

Holy Week Devotional Guide

REFLECTIONS ON THE BLOOD OF JESUS

PASSION
WEEK



The Blood

*“According to the law almost everything is purified with blood,
and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*

Hebrews 9:22

There is a scarlet thread of the blood sacrifice that runs through the Bible.

The first shedding of blood occurs after Adam and Eve sin. When they sin, for the first time they see their nakedness and feel shame. So they do their best to cover their nakedness with fig leaf skirts. The point is clear. We cannot cover up our own sins by our own efforts. So God comes and covers them with clothes made of animal skins. The only way to make animal skin clothes is to slaughter an animal. The first blood that was shed on this planet was shed to make a covering for sin.

The Old Testament has many meaningful ceremonies where shedding of blood was central. Let me just mention two:

The Passover: A lamb was brought in for five days to be inspected and it would naturally become personal and dear to family. Then the lamb was slaughtered. Then father would take hyssop branch and spread the blood on the ground on the top and sides of the door. Blood would pool at the threshold of the door... foreshadowing the cross. This commemorated the first Passover in Egypt—when God’s wrath fell on the firstborn of Egypt, but He passed over the sons of Israel. You can read about the Passover in Exodus, chapters 11 and 12 and in I Corinthians 5.

The Day of Atonement: Along with the many blood sacrifices individuals could make throughout the year, once a year sin was atoned for the entire nation. Only the high priest and only one day a year would enter the holy of holies of the Tabernacle (later, the temple). A rope was tied around his ankle in case he did something wrong and God struck him dead. (No one else could enter so they planned on pulling him out from the other side of the curtain.) The High Priest would first offer a young bull for his own sins. Then, he would cast lots over two goats. One would be the sacrifice and one would be the scapegoat that would carry the sins of the people away. The High Priest would enter into the holy of holies with a bowl of the blood from the young goat. He would not dare to enter the presence of God without blood. “He is to sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse and set it apart from the Israelites’ impurities” (Leviticus 16:19). You can read about the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 and Hebrews 9.

John the Baptist connects the two testaments with his words in John 1:29: “Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”

Devotionals written by Derek Gentle. The introduction in the section above was adapted from part of a sermon by Steve Scoggins, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Opelika. Used by permission.

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Italics are added to give emphasis to some phrases in some verses. The italics are not part of the original.

Monday

The Blood and the Wrath of God

Scripture Reading: Romans 3:9-26

“God presented Him as a propitiation through faith in His blood, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His restraint God passed over the sins previously committed.”
Romans 3:25

The tribal group sees the smoke spewing from the volcano near their village. They are frightened that the “volcano god” is angry and is going to punish them for having offended him. So they seek a young maiden to throw into the volcano as a human sacrifice. The volcano god is appeased and the smoking, burning volcano abates. This is a Hollywood-like version of the story, but it is an example of the word, *propitiation*, that appears in Romans 3:25, the verse above... with a key exception.

Propitiation is a word to which we do not relate in our culture, but an act of propitiation is a sacrifice that turns away wrath.

God’s holy wrath is turned against our sin. Can God be angry with us? Of course God has the right to be angry at our sin, to take our betrayal and rejection personally. It *is* personal! We have sinned not just against “the rules,” but against God. For example, Isaiah 63:6 has God saying, “I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury...” The people had degenerated into a pattern of sin, refusing to heed God’s warnings and repent — and God was angry. Have you read in the second chapter of John how Jesus drove out the money changers from the temple complex? He was angry! Yet God’s anger is not like our anger. God doesn’t throw a tantrum. God’s wrath is His firm opposition to sin and His righteous determination to punish the sinners responsible. If you are thinking that God cannot be angry with us *and* love us, then perhaps you’ve never been married or had children. We can, in fact, be angry at people we love — especially when they do something to damage our relationships with them.

In the first Passover, God was bringing His judgment on the firstborn sons of Egypt. The death angel would pass over every house with the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the door. Otherwise God’s wrath would visit that home. “The blood on the houses where you are staying will be a distinguishing mark for you; *when I see the blood, I will pass over you*. No plague will be among you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13). Now, in the same way, when God sees the blood of Jesus, that blood satisfies His justice and turns away His wrath.

Now the key exception to the kind of propitiation in our tribal group example: The tribe thought they had to produce their own sacrifice to appease their god so he would stop being angry at them. Not so in the Biblical use of this term. “God does not love us because Christ died for us; Christ died for us because God loved us. If it is God’s wrath that needed to be propitiated, it is God’s love that did the propitiating.”¹

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, IVP, 1986, Chapter 7, Page 174

Tuesday

The Blood and Our Standing Before God

Scripture Reading: Romans 5

“Much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath.” — Romans 5:9

Sometimes we are talking with friends at the funeral home when, for example, a beloved grandmother has passed away at a ripe old age after many years of loving the Lord. We may hear something along the lines of, “Well, if anyone is in Heaven today, Granny certainly is!” The implication is that Granny *earned* her ticket to Heaven. But is that what the Bible teaches about how a person comes into a right standing with God?

Justification is when God treats me *just-as-if-I'd* never sinned. In the Christian Standard Version, shown above for Romans 5:9, the word is translated, “declared righteous.” It was a legal term. When people went to court and the court found in their favor, they were said to be *justified*. That is, they were declared to be in the right or to have a good standing before the law.

Justification is when God pronounces us, “Not guilty.” We are not speaking here of guilt in the sense of having guilt *feelings*; instead, it is our legal standing before God. Prior to conversion we stand guilty before God. Once we come to God through the blood of Jesus, we are justified. As Wayne Grudem describes it, we have, “a *legal declaration* concerning our relationship to God’s laws, stating that we are completely forgiven and no longer liable to punishment.”¹

Romans 4:5 tells us how we receive a right standing before God: “But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who declares righteous the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness.” In other words, we trust Jesus, not our own good works, to save us. As our substitute, on the cross, Jesus assumed our bad record and paid the penalty for our sins. In salvation He gives us His perfect record — righteousness is “credited to our account.” It is given to us as a gift, *the gift of righteousness* (Romans 5:17). We must refuse to try standing on our own records... to renounce any trust in our own merits... “For we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Romans 3:28).

A right standing with God is merited alright; just not by us! Jesus secured our new standing with God. For us, the key to *receiving* this right standing is faith. For God, however, the key to *procuring* this standing was the blood of Jesus. On the cross Jesus took on our sin and suffered our punishment — *we have now been declared righteous by His blood*.

¹Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, IVP, 1994, Chapter 36, page 722

Wednesday

The Blood and the Power of Sin

Scripture Reading: Romans 6

*“To Him who loves us and has set us free from our sins by His blood”
Revelation 1:5*

Ralph was laid off. He found some odd jobs, but needed all the money he could round up to provide for his family. He was so desperate he loaded his new golf clubs into the car — a six-month old set of Nike Pro Combos — and took them to the pawn shop. He got a percentage of the price he paid when he bought them new along with a pawn ticket. If he came into a new job and could afford to do so within the allotted time, Ralph could return and redeem his beloved clubs.

God also talks about redemption: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). God used this word from secular life to describe a spiritual reality. It means to buy out of slavery. In the Old Testament, when people were broke and sold themselves into slavery to satisfy the debt, a relative could redeem them. If a person was captured in war he could be redeemed with a ransom. In the Roman world, if a slave was able to save up the money he could go to the temple and pay the redemption price, buy himself out of slavery. Though he would technically become the property of the god, he would be free from his former master.

We were slaves to sin. In John 8:34, we read, “Jesus responded, ‘I assure you: Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.’” We needed to be redeemed.

Redemption is not merely being ransomed from the *penalty* of sin; but also from the *power* of sin. “For you know that you were redeemed *from your empty way of life* inherited from the fathers, not with perishable things, like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish (I Peter 1:18-19). Take note of two things: first it is the blood of Jesus that was the purchase price of our freedom, and second, we were redeemed, not just from hell, but from our empty way of life! Leonard Ravenhill raised this question in a sermon:

*If I was to ask you tonight if you were saved? Do you say 'Yes, I am saved'. When?
'Oh so and so preached, I got baptized and...'*

Are you saved? What are you saved from, hell?

*Are you saved from bitterness? Are you saved from lust? Are you saved from cheating?
Are you saved from lying? Are you saved from bad manners? Are you saved from rebellion against your parents? Come on, what are you saved from?*

Redeemed people don't make comments like, “It's my life” or “It's my own body” ...because they know it isn't. In Heaven, one praise chorus sings to Jesus, “You were slaughtered, and You redeemed people for God by Your blood” (Romans 5:9). We are part of “the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Acts 20:28). The ownership issue is settled. We have been bought with a price and freed from sin!

Thursday

Upper Room Service Tonight at 6:30

The Blood and Forgiveness of Sin

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace — Ephesians 1:7

Forgiveness means to pardon and release, to let a person go as if the sin had never been committed.

Describing forgiveness can be difficult. There are two different ways of hearing the message and one group or the other can get the wrong impression. On one hand there are those who think forgiveness for them is impossible, that their sins are beyond God's grace. So keenly and painfully do they feel the stain! On the other hand, there are those who think forgiveness is no big deal, that God will simply say, "I forgive you" and drop the matter. No problem. So hardened are their hearts and oblivious they are! But sin is a problem...

Carnegie Simpson stated, "Forgiveness is to man the plainest of duties; to God it is the profoundest of problems." How does a perfect Holy God release sinners from their sin? An impartial judge cannot simply overlook sin. Anselm observed in the eleventh century that if anyone imagines that God can simply forgive as we forgive others, that person "has not yet considered what a heavy weight sin is."¹

In the upper room at the last Passover of Jesus' earthly ministry, He established the Lord's supper. As He spoke of the cup and what it represented, He said, "For this is My blood that establishes the covenant; it is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The blood of Jesus secures our forgiveness.

In Revelation 7:14, some particular Christians are identified: "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Perhaps that is exactly what you long to feel in your personal experience — washed, white, and clean. Perhaps something in your past haunts you. Perhaps you cannot ever seem to feel that clean. That kind of clean does not come from your past or your performance, it comes from the blood of Jesus!

"Come, let us discuss this," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are as red as crimson, they will be like wool." — Isaiah 1:18

¹ Both cited by John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, IVP, 1986, Chapter 4, Page 87-88

Friday

The Blood and Our Relationship With God

Scripture Reading: II Corinthians 5:14-21

“For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself by making peace through the blood of His cross —whether things on earth or things in heaven.” — Colossians 1:20

They were getting on up in years. Both were grandparents. But the two sisters had a falling out. It was over something silly — silly, at least, in comparison to the value of their relationship. But they weren't speaking to one another. Perhaps each wished the other would call to apologize. But it never happened. Then suddenly and tragically, one of the sisters died. The second tragedy was that they died un-reconciled. That happens to many people in their relationship with God—and it doesn't have to happen either.

Reconciliation is when two friends have become estranged, enemies even, and then, restore the friendship.

Our sin makes us the enemies of God. Leon Morris observes:

*“It is plain the New Testament speaks of God and sinners as enemies. Now an enemy is not simply someone who falls a little short of being a good and faithful friend. He belongs in the opposite camp. He is opposed to what the one is doing. Sinners are putting their effort into the opposite direction of God. We should be clear on this. The sin we do inevitably arouses the hostility of God.”*¹

Yet it was “While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10). Even though He was the offended party, God took the initiative. He has removed the offense that separated us. As Colossians 1:22 says, “But now He has reconciled you by His physical body through His death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before Him.”

Before we were saved, we didn't feel close to God. But He has provided a way for us to enter His very presence.

- “Therefore, brothers, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus” (Hebrews 10:19)
- “But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah.” (Ephesians 2:13)

¹Leon Morris, *The Atonement: its Meaning & Significance*, IVP, 1983, Chapter 6, Page 136-137

Saturday

The Blood and Our Victory Over Satan

Scripture Reading: Colossians 2:12-15

“They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not love their lives in the face of death.” — Revelation 12:11

In a dream Martin Luther found himself being attacked by Satan. The devil unrolled a long scroll containing a list of Luther’s sins and held it before him. The devil read the list of sins one after another. When he reached the end of the list Luther asked him, “Is that all?” “No!” came the angry reply and a second scroll was put in Luther’s face. Then, after the second scroll there was a third. But now the devil had no more of Luther’s sins to list. Luther replied, “You’ve forgotten something. Quickly write on each of them, “The blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanses us from all sin!” The devil let out an awful cry, cursed, and disappeared.

This story of the dream is closer to reality than some may realize. William Gurnall in his puritan classic, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, states that Satan has two main designs, or strategies, in attacking the Christian:

HIS FIRST MAIN DESIGN is to draw into sin.

The SECOND MAIN DESIGN is to accuse, vex, and trouble the saint for sin. ¹

Mark Bubeck is a Baptist pastor experienced in spiritual warfare, helping people deal with demonic oppression, possession, and attacks. Bubeck encourages what he calls warfare prayer, aggressive praying based on doctrinal truth. However, there may also be times when one must speak to the devil directly. Here he suggests the wording for such a confrontation: “Satan I command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to leave my presence with all your demons, and I bring the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ between us.” ² In fact, numerous writers on this subject describe the power of the blood of Jesus Christ in confrontations with evil spirits.

Scripture celebrates the time when Satan, “the accuser of our brothers has been thrown out: the one who accuses them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10). Jesus became a human being so that “through His death He might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the Devil” (Hebrews 2:14). Jesus “disarmed the powers and authorities” (that is, demonic powers) and “made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15, NIV).

Jesus’ victory is our victory and His blood won that victory for us!

¹William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 1662-1665, Banner of Truth, page 71

²Mark I. Bubeck, *The Adversary*, Moody Press, 1975, Chapter 11, Page 140

Easter Sunday

The Blood and Christ's Reign Over History

Scripture Reading: Revelation 5

"Then I saw one like a slaughtered lamb standing..."
Revelation 5:6

A slain lamb standing... quite an odd portrait. Not a slain lamb on the ground... bleeding... or dead... but *standing!* Slain lambs don't stand. Unless, of course, there has been a resurrection...

In Revelation 5 John has a vision concerning how God will wrap up history. There is in heaven a sealed scroll with God's decrees for its conclusion, but the seals must be opened and the one who opens them must be qualified to do so. Verses 2-3 describe the scene: "I also saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or even to look in it." No one could do it! The implications are enormous. How will all the wrongs of history be righted? Final justice established? Hurts healed? How will God receive the glory He deserves? It was so upsetting to John he cried.

Then in verse 5 we read, "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Stop crying. Look! The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has been victorious so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals.'" A lion... the son of a king... a victor! He can do it.

Verses 6-7 tell what happened next: "Then I saw one like a slaughtered lamb standing between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders... He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of the One seated on the throne." That's strange; he doesn't look like a lion, but like a lamb... who coolly walks to the throne and, in effect, confidently says, "I'll take that." It is a sacrificial lamb who will open the scroll's seals and bring history to its rightful conclusion.

We see it again in 7:17: "The Lamb who is at the center of the throne will shepherd them." The Lamb is at the *center* of the throne—at the very center of the seat of power! A sacrificial lamb and a *sovereign* lamb!

Finally, we see it in Revelation 19, where the glorious return of the Lord Jesus is described:

11. Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.
12. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knows except Himself.
13. *He wore a robe stained with blood*, and His name is called the Word of God.
14. The armies that were in heaven followed Him on white horses, wearing pure white linen.
15. From His mouth came a sharp sword, so that with it He might strike the nations. He will shepherd them with an iron scepter. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty.
16. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

A Final Reflection

The Danger of Failing to Value the Blood

“How much worse punishment, do you think one will deserve who has trampled on the Son of God, regarded as profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” – Hebrews 10:29

A college student took a friend to church. They were in the South and the friend was from the North. The friend had never attended a Baptist Church and wasn't familiar with our hymns. So when she heard the congregation singing, “There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins...” her reaction was, “Yuck!”

The blood of Jesus gives offense to some. The Bible even speaks of “the offense of the cross” (Galatians 5:11). It's not just the gore and the blood that people find offensive. It is what the cross represents... what it is saying to us and about us. The cross tells us about our sinful state. *We are* an offense to God! It shouts out loud how appalling our sins are. It tells us what we deserve to happen to us. We think of ourselves as being good people; the cross says, “You deserve to be punished!” All this offends our pride. We naturally bristle at the hard truths it speaks.

The cross tells us what God thinks of our sin; it also tells us what God thinks of us. God hates our sins, but He loves us! The cross is how far God would go in His love for us. The cross is how far God would go to make us His own.

So there are two kinds of people: those who consider the cross to be foolishness (I Corinthians 1:23-24) and those who glory in the cross (Galatians 6:14). There are those who are so offended by what it says about them, who are so unwilling to humble themselves before it, that they will not come to the cross. And there are those who “get it,” who see the weight of their sins and the extravagance of God's mercy — both — in the cross. These people rejoice in the cross and sing about it. They don't see gore; they see only mercy.

Many have heard of the cross. They know about it. In a purely intellectual sense, they may believe in the cross. Yet they have failed to throw themselves upon the mercy of God and trust Christ's work on the cross to count for them. God became a human being, left Heaven, came to earth, lived a life without recognition or worship, and finally was rejected and crucified. Jesus did that and they are wanting to stand on their own record?! By their casual neglect, or their outright rejection, they have “regarded as profane the blood of the covenant.” Don't let that be you!

