

“There’s Power in the Blood”

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Text: Hebrews 13:20-21



There’s power in the blood. Let us pray.

Lord, we know that you sacrificed so much for us; priest and sacrifice, sacrificed and Father of the sacrificed, judge and judged. Father, by the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to draw on the power of your blood this morning so that we may revel in your covenant and it would be revealed to us and we would know you. We ask this trusting in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

When I was a youth pastor, I got up early one morning to pray at the hospital with a teenage girl who was having a particularly difficult surgery. The surgery was a long one and while I was in there praying with her, a doctor whose specialty was recycling blood came into talk about how they would replenish her blood supply during the surgery. The doctor kept going on and on about blood this and blood that and the blood and the blood and, maybe because it was early in the morning, or maybe because I had not eaten, or maybe because I just don’t handle blood very well, I began to pass out. Mind you, there was no sight of blood, just talk of blood. The doctor noticed, the mother and father noticed, the 13 year old girl getting ready to go into an eleven hour long surgery noticed. Politely I excused myself and managed to skulk my way to the bathroom, leaning against the cinder block wall for support. It was not exactly a confidence builder for this little girl before she went into major surgery to see a man of God nearly pass out on the cold tile floor at the very mention of it.

I know more than a few people who get queasy when you talk about blood in sermons, especially Jesus’ blood, Divine blood. Blood is messy. Blood is costly. Blood is offensive. I know a lot of people, and I have done it myself, who have walked out of a movie that was too bloody. I actually passed out and woke up when the credits rolled. But it’s practically the same thing. When Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* came out a few years ago, a lot of Christians did not see and still will not see it because it is so bloody. Most denominations took all the blood hymns out of the hymnbook. When I went to seminary a required and widely used theological text, required for two of my classes made this outrageous claim, “There is nothing redemptive in the blood of the cross.”

There is something about Jesus’ blood that we want to avoid. It just seems so...personal. After all, if God’s only Son, had to suffer to redeem us, if His body had to be broken and bruised and His blood spilt on the hard Judean ground, maybe this sin thing is a bigger deal than we thought. Maybe I really am a hardened sinner. Maybe sin isn’t something we can just explain away as an understandable indiscretion or atone for by going on a mission trip or serving on a Church committee.



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Hebrews Chapter 9 teaches, “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.” (v. 22)

Now, we are really getting offensive. Yes—we are sinners. Yes we have, every one of us, fallen short of the glory of God. Yes—the only means of remedy is Jesus’ blood. As the self-righteous 60’s era bumper sticker says, “If you’re not outraged you’re not paying attention.” This idea should make us theologically and even spiritually queasy. We are outraged and queasy and we question until we hold in tension the terrible truth of our circumstance and the terrific triumph of Jesus’ Lordship over our circumstance.

There is a great grace here that we cannot overstate. You see, our works fall short, desperately short, but because Jesus has shed His blood, we need not worry about works. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice so we do not have to worry about being good enough.

Watchman Nee put it like this: God keeps short accounts, and we are made nigh by the blood every day, every hour, and every minute. It never loses its efficacy as our ground of access if we lay hold of it. When we enter the Most Holy Place, on what ground dare we enter but by the Blood?¹

Do you remember in elementary school and junior high how people would trade items from their lunch? You could easily trade chocolate milk for say a cookie. On pizza day, that good-old fashioned, cardboard crust square pizza, there was a lot of swapping going on. Pizza for chips. Chips for a ham and cheese sandwich. A ham and cheese sandwich for a Twinkie or a Ho Ho. It was like an Arab bazaar.

No one ever traded green beans. It did not matter how many green beans you had to trade. You could have a palate—brought in on a forklift. It did not matter the quality of green beans. Even the very best green beans, Del Monte, with the juicy piece of bacon cooked in among their green goodness, was not a tradable item. They simply fell short.

Theologically speaking, and this, by the way, is why you call a pastor with degrees from three different theological schools, good works in the heavenly court and green beans around the school lunch table have a lot in common. You cannot trade them for anything.

However, we miss something very important if we just think that the blood only wipes away our sins. That’s only the beginning of the fun. God’s covenant with His children, written in the blood of His Son, His only Son means that no matter how far we fall, He will lift us up on eagles wings. No matter how far we stray, the Great Shepherd, will chase us down and carry us back in his arms. No matter how terrifically we injure ourselves, the Great Physician will knit us back together.

And then the Holy Spirit pounced, “So your sin is greater than Jesus love and Jesus’ blood? That’s the most arrogant thing I have ever heard,” Someone who was using my voice said.

He looked at me and said with a smile, the first one I had seen that morning, “Yes. I suppose it is. What do I do?” It’s not about what we do. It’s about what Jesus did. And it’s about what He will do.

There is power in the blood.
In Jesus’ blood, sinners becomes saved.
In Jesus’ blood, sinners become sent.
In Jesus’ blood, suffering becomes sanctifying.
In Jesus’ blood, our pain becomes our passion.
In Jesus’ blood, wounds become world-changing.
In Jesus’ blood, gifts become instruments of grace.
In Jesus’ blood, failure becomes faith.
In Jesus’ blood, fear becomes fortitude.
In Jesus’ blood, there is promise and possibility and potentiality.
And power.

¹ Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Carole Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1957) p.12-13.

² Gregory Nazianzen, *Flight To Pontus*, Book II.

³ Horace Bushnell, “Our Obligations to the Dead,” delivered July 26, 1865 in New Haven, CT to the Yale Alumni Association in honor of the alumni who died in the Civil War.

Notes:



cents but she did it with the right heart. If you are excited about the campaign, there are ways that you can give time—through helping it to come off, through being a part of the Capital Campaign Team. When we make improvements to the building we will create opportunities for people to give their time by coming in to do demolition work or paint or pull wires or clean up. Most of all, and I mean this, you can pray. Prayer is the most powerful weapon we have.

Any Church financial campaign done right is not about money. It's about heart. Money is just a tool; a tool that God uses to build the faith of His people. Raising \$1.2 million without raising our faith will be an abject failure. If we raise 1.2 cents but and turn our hearts toward God, it will be an amazing grace-filled success.

The reason for this is because we are a building a temple here. But not one like the \$170 billion edifice Solomon built. We are not building a temple made of cedar and gold and silver and bronze. We are building a temple in our hearts—and we are using something much more costly, the blood of God's Son, His only Son.

Jesus is the cornerstone—but we are the living stones, joined together on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets mortared in together by the Holy Spirit.

And our call, as living stones of the temple of the Living God, our petrifying call, is to bleed, to sacrifice beyond what is comfortable, to give beyond what is convenient, to go beyond and above and afar what most what would do.

Horace Bushnell once preached: "Without shedding of blood, there is almost nothing great in the world, or to be expected from it—for the life is in the blood—all life. Sentiments must be born that are children of thunder; there must be heroes and martyr testimonies, else there will only be mediocrities, insipidities, and common-place men..."³

I suppose the question for all of us is do we want to be mediocre, common place or do we want to be witnesses, heroes and children of thunder. "Impossible?" you say. There is power in the blood.

Two weeks ago, a man came into my office—a member of this Church who I had not seen for a little while. We talked around for a little bit—sports, work, school, friends and then he finally said, "I don't know who I am anymore. I have turned my back on God. I am lost."

As we talked more and more he listed of all the things he used to do for the Church and all the ways he had been involved and now one by one they had fallen away and he was left with nothing but memory of better days. "I can't believe after what I have spent the last few years doing that God would want anything to do with me."

The ultimate purpose of God's covenant is to restore our purpose to "equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever." *Hebrews 13:21*

There is a phrase repeated often in Scripture. "The life is in the blood." Genesis tells us that there is one penalty for sin and that penalty is death. If we want to know life, we will seek it in the blood. Leviticus 17:11 talking about the temple put it like this, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life."

Years later, Jesus would talk about His own sacrifice in these terms: Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." *John 6:53-56*

Whenever the Bible speaks of life, God means more than mere existence. He does not simply mean fogging a mirror but an abundant, full, life of meaning and consequence—a powerful life; a life where we are restored, where we are made potent through Jesus living in us to do what is pleasing in God's sight, the One to whom is all the glory in the universe forever and ever.

However, what is pleasing to God is often petrifying to us. When God called Gideon, he was just a young man, living in his father's house, the youngest and the least of all his brothers, and a member of the least of all the tribes of Israel. He was nobody. In fact he was less than nobody. God's people were being oppressed by the Midianites. They were living in the mountains, making their homes in caves and dens, scratching out a living from the rocks. The Midianites stole all their food, not even leaving enough for them to feed their sheep or oxen or donkeys.

When God called the young nobody Gideon to beat back the Midianites and set His people free from their tyranny, Gideon was hiding the family's crop from the Midianites. When God called Gideon, Gideon jumped right up and said, "I am your man! I am more than capable and qualified Lord. I am so glad you decided to put my obviously exhaustive talents to use. Here I am Lord. Send me!"

Uh, not exactly.

When the Angel of the Lord stood in front of Gideon and told him he was God's instrument to set His people free, Gideon looked around because he was sure God was talking to someone else. The Bible teaches that Gideon said, "Please Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my Father's house." *Judges 6:15* And then he asked for a sign just to make sure he had heard God correctly.

No true call from God is devoid of fear. If it does not fill us with fear, the chances are it is not God speaking. The first time Jesus sent His disciples out He sent them away with these words, "Behold, I am sending you out as a sheep midst wolves." *Matthew 10:16*

This is not exactly a Knute Rockne-esque pep talk. You can almost see the disciples tugging at their neckties.

What is pleasing to God is often petrifying to us. God called Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the great Fathers of the early Church, to be a pastor in his early thirties. The only problem was Gregory did not feel qualified. So instead of being ordained on Christmas Day as was planned, he ran. He took off and lived with a friend in the city of Pontus along the seaside in modern-day Turkey. Gregory came back a few months later and preached his first sermon, to a very skeptical church, on Easter morning.

Gregory came back when he found the manner and the means to face his fears. He preached these words: "Of external warfare I am not afraid, nor of that wild beast, and fullness of evil, who has now arisen against the churches, though he may threaten fire, sword, wild beasts, precipices, chasms; though he may show himself more inhuman than all previous madmen, and discover fresh tortures of greater severity. I have one remedy for them all, one road to victory; I will glory in Christ."²

What is pleasing to God is often petrifying to us. But there is one remedy, one road to victory—to glory in Christ. What is pleasing to God's sight for His Church, the Presbyterian Church of Stanley? It is something that is petrifying to at least a few of us.

Last week your Session, after examining over 150 Capital Campaign survey responses, discerned the Father's call to extend, renew and re-craft the current Capital Campaign this fall. Let me start by saying thank you. Thank you for your generosity. We have paid off nearly three-quarters of a million dollars worth of debt in the past three years and saved millions of dollars of interest. Paying down debt has allowed us to make great strides in our two core purposes of discipleship and mission. It has taken some extraordinary giving and extraordinary effort, we have had balanced budgets the last three years. I do not know of many congregations who can say that.

This fall our hope is that some of you will make new commitments, we hope some of you will extend your commitments, we hope that some of you who made commitments and were hit hard financially the last few years will be able to use the extra time to fulfill your pledge.

Thanks to God's faithfulness and your generosity, we have only about \$950,000 left to go on our debt, down from nearly \$1.75 million just three years ago.

We have beautified and increased the functionality of God's house here, improving an already great tool for His Kingdom. I am so excited, as I know are many of you, to see the remodeled chancel later this year.

Where I come from you don't stop working when you feel like it. You stop working when the job is done. And we still have work to do. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to admonish the Galatians: And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. (6:9)

We need to move the nursery upstairs from its current location down in the basement. This will let us put our best foot forward with new and young families. You can tell a lot about a congregation from their nursery and although we have excellent staff, a windowless room in the basement does not send the message we want to send to new families. Right now we have a group working on a design for that space and we will have a finished design and a firm cost in a few weeks.

This is not our only need—some day our 31 year old organ, for which we have to scour the junkyard to get replacement parts, is going to finally give out. We have a lot of siding on the building that needs to be replaced. We need to establish an emergency fund.

Clearly on the Capital Campaign survey the economy was cited as the overwhelming factor that might cause an anemic response to any campaign. It is an understatement to say that the economic times are not ideal. Why not wait until better days?

The Bible teaches that debt is bondage and when any person, institution or nation carries excessive debt, it limits their options. Debt also presumes upon the future. These are uncertain times that we live in, we don't know if there is going to be inflation or deflation or both, we presume that many of us will have to pay new taxes. We don't know what the stock market or unemployment will do.

I believe a debt-free Church will have incredible opportunities for ministry in the next few years. I would so love for this Church to be in the position to be even more generous than we have been able to be. A debt-free Church in a debt-ridden economy can be a powerful tool for the Kingdom.

When we glory in Christ, we don't complain about the times. We change the times. When we seek first to please God we don't fear failure. We fear not being faithful.

We did the capital campaign to see what kind of Church we were, coming off a long difficult period. As we move ahead to extend, renew and re-craft the capital campaign, I believe we do it to see what kind of Church we can be.

Some of you simply will not be able to give financially as you would like. It goes without saying that is okay. We are not imposing a tax. The one person singled out by Jesus for her giving was the poor widow who gave only a few