

The Blood of Jesus

Hebrews Benediction

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Bible Text: Hebrews 13:20, 21; 8; 9; Genesis 15; Revelation 12

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Hebrews 13:20: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.”

We now are on our fifth message from this verse. Today, we want to consider another aspect of that covenant: that it is “a covenant in blood.” “Through the blood,” he says, “of the eternal covenant” (Hebrews 13:20), the blood.

Think about the blood for a moment. There are some who tell us that the blood is merely a metaphor for death, that we could easily have Jesus die in some other fashion.

Suppose that Jesus, instead of being nailed to a cross, had been hung from a gallows and trap door opens and his neck snapped and he died in that way. Is it simply the death of Jesus that brings about our rescue from sin and its consequences?

I submit to you that verse 20 of Hebrews 13 tells us very plainly that Jesus could not have been hung by the neck until he died, that Jesus had to shed his blood.

But some would tell us, “Well, yes, he had to shed his blood, because he had to fulfill those types and shadows in the Old Testament and they were all about blood shed and so therefore he had to conform to that in order to demonstrate to people that he was the fulfillment of those sacrifices.”

But now—and you begin to think about it for a moment in a modernistic way of thinking—but now that human beings have become enlightened we understand that these primitive notions of blood atonement, of blood satisfaction, of propitiation—there is a big word, but it is a word everybody ought to know—propitiation, that is a sacrifice that satisfies an offended and angry person. A propitiation, it is a gift given to an angry person to remove that person’s anger.

But these kinds of ideas are primitive and now that human beings have come to be enlightened we understand that that is not the way that it really is. Those are notions that are told sometimes.

But the Scripture speaks here of the blood of the eternal covenant. Is that blood shed merely to fulfill shadows in the Old Testament or is it the other way around?

Turn with me, if you will, to Hebrews chapter eight and verse five. He speaks now of the Old Testament rituals of that temporary law given at Mount Sinai, of that temporary tabernacle, for it was quite temporary, you know. It is built after the revelation at Mount Sinai. It is established with its intricate patterns of worship with the holy of holies and then the holy place and then the tabernacle itself, a series of barriers between a holy God and a sinful humanity.

God whose presence is in some sense localized, though the heaven of heavens can't contain him, but God whose presence is in some sense localized above the ark of the covenant, dwelling there in the holy of holies. In that place where the high priest enters one day out of the year on the Day of Atonement, these he serves... they he says in verse five, "They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven" (Hebrews 8:5).

Think about it for a moment. That tabernacle pitched under Moses' direction later put into more concrete form with stones and mortar in the temple built by Solomon, it is what?

We said a few weeks ago it is a cheap imitation. I mean, all that gold, isn't that gold valuable? No, it is a cheap imitation. All that silver, isn't it valuable? No, it is a cheap imitation. Those rich fabrics, aren't they of value and significance? They are cheap imitations. They are a copy. They are not the real thing. He says "They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven" (Hebrews 8:5).

This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle, "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" (Hebrews 8:5).

In other words what this is saying to us is this. It isn't that Jesus had to die and shed his blood in order to fulfill these human ideas of blood sacrifice created by Moses. The whole idea of the blood sacrifice is given by divine revelation. It is the divine way. It is God's way. And the reason that the blood sacrifices are set up in this revelation given to Moses on Mount Sinai is that they picture to human beings God's way.

God's way is by the shedding of blood. God's way is that sin must be removed by the shedding of blood. In other words, the reason why the Passover lamb is offered the way

that the Passover lamb is offered is that God demands a blood sacrifice. This isn't God accommodating himself to a primitive people with primitive ideas in a primitive religion as if the Old Testament is somehow or another a primitive book with primitive ideas.

No, this is a revelation on earth of a divine reality, and the divine reality is that it is only through the shedding of the blood of Jesus that we can be right with God.

So, again, it isn't that Jesus has to fulfill in order to convince people, a human scheme. It is that the human scheme set up in the tabernacle and temple is not really a human scheme at all, but a divine scheme revealed by God through Moses in order to communicate the truth of the way of salvation.

Hebrews 8:5. "They," those priests, the high priests, the offering of the blood of the bull, the offering of the blood of the goat on the Day of Atonement, "serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven" (Hebrews 8:5).

We read further over in Hebrews chapter nine verse 11, "When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation" (Hebrews 9:11).

Think of it for a moment in verse 11. Think of the beauty of Solomon's temple, the beauty of the temple that was completed in the year 516 BC after Solomon's temple had been destroyed in 586 BC is rebuilt 70 years later. Think of how that temple in the year 19 BC is remodeled extensively with this massive building program that the half Jew, half Edomite king, Herod the Great began in order to try to establish himself securely as the king of the Jews when in reality he was an illegitimate king for the Jews being a man who was not of pure blood and not a descendant of David.

Think of the glory of that temple. Yet what are we told in verse 11 of the beauty of the tabernacle and the glory of the tabernacle, of the glory of Solomon's temple, of the temple built in 516 and remodeled in 19 BC. We are told that it is inferior and imperfect.

"When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation" (Hebrews 9:11).

Verse 12. "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

I want you to think with me a for a moment of the meaning of verse 12. Why the significance of the blood of goats and bulls? It is because they are a copy and a shadow, a foreshadowing of the blood of Jesus. It is blood that is important in salvation. It is the

blood of Jesus that is important in salvation, not just the death of Jesus, the blood of Jesus.

Verse 12. “He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place.” That is he came into the very presence of God. Notice the next phrase, “once for all” (Hebrews 9:12).

We will do the Lord’s Supper in a little bit this morning. The Lord’s Supper is not a fresh sacrifice of Christ. It is a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ. Of course, it is more than that. It is a fresh and present communion with Christ. Christ is present to us through faith. Christ who through the Holy Spirit lifts us up to where he is at the right hand of the Father and brings us into his presence so that we are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus really and truly gives us himself in this supper. But the supper is not a fresh sacrifice of Christ.

This isn’t an offering up of Christ as if somehow and other the sacrifice of Christ was not complete. What we are told here in Hebrews 9:12 is that Jesus entered the very presence of God, the most holy place once for all. And notice how. By his own blood. It is the presentation of the blood of the Son of God that gives us access, that gives us intimacy, that gives us communion with God. It is the blood of Jesus.

“He entered into the most holy place once for all by his own blood having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12).

I want you to know something. If you have ever come to know the Lord Jesus Christ you can never be lost and the reason you can’t be lost is that God in the person of his son obtained for you and for me eternal redemption, by his what? His once for all sacrifice.

He goes on and says so in verse 13: “The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:13, 14).

It is blood, the blood shed under the Old Testament rituals is an outward cleansing thing. But it doesn’t cleanse the heart. It doesn’t really remove the guilt and contamination of sin. The sin issue is not settled. Sin is still present and so therefore there is the daily sacrifice and the monthly sacrifice and the sacrifice on Yom Kippur and the sacrifice at the Passover.

But Jesus dies once for all. We read further in Hebrews chapter nine of these things, verse 20.

‘He said, “This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.” In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness’ (Hebrews 9:20-22).

He is speaking of the Old Testament rituals.

Notice verse 23. “It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (Hebrews 9:23).

Do you see what he is saying? He is saying that the imitation temple, the one that was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s army in 586 BC, the imitation temple, the one destroyed under the Emperor Vespasian through his son Titus in 70 AD, the imitation tabernacle that fell in ruins all had symbolic removal of guilt by means of animal blood.

But he says to us very clearly in verse 23, “It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves” (Hebrews 9:23), the really important things, the thing that really matters, “with better sacrifices than these” (Hebrews 9:23).

Verse 24: “For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one” (Hebrews 9:24).

You mean the temple that Solomon built was a false one? In a sense, yes. If you think it is the real McCoy. It is not the real McCoy. The real McCoy is not made by man but by God himself. The thing built by men was to depict the heavenly reality, heaven itself. “For Christ,” we are told here in verse 24,

“...did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own” (Hebrews 9:24, 25).

Verse 26. “Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world” (Hebrews 9:26).

Now notice the next sentence. “But now he [that’s Jesus] has appeared” (Hebrews 9:26). Notice, again, that phrase, “...once for all” (Hebrews 9:26). Never to be repeated, never needing to be repeated. “But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages” (Hebrews 9:26). He means the consummation of history. He means the apex and zenith of all that is happening. He means that history has an omega point and the omega point comes at a hill called Calvary outside the gates of Jerusalem. That’s the climax of history. Everything else is anticlimactic until Jesus comes again.

It is the really significant thing. It is the turning point in history. It is the crossing of the Rubicon of the history of redemption. That is what the cross is.

So he tells us here in this verse, he says, “But now,” halfway through verse 26, “But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages” (Hebrews 9:26). Notice the next statement. To do what? “...to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

Do you know there are things God can't do?

You say, “Whoa. I thought God was omnipotent.”

You have to understand what omnipotence means with God. God can't lie. God never lies because God cannot lie. God can't break his Word. God doesn't sin because God cannot sin.

I want to tell you something. God can't find out my sins. Oh. There's plenty around in a sense, but what is this verse saying? It is saying that by the death of Jesus, not just by his death, but by his bloody death he has done what? He has done away with sin. He has done away with it. He has done away with it. It means that before you were ever born, before your mom or dad were ever born, before your grandparents were ever born, before your ancestors a thousand years ago were born, before you had ever committed any actual sins in a personal way. In the sight of God your sins were eradicated. They were removed. They were washed away.

So look at what he says. He did away with sins. That is why this is not a sacrificing of Christ again, but a reminder pointing us back to the once for all sacrifice of Christ because our sins have been what? Done away with.

Verse 27: “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:27, 28).

Do you see the point? It is the sacrifice of Jesus. It is the shedding of the blood of Jesus, that the shedding of the blood of Jesus actually removes our sins. Our sins are gone. They are removed. They are eradicated. There is no evidence left. There is nothing that can bring a true bill of indictment against you or me if we put our trust in Jesus because the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin because it removes our sin.

Now this is the blood of the eternal covenant we are told in Hebrews 13:20. And we have seen that that eternal covenant was made with Abraham.

Turn with me, if you will, back to Genesis chapter 15. God made his covenant with Abraham. It was an eternal covenant. Unlike the covenant with Mount Sinai that would be fulfilled, the covenant with Abraham lasts forever and it is also a covenant made with Jesus as we have seen.

Look with me if you will for a minutes at this striking passage of Scripture that I hope you become very familiar with, Genesis 15 beginning at verse one.

‘After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

‘But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir” (Genesis 15:1-3).

Now you understand what Abraham is saying. He is saying this and it is a profound thing. And you read Ecclesiastes and you get more insight into it, that great book of the Old Testament.

He says, “What is the meaning of my life? What are you going to give me? What can you possibly give me, God, that means anything to me? I mean, if you are just going to get it for... if it is a loan for an hour or a day...”

And there is a sense in which Abraham had come to understand something. He was a rich man. Unlike most rich men, Abraham really understood wealth. You know, most rich people don’t understand wealth. Abraham realized that wealth is really valuable because you are going to lose it. You can’t take it with you. And, indeed, you can’t really leave it behind in a real sense. That is what he is understanding. He is understanding that all of this wealth that he has accumulated is for nothing because he is going to leave it behind to somebody who is not even kin to him. The hired help is going to get it and so he says to God, “What can you give me?”

He is being honest. You know, there is a place to be honest with God, to argue with God. Do you know that Scripture records a number of people who argue with God? It is okay to argue. Argue respectfully. It is okay to argue with God. It is all right to give a complaint, in fact, such as: “I don’t understand this.”

And that is what Abraham is doing here. “I don’t understand this, God. What can you give me? You bless me, but it means nothing to me, God. It means nothing to me because when I die this Syrian hired servant of mine... He is a reliable servant, but I am going to leave it to him, Eliezer of Damascus. So it has no meaning. It is like a rental car. It is not mine. It really isn’t going to last. It has no significance.”

Abraham hit on a basic truth. Here it is, dear ones. If something doesn't have a value and a significance that transcends your life now it is ultimately valueless. That is what Jesus says when he says, "What does it profit a person if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36)

See, for your life to have meaning then your life has to transcend the time frame in which you live. You have to pass on a legacy that has meaning and significance.

Now in Christ we can do that. Even if you never marry and never have children you can lead people to Christ. You can point them to the Savior. You can have spiritual descendants that survive you and you can do that with your own biological descendants which ultimately you have to see those people come to the Lord for that to have significance.

And you can leave behind a great legacy of pointing people to Christ.

Well, that's Abraham's issue. I need to have something that transcends my life to give it worth and meaning. And so God says, "I am going to do that for you."

Verse four: "Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."

"He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be" (Genesis 15:4, 5).

"Your life has significance, Abraham, because I am going to give you a multitude that no one can number. Your life has significance. It has transcendent value. You are significant, Abraham."

And at that point, verse six, "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). That's an amazing statement, isn't it? That is the gospel.

Abraham wasn't right with God because of the law. Abraham was right with God because he believed the Word of God. The moment that Abraham believed the Word of God it was credited to him as righteousness. Just as your transfer funds electronically into your checking account, the moment that Abraham believed the promise of God, God transferred into his account righteousness. It is an amazing statement.

Is it the power of faith that does that? No. It is the power of God that does it as we see in the very next verse when Abraham responds which is actually not the next verse, but the next verse where Abraham speaks. Verse eight.

"But Abram said, 'O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it?'" (Genesis 15:8)

Abraham believed God, but he didn't believe him much. Abraham's faith wasn't a perfect faith. He wasn't saved by perfect faith. He had doubts. Do you ever get doubts? Have you ever been praying and just been overcome with doubt?

"Is God hearing my prayers?"

Well, maybe you are on your knees in prayer and pouring your heart out to God and the next minute, all of the sudden, you have an atheistic thought that just comes in like midnight reflux—the twelve hotdogs and a gallon of lemonade kind of reflux. That's midnight reflux. Have you ever had that?

Sweet communion, precious outpouring of your heart in prayer to God, great rising of faith and then suddenly the acid comes into your throat, pure atheism, "Where is God? How do you know there is a God?"

You need to understand something. Not everything you think do you think. Not everything that you think do you think. Those are called fiery darts. Satan can throw thoughts at you.

My point is this. Abraham isn't saved by his faith. His faith is riddled with weakness. Abraham is saved by the object of his faith, the Word of God. It is the Word of God who saves us.

And, you know, the amazing thing about God, he stoops down to where we are and meets us where we are and he helps our crippled, weak, inadequate, vacillating, sinful faith. He does. And that is what he does for Abram.

Verse nine: 'So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

'As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own"' (Genesis 15:9-13).

And he goes through it all and he says and concludes in verse 16, "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (Genesis 15:16).

Verse 17: 'When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates"' (Genesis 15:17, 18).

I want you to understand what God did here because it is so extraordinary. Bear with me for a few minutes.

Abraham, like us, is a weak man. This man who is in many ways preeminently the example of a man of faith on two occasions—not once, but twice—allowed his wife, because of his faithlessness, allows his wife to be carted off to some pagan person's harem. Yet God loves Abram and God meets Abram right where he is.

I want you to see this scene that we have just had read.

We live in a world in many ways that while it is pornographic, our world, it is also in a bizarre and perverted way, sanitized. Here is what I mean. When you stop at the fast food store and get your hamburger you don't really visualize what went into giving you that hamburger. You don't realize that there was once a sweet little calf with big brown eyes that would just melt your heart that was fed and prepared and then taken to a slaughter house where its throat was slit.

It is a brutal thing, the cost of having a hamburger. We live in a sanitized world where it is out of sight and out of mind. But it was never that way for the Jewish people. You see, kosher meat had to be prepared a certain way. That meant that the animal had to still be alive. Its throat is slit. You don't take a big hammer and hit the animal in the head and stun it. You don't break the animal's neck the way the pagans do. Kosher food demands that the animal is alive when its throat is slit, and you allow the heart of the still living animal to beat out the blood till the blood is largely removed. And finally the animal dies not of a broken neck or strangulation, but by bleeding to death. It is always that way. God reminds his people over and over again by the shedding of blood, the pain of death. Death is painful. Death is an alien to our planet. It is an enemy that we face and we are told by Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 it is the last enemy that will be destroyed. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26).

When will that be? When Jesus comes and we are caught up to meet him in the air. Think about it. Think about what Abraham did. He took a ram. He took a goat. He took a calf. And what did he do with them? Read the text. What did he do with them?

He didn't just slice their throats and let them slowly bleed. He then took his knife and it was a very hard thing to do. Having bled them out, he then cut them and broke their rib cages and split the carcasses apart. And he didn't just open them up the way a surgeon does in open heart surgery when he spreads open your rib cage. He actually took them and opened them up to the point where he severs one half of the animal from the other half so that the animal is cut in half. This is a gory and a bloody task and very difficult for Abraham. It takes him a long time. He is working by himself. He is an old man and he is working with a knife. He doesn't have an axe. He cuts and he cuts and he cuts until he completely severs the calf and he puts one half of the calf over here and the other half of

the calf over here, and then he does the same with the goat and then he does the same thing with the ram, and blood is everywhere.

Have you ever smelled a lot of blood? I have seen a lot of people die. I have been with people when they die a number of times. I have been with people as they bled sometimes to the point of death. I will never forget one evening being with a person in a car wreck. I saw it happen. I waited until the ambulance came. I saw the blood coming out. Another guy and I held and kept the pressure on so he wouldn't bleed to death.

But then I remember the soggy, bloody seat of the car as the blood soaked in and saturated the car seat. I have been around death a lot. And dead blood is foul. It is repulsive because the life of the flesh is in the blood. And I want you to understand the repugnance and repulsiveness of this scene that is depicted for us in Genesis 15.

Three animals are killed. The birds are killed as well, but they are not cut in half. But the big animals are cut in half. It is time consuming, and blood is everywhere, and blood is on the hands of Abraham. He didn't have a sink and soap to wash up. He wipes his hands in the sand and uses the sand to cleanse the blood. But the stink of death is there all around him. The stink of death has begun to go up into the air. That is why the buzzards are coming down and the hawks and the eagles are coming to prey on the carcass, to eat it. But Abraham shoos them away.

And then God causes a deep sleep to come on Abram. And something extraordinary happens, but I have to give you a bit of archaeological background. In the world of the second millennium before Christ, in the ancient Near East when people made treaties, they did things like this. They didn't just kill animals. They placed an animal half on one side and half on the other and then those who made the treaty walked between the pieces—the kings and the vassals, the suzerains and the vassals, the one nation and the other nation, the one party of the treaty and the other party of the treaty. They walked between the pieces of the slaughtered animals, the animals that had one limb ripped apart from the other limb, that had been torn to bits, as it were, and they walked between the pieces.

And in the language of the ancient Near East what this meant was: May this be done to me if this covenant is not fulfilled. May this be done to me if I violate the terms of this treaty. I swear before the gods that I will fulfill my part of this contract, and if I do not, may I be treated as these animals have been treated. May they tear me apart. May they rip my throat apart. May they rip my ribcage apart. May they split my backbone and put one side of me on one side and one on the other. May I be damned.

And so a deep and terrifying sleep, a supernatural sleep comes over Abraham and he sees this.

Verse 17.

“When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram” (Genesis 15:17).

Do you know what this is? That is a theophany. In Jesus of Nazareth, God became flesh. Here, 4000 years ago, in the desert sand God comes as a smoking fire pot. That is, God manifested himself in the form of this smoking fire pot.

Do you understand the significance of it? Abraham is entirely passive. Unlike the treaties in the ancient Near East where both parties of the covenant walk between the bloody pieces of the slaughtered animal, only one party goes between the pieces.

Do you see that Abraham is entirely passive in this? He does nothing to secure the blessings of this covenant. He does nothing to enact it, to inaugurate it. He does nothing to see it fulfilled. He is simply a witness. God is the one who acts unilaterally. God himself does this. God himself in the smoking firepot passes between the pieces. As God passes between the pieces God is saying of himself, “May I be damned. May I be damned. May I be slaughtered. May I go to hell, if this covenant isn’t fulfilled.”

Do you understand this? It is an act of imprecation. It is the almighty God calling down on his own head the curse of the failure to keep this covenant. It is God unilaterally, by himself, absolutely taking total, full, not partial, but absolute responsibility to secure that this happens. That is what this is.

In our sanitized world, we are apt to miss the import of it. It is God, God who acts with Abraham in an absolute way.

Read in the light of the treaties of the ancient Near East verse 17 takes on the profoundest meaning.

“When the sun had set and darkness had fallen,” God in the imagery, in the vision of “a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces” (Genesis 15:17). On that day, Yahweh, the LORD, made a covenant with Abram, a bloody thing.

The path that God treads is a path of blood, blood in the soil, blood in the sand. It is blood that reminds us of the cry of Abel. God said, “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10).

What did the blood of Abel cry out? “Avenge me.”

So man has been crying for thousands of years, “Avenge me. Avenge me.”

But this, Genesis 15 is so different. For in this it is not blood saying, "Avenge me." But it is saying, "I swear to God. May I be damned by God if this covenant isn't fulfilled and realized. May I have my blood shed. May I be slaughtered. May I be as these animals."

Four thousand years ago, God almighty comes down under the symbolism of a smoking firepot, and he says, "May I be damned. May I be slaughtered. May I be torn asunder. May my blood be shed to guarantee this covenant with you, Abraham, this eternal covenant with you."

It is the calling down of judgments on himself, not on others. And it puts the cross in a totally different light. The cross is not some novel thing. The cross is God fulfilling his commitment from 2,000 years earlier when he makes that commitment to Abraham and says, "Abraham, I swear by myself, by my own life, the life of God. I will fulfill my promise to you."

It was an eternal covenant and it was made with Abraham and it was made with Jesus. And it was made with the blood of Jesus. See, it is an amazing thing to think about, when we think about the death of Jesus.

Jesus is a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, a real human being, just like you and me except he never sinned. But in addition to being human, Jesus is actually God. At the moment of conception, God almighty joins himself with a human cell, and that is the Lord Jesus, God and man. And so who is born that Christmas morn? God is born, not in his divine nature, but in his human nature. God isn't born. But he who is both God and man was born.

Who died on the cross? God died on the cross. In his divine nature? No. The universe would have ceased to exist so that moment and time would have imploded on itself and there would be nothing. God did not die in his divine nature on the cross. But it is more than a man who dies on the cross. It is he who is both fully God and fully human in his one person who dies on the cross. And I don't understand that. And I can't explain it. But it tells me this, that what God prophecies to Abraham in the smoking firepot between the slaughtered, bloody, gory pieces of animal, God himself fulfills on the cross. And he bleeds. He dies. He is slaughtered. He is sacrificed. It isn't just the pouring out of his life. It is the pouring out of his life in this ghastly, gory way, in this way that is repulsive, in a way that my sermon today has struck some of you offensively because I have dwelt for a time on the gory side, the stench of dead blood. The cross was such a gory place, of blood shed, of a place where other people had been killed, where their blood had been shed, where buckets and buckets of blood had been poured out as criminal after criminal had been crucified, and now the Son of God mounts the cross and his blood, too, is shed from wounds that seep blood and finally gush out as the spear is thrust into his side and gushes out the blood and the water. That most odious and repulsive of things, blood, that

dead, slick and foul smelling thing. That is your only hope. It is my only hope. For it is the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sins.

And Jesus wants us regularly to be reminded of it. That is why he tells us, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

Think of it. Most of you have only had blood in moderation, from a distance in a sanitized way, not as I have seen it, not as I have smelled it. That is what we are brought back to in this cup, an odious and repugnant thing that assaults our senses at every level, that is something we want to be pushed away from. But it is held out to us Sunday after Sunday.

This cup is my blood of the new covenant. This cup is my blood of the new covenant. All of you drink it. Drink blood. Drink blood. Drink blood. This cup is the new covenant in my blood. It is the eternal covenant. It will never pass away. It began before there was time with Christ. And it will go on forever. For the blood will never lose its power. When the blood of Jesus is applied to the soul, every last damned spot is gone.

Before we take the Lord's Supper, I am reminded of that scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. We see Lady Macbeth, having plotted the murder of the king. We see her washing her hands in water, trying to get away from the blood. She is like we are, feeling guilty and trying this and trying that to find absolution, trying this and trying that to get away from guilt.

"If only I had never slept with that person and broken my marriage vow."

"If only I had never stolen that money."

"If only I hadn't had that car wreck and killed that person."

"If only... if only... if only... if only... if only..." All the "if onlys" of life.

And people run from one thing or another to get rid of it. "If only... If only I hadn't been caught."

And maybe you weren't caught, but you still have the "if only." And you are like Lady Macbeth washing, "Out, damned spot!" (William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, scene 1)

"What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." And we are reminded of it so in this cup. "This is the new covenant in my blood. All of you drink it."