lamenting the fact that you are not yet living the perfectly obedient life that you want to live. Yes. Wage WAR with the sin in your life. YES!

But.

But if that is all that you are seeing as you look at the cross then you aren’t looking close enough. Look again. See the perfect, spotless Lamb of God who has taken every single one of your sins upon himself. See the unfathomable love of God for you as He has given of Himself to purchase you out of your bondage to sin. See the blood and know that it was spilled not only to blot out your sins but also to PURIFY YOUR CONSCIENCE! There is therefore now no condemnation for you! As John Piper so eloquently puts it:

God took the record of all your sins that made you a debtor to wrath, and instead of holding them up in front of your face and using them as the warrant to send you to hell, God put them in the palm of his Son's hand and drove a spike through them into the cross.³

That guilt and condemnation that you have been wallowing in was nailed to the cross in Christ! The enemy would love for you to burden yourself with it once again, but Jesus has already taken it onto his capable shoulders. He paid it all! No self-deprecation is needed. No self-loathing. No more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Your sin has been removed from you as far as the East is from the West.

Do you see that?

Do you FEEL that?

It was God's awareness of our frailty that led to the ceremony of the sprinkling. The Israelites had seen the sacrifice, but they were so slow to believe. So, God went a step further. In His wisdom He instituted a ceremony in which they would FEEL the sacrifice.

God has not changed, and He knows that we possess the same guilt-ridden, slow-to-understand hearts as our forefathers. So, He instituted a ceremony in which we would see, and feel, and TASTE the offering. Just like the sprinkling of the ashes on the face of the Israelite, as we consume the bread and the cup it reminds us that we are partakers of the grace of God in Christ. So, let's come again to the table this morning.

Approaching the Table

In the same way that there was nothing magical about the heifer, and the ash and the water, neither is there anything magical about these elements. One commentator, reflecting on Numbers 19, put it this way:

The Christian may wish to make comparisons with the "ordinariness" of the substances we use in our own ritual. There is no magic in the baptismal waters, no magic in bread and

³ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 45.

wine. Ordinary things, however, may be used for extraordinary rites; ordinary items – not magic! – may be used by the Spirit of God to effect any result in which he takes pleasure.⁴

When we eat that ordinary bread and drink that ordinary juice, we should feel the same sensation that the Israelite felt as the ashes were sprinkled on his face. We should feel, “I AM a sinner, and God IS holy, but this sacrifice was enough. And this sacrifice was for me. I am putting this bread and this juice into MY mouth because I believe that Jesus has died for MY sin. I have heard about grace. I understand it. I see it. But I am quick to forget, and I am slow to believe. This morning I need to FEEL it. I need to TASTE it.”

Of course, you can only say those things if you have repented of your sin and placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Communion is only a comfort for those who believe in faith that Christ has died for their sins on the cross. Which is why, we always read this warning before we come to the table. The Apostle Paul told the church in Corinth:

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Amen

⁴ Ronald B. Allen, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Genesis – Numbers)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 2, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 864.