

THE POWER IN THE BLOOD OF JESUS
Maundy Thursday Tenebrae and Communion –March 28, 2013 –Hebrews 9: 15-22
The Church of the Covenant

What can wash away our sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Our study in the New Testament book of Hebrews seems to be filled with blood everywhere. There is the blood of animals shed for sins under the Old Covenant law. There is the shedding of Jesus' blood, on a cross at Calvary, for the remission of our sin. Seems like there is a lot of blood. The New Covenant indeed is forged in Jesus' blood. Why is this? Our scripture for this evening says: *"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin..." (Hebrews 9: 22)*

From the Old Testament it is clear that when a person sins it creates a blot, a stain if you will, on the land. The one way to equalize that stain, to wipe away the blot, is the death of the person who committed it. As the scripture says: *"The wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6: 23) The person who sins is required to die in order to wipe clean the blot of their sin from the land. This is because a Holy God despises sin; He cannot be in its presence; a sinner on their own cannot hope to stand in the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy (thrice Holy) God. Consider this. Haven't you always wondered why when the Israelites would take over a Caananite town they were required by God to kill all the citizens and even the animals in the town? Well, it was because for the Holy Land, the Promised Land, to be Holy and without stain, the sin of the original residents needed to be washed away. Haven't you always wondered when you read the Bible why under the Old Testament law there was the ongoing sacrifice of animals in the Temple in Jerusalem? The blood of animals washed away the stain of sin of the people. It wasn't somehow that animals were a cheaper cut and so they were able to sacrifice an animal instead of dying themselves, no, God so highly values animals that their blood was seen by Him as equivalent to that of humans. Because *"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin..."* But after a while the sin began to build up on the land; greater and greater was the black blot upon the Promised Land. God's people would commit adultery; God's people would sacrifice their children in the high places on altars to pagan gods; God's people would turn their back on the One, True and Living God and instead trust in their great wealth, and the stout walls of their cities, and the force of their armies. They came to trust in themselves and not in the Lord God Almighty. And, you know, the sin upon the land would build up and up, normally the blot and stain might be knee deep, but then it became over the heads of the people. And periodically, then an outside destroyer, the Assyrians or the Babylonians, say would invade the Promised Land and slaughter the people of God, until all their blood finally atoned for the blot and sin on the land. At some point there were not enough lambs and goats to be killed to atone for the sin that weighed so heavily upon the land. (By the way and parenthetically, do you see how wrong we are when we think that we are responsible only for our own sin and not the sin of those around us or our society? No, we are our brother's keeper. Because our brother's sin stains us just as much as does our own.) "Whatever floats your boat" –whatever I do is my business and whatever you do is your business does not absolve us of the fact that *"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin..."* You see this concept, by the way, in President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. He makes the point that the Civil War will not be over until every drop of blood shed by the lash will be recompensed by the battlefield. Slavery placed a great stain of sin upon the nation and it required 600,000 deaths in the Civil War in order to atone for that one sin; that was Lincoln's point and I am sure he derived that point from his reading of scripture.

Has anyone been wondering why have there been so many shootings and so many senseless deaths? In the city of Washington it seems that hardly a week goes by without someone being shot or murdered. Or that there is a drug overdose. Or someone is slowly killing themselves with an addiction or a self

destructive behavior. Or the saddest thing of all, some young person with all of life ahead of them, takes their own life. Why is suicide one of the greatest killers of our children? Maybe I had my head in a bubble when I was growing up but I don't remember all of that going on. Maybe a cause of it is the sin and blot on the land; the American Promised Land has become stained with sin and a rejection of our God. Are you saying, Stu, that it is the will of God that all these terrible things are happening? That God is **causing** all these terrible things to happen to us? No, beloved. It is God's will as His Word says, that not even one should perish...but that all who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God would have eternal life in HIM. John 3:16 is God's will –no one should perish but that everyone would have life, new life, abundant life and eternal life in His Son. No, what is causing this spiritually speaking is not God; what is causing this is the blot on the land which is caused by our sin. And our sin as the church is this – if we were indeed all the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is meant to be, then our nation would not be in the shape it is in today. Because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin...

So we have a choice on this Maundy Thursday. We can be Old Covenant and Old Testament and let events unfold as they will. It will not be pretty. Because there is no forgiveness of the blot of sin on the land without the shedding of blood. OR...we can be NEW Covenant and NEW Testament and enter into a life-giving relationship through the new and living way offered through God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. We can let Jesus' blood wash away our sin. We can let Jesus' blood wipe away the stain from our community. We can invite Jesus Christ to enter into our heart, and the heart of our community and the heart of our nation, and thereby HIS blood atones for our sin. Why do we need spiritual awakening in our church and in our community and in our land? Because nothing but the blood of Jesus will do.

One tiny droplet, one infinitesimally small proton, one speck so small it cannot be seen droplet of the blood of the Lamb of God can wipe away our sin, and the sin of our church, and the sin in our community and the sin in our nation. That's the power in the blood of Jesus. What all the sacrifices of animals over all the years could not hope to do, what all the deaths in all the wars over all the years can never hope to do, what all the senseless deaths of innocents and people could never hope to atone for....what all the blood shed over all the years from the beginning of creation to this very day could not accomplish...what all the deaths of all the people over all of history could not provide...one tiny speck of the blood of Jesus can do. He is able. He is able to do this tonight. He is able to accomplish this in you and in me. For this is the will of God and why God sent His only begotten Son, to suffer and to die upon a cross for us and our salvation. That HIS Blood would accomplish God's will in us.

So we come now to this sacrament of the Last Supper and close communion with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We will say in the words of Jesus tonight –“This cup is the New Covenant shed in my blood for the remission of sin.” The blood of Jesus is present tonight. All are welcome to partake. You don't have to be a Presbyterian or a member, you just have to believe that there is a power at work in the blood of Jesus that can make you whole. You don't have to be good enough to receive it; none of us here tonight are good enough. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to receive it and believe it. Receive the Lord Jesus and the power in His blood. Believe that the wages of sin is death but that His blood is life for you tonight. Believe that there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood, but believe that it is HIS blood present tonight that can wipe away our every sin. Be washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. Let it flow from you tonight, out into this church, and out into our community, and out into our world. The wages of sin may well be death...but there is POWER in the BLOOD of Jesus to wipe away sin and death....POWER in HIS BLOOD to give us new life in HIM tonight. What can wash away the blot of sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. So be it and Amen.

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