

Anglican Church of Noosa
JESUS – Greater Than – The Blood of Christ
Hebrews 9:11-28
Rev'd Chris Johnson – October 24, 2021

There is a popular idea out there that the Old Testament is full of blood and guts whereas the New Testament is all about love and peace.

We encounter something of the blood and guts of the Old Testament in our Hebrews reading today because there are so many references to the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant. Did you pick up how many times the word blood kept coming up in this passage - it is there 11 times and mostly referring to the animal sacrifices which were instituted by Moses in Exodus and Leviticus.

v.12 talks about the blood of goats and calves

v.13 talks about the blood of goats and bulls

v.19 says that Moses took the blood of calves and

- sprinkled the scroll containing the law,
- sprinkled the people with the words, *"This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you to keep."*
- He then sprinkles the blood around the Tabernacle and on everything used in its ceremonies.

This is serious religion. This is so far away from our culture and what people find acceptable today. So, do we just write this off as ancient religion from which we have evolved into a much higher form of religion today because of Jesus.

We could make it so simple, but of course it's not. These Jewish scriptures and the faith they espouse were endorsed by Jesus and in fact Jesus said he was fulfilling them. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross stands in direct line with the sacrificial system of Moses and derives its meaning from it. Yes, Jesus' death does replace the sacrifices of the Torah, but it has its foundations in the Torah and this is what gives the cross its depth and power.

So, what do you think about the blood? In both secular and religious thinking blood is hugely significant. Blood is essential for life and when it is spilled, life drains away. To shed one's blood is to make the ultimate sacrifice, to give up one's life for some greater good.

Blood is about life and death - the life and death of an animal; the life and death of a human being. The first thought for me about blood is that this is something serious. Maybe the first thing we can say about the sacrificial systems of both the Old and the New Covenants is that we are dealing here with something serious.

What the blood is pointing to is the seriousness of sin. The sacrificial system of Moses was instituted to keep reminding the people of how serious sin was and likewise cross of Christ and his sacrifice is a reminder to us of how serious sin is. Our natural disposition is to simply take forgiveness for granted rather than be staggered that it is possible at all. We have very little appreciation of the holiness of God. We put God under the microscope and think it is our right to question him; rather than let him put us under the microscope and question us. There is a place to question God, but only if we have an attitude of submission where we have let him question us first.

Our appreciation of the awesome purity and perfection of God is very clouded. People talk about God simply as “the big fella upstairs”, or “me mate who fixes things for me”. Really we should be talking about God in hushed tones; not just because he is the Almighty Creator of the whole universe; but because he is Holy, Holy, Holy!

So the first thing we can say about blood sacrifice is that it highlights for us the

- seriousness of sin
- the holiness of God
- and that we have a problem - sin cuts us off from God.

But the blood shed on the cross takes us beyond the problem to the solution. Through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross we are forgiven. We do not need to be afraid to take sin seriously because we know that at the cross there is forgiveness. I love that line in Amazing Grace which says, “Tis grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.” The cross should make us terribly afraid if that is the consequence of sin; but it should also fill us with gratitude and joy that we have a God who would do that for us.

The cross makes a difference in our relationship with God.

- Where previously, before this holy God we were guilty, now we are justified.
- Where previously we were on the path to hell, now we are on the road to heaven.
- Where previously we were enemies of God, now we are turned into friends.

Christ's shed blood changes our status before God. We should stand in awe and it should move us to our bootstraps. I think only an element as strong as blood has the power to do that.

Let's look more closely now at the passage itself. Our author is concerned to draw a sharp contrast between the sacrifices of the Old Covenant and the sacrifice of Christ in the New Covenant. The deficiencies of the Old Covenant sacrifices are highlighted, and the superiority of Christ's sacrifice is championed.

Jesus is greater.

V11 The people under the Old Covenant had the Tabernacle built by Moses. It was an earthly vehicle for imperfect people to bring sacrifice and know they could be forgiven. So in v11 Jesus enters the perfect Tabernacle which of course is heaven itself. There is no need for cleansing here. We have the imperfect Tabernacle and the perfect Tabernacle.

V12 In the earthly Tabernacle it was the blood of involuntary animals that was used to remind the people of their sin and need for forgiveness. In the New Covenant it is Christ who enters voluntarily into the Most Holy Place to make sacrifice with his own blood and by that obtain our eternal redemption.

V13,14 Under the Old Covenant it was only an outward cleansing but the blood of Christ brings an inward cleansing and here the conscience is particularly referred to. We can have a clean conscience from acts that would lead to death. Whatever you have done in your life that weighs heavily on your conscience; be assured the blood of Christ can deal with it.

V15 The end of the verse talks about sins committed under the first covenant. The first covenant was based on the law and this is what highlights our sin. Martin Luther described the law as a schoolmaster meant to expose our sin and lead us to Christ. In the new covenant Christ dies as a ransom for sin and sets us free. Only by this means can we receive our promised eternal inheritance.

V19-24 These verses go into more detail on what the author was saying in v11.

The earthly Tabernacle had to be sprinkled with blood for its cleansing but in v24 Christ enters the heavenly Tabernacle to appear for us before God. This is one of his important roles - to be our high priest who intercedes for us.

V25-28 The Old Testament sacrifices had to be offered continually. There were daily sacrifices but the writer to the Hebrews emphasises the Great High Priest entering the Holy of Holies every year to make sacrifice for the people's sin. There could never be any assurance under the Old Covenant because the sacrifices were imperfect and oft repeated. Under the New Covenant the New Testament says believers can have assurance because of the once for all nature of Christ's sacrifice.

V26 is very powerful, *"He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself."* There is something very full and complete about the cross of Christ. If this is where salvation was won, then we cannot add to it. All we can do is love him, serve him and as v28 says look forward to when he will appear a second time and bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (wonderful assurance)

The 1662 Book of Common Prayer is very strong on this once for all nature of the cross.

"Almighty God our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption: who made there by his one oblation of himself once offered a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." Very powerful.

The modern liturgy goes for simplicity and says *"we proclaim his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross."* That says it all, but not as poetically and powerfully as previous generations.

We do however in our Eucharistic Service hold onto the very realistic language of John 6 which talks about feeding on the body and blood of Christ. We don't believe we literally feed on Christ but we do feed spiritually by faith. We do use very realistic language about the blood of Christ. And it all takes us deeper into the cross and the salvation Christ has won for us.

We can only push so far into the mystery about how the cross wins our salvation. We can only push so far into understanding the significance of the blood. One thing I know is that there is something very evocative about blood and blood spilled in sacrifice. Probably the closest modern analogy we have is the reality of war where a soldier spills his blood on the battlefield for a noble cause. It may be to stand up to an oppressor, to defend one's country, to provide freedom from tyranny for one's family and home.

War reminds us that sin is real and sin is serious. Sometimes you have to make a stand and that stand is costly.

I think one of the reasons Anzac Day is so powerful in the Australian psyche is that it is about blood being shed to win freedom. Lynda and I listened to a McCrindle Webinar this week and one of the findings in their latest research is that the majority of Australians think Anzac Day is the most important occasion for the identity of Australia. It ranks ahead of Grand Final days, the Melbourne Cup, Christmas, Easter, Australia Day and any other event. One of the reasons for this is surely the idea that sacrificing one's life for another is the supreme act of love.

There are forms of Christianity out there which sit very lightly with the blood of Christ. Some which almost ignore the cross altogether.

But when the chips are down, where else have we to go than the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. When you're facing something really difficult in life, something really tough, then the blood Christ shed on the cross may be the only thing that will help.

So

- When the inspiring sunset isn't enough
- When the latest sporting event isn't as spectacular as the media made it out to be
- When the escape into a romantic novel, isn't enough
- Or whatever your escape is

Then maybe the love of Christ and the blood he shed on the cross is the only thing that will help. There is power in his blood to save.

My friends we have a flesh and blood faith not a sentimental, hope-for-the best type of faith. Christianity is essentially about grasping the truth that at the heart of God lies sacrificial love and this is expressed most directly and powerfully in the blood Christ shed on the cross. All glory and majesty and praise to him and may we know the power of his blood to save. Amen