

Hebrews 9:15-28

“Without the Shedding of Blood”

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Pr Josh Anderson

Advent I

Listen now to God’s holy and inerrant word as it comes to us from Hebrews 9:15-28.

*15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. 16 For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. 17 For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. 18 Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.*

*19 For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” 21 And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. 22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*

*23 Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*

*25 Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, 26 for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, 28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in Heaven loves you.

Prayer...

This fall we've been teaching through the Ten Commandments in our adult Sunday school class. We've gone through the first eight commandments, and we have two more to cover.

I hope that you've been able to attend - I think it's been a wonderful class with really detailed and thorough teaching, and I recommend that you take some time to listen to the audio on our website if you haven't been able to attend in person.

And of course, one result of closely studying the law of God that I've experienced this fall, and I hope you have as well, is the experience of becoming, by help of the Holy Spirit, more deeply and truly aware of our actual sin.

We've been sinners the whole time, of course, but at least one of the reasons God's law is given to us is to reveal our sin - so that we might understand more deeply our condition as actual sinners.

Sometimes the law of God is described as a kind of clear and pure mirror - if we look in a cloudy mirror (that is, our own assumptions about morality and righteousness) we can feel pretty good about ourselves (we're not that bad, we think...), but when we look in God's perfect law, we see our selves truly, we see ourselves for who we really are - we see our deformities, we see our transgressions, we see all the ways that violate the perfect law of God on a daily basis.

I know that studying the Ten Commandments this fall has had that effect on me - and I hope it has had that effect on you as well.

But what do we do with that tension, that gap that we feel and experience when we look at the law of God and our own lives? What do we do with the guilt that we rightly feel for our sins?

One possible answer, of course, is for us to somehow convince ourselves that actually, really, it's not that bad.

I mean, sure we're not perfect, but who is perfect after all? I mean, consider my neighbor or my friend. They're probably worse than I am. And - hey, isn't there a new show on that I want to watch? Maybe if I can just distract myself from my guilt, then it'll go away.

But of course, this doesn't work. It might seem to work for a short period of time, but comparing ourselves to our neighbors or looking down on someone else or distracting ourselves by something outside of us won't take care of our sin and our guilt and our malaise.

And indeed, our passage this morning won't let us off the hook. It won't let us look away from the horror and violence of our sin and the desperation of our situation left to our own devices.

As we read in verse 15, only death can redeem us from the transgressions we've committed. And in verse 18, we find that, because of our sin, God has never made a covenant with his people that has not needed to be sealed with blood.

And then in verses 19-21, we read about the events described in Exodus 24, when God covenanted with Israel after he delivered them from Egypt, and how, because of their sin, God instructed Moses to seal his covenant with his people by the shedding of blood - how the law book itself was sprinkled with blood, and how the people were sprinkled with blood, and the tabernacle itself and the vessels in the tabernacle - all of these things, because of the sinfulness of the people needed to be covered in blood.

And then, all of this emphasis on death and blood and its connection to the forgiveness of sins is summed up in verse 22, where the Apostle writes these words: *"For without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."*

I don't know about you, but that verse hits me like a freight train.

I mean, I believe it's true because it is written in the Holy Spirit inspired Scriptures, but in some sense, I don't need it to be part of the Scriptures to believe that it's true.

*"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."*

I mean, that is a statement that just feels true.

It matches what I know about the world and what I know about myself, and what I feel when I think about the guilt that has been part of my experience ever since I was old enough to understand that I was a sinner and I hurt other people — and that I sin and harm others not just because I'm not perfect, but because there is at least a part of me that is actually cruel and malicious and even, in some very real sense, evil.

When I read that verse: "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" - I think: "*Of course.*"

How else could sin be forgiven, without death being involved?

And we feel this way, we feel the truth of this verse in our bones because this verse describes how the Living God made us to feel - he put this feeling in our hearts, for when God made Adam and Eve in garden and told them to enjoy all the world but to avoid the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil he also warned them with these words: "*For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.*"

And then, just one chapter later, after the sin of our First Parents, we read how their sin caused death to enter the world, and how their life-spans were temporarily extended only by the death of an animal, for the Lord God had to kill an animal and clothe them in its skin before he drove them out from the Garden and into exile.

We feel the truth of the statement: "*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*" because God put it there in us when he made us.

And of course this connection between the forgiveness of sins and the spilling of blood is all throughout the Old Testament. It's there in Exodus 24, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, when Moses sprinkles the people with blood and seals God's covenant to them.

It's there in Leviticus 4, as a central feature of the sin offering, as we heard earlier this morning, as the sinner would lay his hands on the animal brought for sacrifice, putting his sins on the animal itself and then killing the animal, so that the animal's blood would be shed in his place, and the animal would die instead of him and thus atonement would be made, and his sin would be forgiven.

Indeed, this statement by the Apostle: *"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins"* is one of the great assumptions and principles of the Old Testament - such that reading the Hebrew Scriptures makes no sense at all except that this be a true and accurate description of reality.

But fascinatingly, the Old Testament does not only teach and assume that the shedding of blood is required for the forgiveness of sins.

It also, in multiple places, imagines a future where the power of sin is destroyed and the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins comes to a climatic end.

For example, in Daniel 9, we read that God will one day *"put an end to sacrifice and offering,"* and that he will *"finish transgression and put an end to sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness."*

And in Micah 7, the Prophet says these words to God: *"You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."*

Beloved, what I want you to see this morning from Hebrews 9 is that it is in the death of the Incarnate Son of God that these two great principles and promises of the Old Testament finally come together - the principle that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins, and the promise that one day, God would destroy the power of sin forever.

For, as the Apostle puts it in verse 26, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God has *"appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."*

Friends, *this* is the answer to your guilt. This is God's gracious solution to the dilemma created by your sin.

Yes, it is true, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

There is no getting away from this reality. The guilt you feel for your sin is real, and it is given to you by God. Only death and blood can achieve the forgiveness of sins.

But, in the fullness of time, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, has appeared in human flesh and his blood has been shed in his crucifixion and death so that your sin would be put away and forgiven.

And that's it. That's the end. No one else need die for sins to be forgiven, no more blood needs to be shed, because Jesus has died, as the Apostle says: *"Once for all."*

Once for all. His death does not need to be repeated.

You cannot add to it. You cannot improve on it. You cannot make Jesus' death more efficacious than it already is.

For Jesus Christ has appeared *"appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."*

And friends, it gets even better than that.

Indeed, as we confess every week, right before we commune with Christ in the gift of his blood offered as wine, Christ has not only died, Christ is risen, and as the apostle puts it in verse 24, in his risen flesh, *"Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf."*

The Son of God has died for our sin once for all, and he now stands, in his risen flesh, in heaven itself for us - on our behalf, that we might be righteous with him before the face of God.

But that's not all.

For, just as we say each week, not only has Christ died, not only is Christ risen, but Christ will come again, and as the apostle puts it in verse 28, we have something still to anticipate and look forward to in terms of the faithfulness of the Son of God for us, for *“Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”*

Here in this passage is contained the mystery of our faith: *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again* - and in each one of these dramatic and essential aspects of his victorious work, Jesus delivers us from our sin and liberates us from death and sets us free to live forever before the face of God.

So how then do we respond to this teaching of the Apostle? What do we do with these things?

I think that first of all, this passage invites us to reckon truly with the horrific nature of our sin.

*“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”*

And that statement is true not only for sin in general, but that is true for your sin and for mine.

For every violent act. For every angry word. For every indulgence of lust. For every lie we've told. For every other transgression we've ever committed.

There is no forgiveness available for any sin we've ever committed, no matter how big or how small, without the shedding of blood.

That's the reality. That's the deal. That is the horror and violence of *our* sin, and this passage does not allow us to cover this up at all.

But this passage does not only invite us to reckon with horror of our sin.

It also invites us to flee for refuge in the shed blood of Jesus for us.

Beloved, know this. Hang on to this. This is God's gracious gift, the remarkable free gift of grace that he offers to you.

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away *your* sin by the sacrifice of himself.

The blood of Christ has been shed so that *your* sin would be forgiven. God has taken on flesh that he might die in your place, for your sin.

Friends, whatever else we do as a church, let us not forget that this is the heart of the good news that we proclaim week by week, the good news that each of us orient our lives toward God around.

This is the ground of all of our joy, all of our thanksgiving, all of our life together with one another and with our neighbor and with God himself: *Jesus Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

But this passage does not only invite us to reckon with the horror of our sin. And it does not only invite us to take refuge for our sin in the sacrifice of Christ.

It also invites to believe that the shed blood of Jesus is sufficient to cover *our* sin.

This passage invites us to believe that the provision God has made in the death of his Son is truly enough to bear the weight of our particular sins.

Beloved, I want you to hear this.

Each of us walk around in our lives with a bag full of our sin which we carry with us. All of us have regrets and failures and are deeply aware of ways that we know we have harmed others and violated the law of God.

I'm guessing that if any one of us sat down for an hour or two, we could write out all of the sins that we're the most sorry for, the sins that we've committed that still cause us the most pain whenever we think of them.

Beloved, what I want you to see and believe and know is that it is precisely for those sins that Jesus has died for you. That's why he did it. That's why he died. He did it for *those* sins.

It is precisely for those sins that the blood of Jesus has been shed. His blood was shed so that those particular sins that you have committed would be forgiven.

So that those sins would be "put away" and destroyed, as the Apostle puts it in verse 26.

For this is true, that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

And yet this is also true, that Jesus Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

And it because of these two things that are *both* true that I invite you to hold, even for a brief moment, all your greatest sins in your mind and hear these words and believe them to be true for you.

*Our heavenly Father, in his great mercy, has given his only Son to die for you, and for his sake forgives you all your sins; wherefore as Christ's minister and by his authority, I declare to you that all of your sins are forgiven, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

Hang on to that, beloved. Hang on to that promise. Because it is for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.