

Blood

Opening Hymn: #290 — Cleansing Fountain

There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

Eighteenth century poet William Cowper ["Cooper"] wrote these words. Our hymn book contains four of his original six stanzas. It omits his final stanza which reads...

Lord, I believe thou has prepared (unworthy though I be)
For me a blood-bought, free reward, a golden harp for me!
'Tis strung and tuned for endless years, and formed by power divine,
To sound in God the Father's ears, no other name but Thine.

Even without the "golden harp" stanza, this hymn has not been one of my favorites. Picture before your mental vision a fountain filled with blood? Can you imagine anyone plunged into it and coming up cleansed? Blood **stains** what it touches, it doesn't cleanse.

Now that I know more about blood, I feel differently. And it is well I do since the Scriptures more frequently use phrases like "**blood** of Christ" or "**blood** of the lamb" than phrases like "cross of Christ" or "death of Christ."

Life is in the Blood

Leviticus 17:14 "The life of all flesh is the blood thereof."

We can live a few weeks without food, a few days without water, and a few minutes without oxygen. Oxygen from the air enters the lungs where it is absorbed by the blood and carried to even the tiniest recesses in the body. The brain has the greatest need for the oxygen carried by the blood. If something should happen to cut off its supply, brain cells begin to die almost immediately. In minutes you can be "brain dead," and incapable of ever living again though some of your body organs might still function. Truly **life** is in the **blood**. Lose one and you automatically lose the other.

I read about a young man who resisted family pressure to become a doctor because he hated the sight of blood. He decided to become a missionary like his father, but his training required some basic health education in a local hospital. He tells of a time when a young accident victim was brought in. Loss of blood had turned her skin so pale she looked like she were made of wax. He could detect no pulse and was sure she was dead. But experienced medical people quickly began transfusing blood into her. Shortly he detected a faint pulse. A pinkness touched her lips. Her eyelids fluttered. Eventually she opened her eyes ... and asked for water. He says this experience so deeply affected him he lost his aversion to blood and changed his career. He entered medical school and became a doctor. (*In His Image*, Dr. Paul Brand, Zondervan, 1984. pp. 53,54)

Blood has always had sacred associations. A person's word might be considered enough to make a contract binding, but an oath really sealed it. Thus we read about the time the daughter of Herodias danced before king Herod. He was so pleased that ...

Matthew 14:7-9 ... he promised **with an oath** to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: **nevertheless for the oath's sake**, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

About the only thing Herod could have done to make his verbal contract more binding would have been to slaughter an animal and walk between its pieces. The shed blood of an animal made a contract absolutely binding.

Jeremiah 34:18 I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof ... [I will give them into the hands of their enemies]

God here reminds the people how seriously they treat covenants they sign among themselves when sealed with blood sacrifices. The blood of calves and goats was sprinkled on all the people when God made his covenant with them (see Hebrews 9:19). Shed blood makes a covenant binding. Yet it was the same old story: making a vow is easy; keeping a vow is hard. When the people ignored their vows, God delivered them into the hands of their enemies.

The wonderful covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15 was solemnized by the sacrifice of animals. Abraham saw a representation of God as a “smoking furnace and a burning lamp” passing between the pieces of the sacrificed animals. God followed the custom Abraham associated with the ritual that made a contract absolutely binding. In this case God promised to bless Abraham by giving him land and a seed.

There is one place in Scripture where blood became associated with death. It was the first of the ten plagues that came upon Pharaoh to force him to let the nation of Israel go:

Exodus 7:20,21 And [Aaron] lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. And the fish that were in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

There is a difference of opinion about whether the Nile became real blood. But whether it was literal blood or only appeared blood-red makes no difference. This river could no longer support life and it was dramatic! The Egyptians considered the Nile as their special treasure. Ezekiel 29:3 quotes Pharaoh claiming he made the river himself. This first plague showed the Egyptians that the Nile was not theirs but God's, and he could take away its life-giving properties whenever he pleased.

In the New Testament Jesus' first recorded miracle was turning water into wine. There that blood-red liquid is associated with life and joy: it occurred during a marriage at Cana (John 2: 11).

Cleansing Blood

Blood as a symbol of a sacrificed life can be seen in the blood applied to the lintel and two side posts of the Israelite houses prior to the passage of the death angel through the land of Egypt. It is also found in various sacrifices associated with the Tabernacle. The first time blood is specifically mentioned as a

cleansing agent is in Leviticus 14 where the priest performs a ritual for someone whose leprosy has disappeared. The priest kills one bird, dips the second bird in the blood and lets it go. Then...

Leviticus 14:7 He shall sprinkle [the blood of the bird that was killed] upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.

Associating blood with cleansing is found in a well-known text about the Great Company:

Rev. 7:14 These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

It's not just robes that are made white in this blood; as we sang in our opening hymn, sinners plunged into this blood lose all their guilty stains.

I'm sure you all knew that blood carries oxygen and nutrients to all the cells in your body, that it provides nourishment for your body. But that's not all it does. Blood also cleanses the body by carrying off toxic wastes like carbon dioxide and uric acid generated by the muscles and other body processes, and brings those toxins to organs that can dump them outside the body. Pump up a blood pressure cuff on your upper arm, and cut off that arm's blood supply. Then use that hand to do something repetitive, like driving staples into paper. It's easy at first but soon the pain becomes so intense you can't continue. Remove the pressure cuff and sweet relief floods your arm as the blood rushes in to carry off the wastes generated by the muscles in that arm. Is there anything comparable to this function in the Body of Christ? There is, and in this case the toxic waste is called "sin."

1 John 1:7 If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son **cleanseth** us from all sin.

What do you think about this Scripture? Is it a one-time thing that happened when you presented yourself in consecration? Perhaps we need to define sin.

Mark 7:21-23 (Phillips) It is from inside, from men's hearts and minds, that **evil thoughts** arise—lust, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, arrogance and folly! All these evil things come from inside a man and make him unclean!

Just because you aren't guilty of every sin listed doesn't mean you're free from sin. Can you honestly say you never have evil thoughts? These make you unclean, a condition that cries out for cleansing.

1 John 1:8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

How can we be cleansed from the toxic wastes of sin within our mortal body that are a byproduct of everything we do? Answer: the blood of Christ:

1 John 1:7 [repeating the reading] If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the **blood of Jesus Christ** his Son **cleanseth** us from all sin. ... [vs. 9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our Lord is ready to cleanse us, but note the important stipulation introduced by the little word "if."
"If we confess our sins, he [will] cleanse us."

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Rev. 3:4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

The death of Jesus Christ paid the ransom for father Adam and provides us what has been called the “robe of Christ’s righteousness.” As we sojourn in this world, things happen of which we do not approve. These have been called “spots on our robes.” The few in Sardis who did not defile their garments are the real footstep followers of the Master. It is not because they are perfect. They are as imperfect as anyone. But they confess their shortcomings and the cleansing power of the blood restores their robe to sparkling white.

“Drinking” Blood

When Gentiles accepted the gospel message, some claimed they had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. This controversy became so divisive it was felt that only the apostles could settle it once and for all. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem and in Acts chapter 15 we have the account of the proceedings. James stands up and summarizes what they decided. He lists four prohibitions for Gentile Christians, two of which concern matters of blood:

Acts 15:29 (Phillips) ... avoid what has been sacrificed to idols, tasting blood, eating meat which has been strangled, and sexual immorality. Keep yourselves clear of these things and you will make good progress.

Jewish law prohibited eating any meat unless the blood had been thoroughly drained from it. So a faithful Jew would not eat the meat from an animal that died by strangulation, from natural causes, or by a predatory beast. So did the Jerusalem apostles pick and choose among the law’s prohibitions when they said Gentiles should abstain from blood and meat containing blood? Not at all. They were reiterating a rule God gave the entire human race as represented in Noah and his family immediately after the flood:

Genesis 9:3,4 Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you ... But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

Remembering how ingrained this rule was within the Jewish community, consider how shocking, almost revolting these words of Jesus would be:

John 6:53-55 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, **and drink his blood**, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, **and drinketh my blood**, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and **my blood is drink indeed**. He that eateth my flesh, and **drinketh my blood**, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

No Jew drank blood. Only savages and the uncircumcised did that. For Jesus to say this was too much. In verse 66 we read that after this “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” Why did Jesus say this in a way that would offend the largest number of people? Why did he not say,

“Eat my flesh and **pour out** my blood,” or “Eat my flesh and **sprinkle** my blood”? That would be compatible to what was done in all the typical sacrifices.

Jesus knew exactly what he was doing: he was transforming the symbol. God said to Noah, “If you drink the blood of a lamb, the life of the lamb enters into you. Don’t do it!” Jesus was saying, “If you drink my blood, my life will enter into you. Do it!” It is not just his past life and death that is so valuable to us; he is the continuing source of our life.

Matthew 26:27,28 He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all, of it; **for this is my blood** ... which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Later that night he used a different metaphor to show how our life comes from him:

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

A vine is a picture of our life in Christ. As physical life is sustained by the circulation of blood and a branch lives because of the circulation of sap, our spiritual life survives only if it is constantly nourished by Christ. True, his death was only hours away when Jesus told his closest associates to drink his “blood” from the cup, but a marvelous, spiritual resurrection was just a few days away. Such a spiritual life will be ours also if we are faithful:

2 Tim. 2:11 If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.

Defending the Body

The job of bringing nutrients to and carting off waste products from the body’s cells is done by the red blood cells. Blood also contains white blood cells and these defend the body against infection. Amazingly they have a kind of “memory” about past enemies and if seen again, they instantly begin to fight them. This is why vaccination is so powerful. If you deliberately infect someone with a benign form of a virus, the body will memorize its structure so it can attack it if necessary in the future. Edward Jenner, in the mid-1700s learned that those who were infected with cowpox never got smallpox, a disease that kills 30% of those it infects. One smallpox-infected wounded warrior from Cortes’ army is said to have been responsible for the death of four million Aztecs over a two-year period. The last known smallpox death occurred in 1978 and today general vaccination against this disease has stopped. That brings us to the subject of overcoming:

Rev. 12:11 And they overcame him **by the blood** of the Lamb.

If you successfully overcome a disease, your blood changes in subtle ways so it can efficiently fight that disease in the future. Its “memory” is in the form of antibodies and these can be transferred to those who were never infected. This is done by separating the “serum” from whole blood and putting it in the body of a recipient. The new host body begins to duplicate those antibodies and is thus prepared to overcome and survive when assaulted by that disease.

Jesus was tempted by the Adversary to take an easy way to success, power, or the satisfaction of his own human needs. He was frequently tired, frustrated, tempted, and abandoned. But he overcame all of these besetments without using any supernatural power.

Heb. 2:18 (Jerusalem Bible) Because he has himself been through temptation, he is able to help others who are tempted.

Heb. 4:15 (Jerusalem) For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin.

When we “drink his blood” at the Memorial celebration, we accept his invitation to share his life, to use his strength as we encounter the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He previously overcame these and with his help, we can too. In fact John tells us that because of what is within us, we are overcomers:

1 John 4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them [false prophets—see vs. 1]: because **greater is he that is in you**, than he that is in the world.

Remember that accident victim who was thought to be dead by the missionary trainee. It was life-giving blood that saved her. Likewise the blood of Christ brings us back from the dead, the dead life we inherited from father Adam:

Col. 2:13 (Jerusalem) You were dead, because you were sinners... He [God] has brought you to life with him, he has forgiven us all our sins.

“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). There is no other New Testament picture which expresses this concept so perfectly as does blood. We drink Christ’s blood in symbol at the Memorial.

One of the early church fathers described what Christ has done by saying, “Jesus Christ became what we are ... to make us what he is.” [Barclay, *Letters of John*, p. 9]

Since we all know from whom we have received life, why do we need to have a ceremony? It is a physical expression of a spiritual reality. The ceremony keeps the memory bright. Whenever we partake of the bread and drink of the cup, let us see the spiritual reality of Christ who energizes us to fight off sins which so easily beset us, who nourishes us, and who purges us of toxic sins. This is “The Mighty to Save” to use Isaiah’s words:

Isaiah 63:1 Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

Opening Hymn: #9 — The Mighty to Save

"The Lamb's Wife"

The Bride of a spotless Lamb to be,
 Thy Bride with garments clean,
 From every spot and wrinkle free—
 Teach me what this doth mean.

The cleansing blood of Calvary
 Can wash me white as snow;
 But how can all the wrinkles be
 Removed, Lord, I would know?

I've seen the linen, Lord, made white,
 All free from spot or stain
 And yet, not faultless in Thy sight,
 For wrinkles still remain.

And 'neath the heated iron,
 Lord, I've seen the linen made
 So smooth that ne'er was royal board
 With choicer linen laid.

Is this the way that I must be
 Made meet to be His Bride?
 Cleansed by His blood—from wrinkles freed
 By furnace heat applied?

Then let pain's furnace fires glow,
 Let sorrow light her flame,
 If 'neath the heat and ache below
 I still may bear Thy Name.

No pain too great if only this
 The glorious outcome be:
 We the Lamb's Wife in spotless white
 Throughout eternity!

—*The Herald*, March 1943 [no author given]