

A Bowl Full of Blood and “Lettuce”

25th Sun. after Pent. – 11/14/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Hebrews 10:11-25 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 14, “...by a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

Introduction

⌘ I would imagine that most of you are a little bit curious about the sermon title. What in the world Pastor, does this Reading about Jesus as our great high priest have to do with “A Bowl Full of Blood and ‘Lettuce’”?

→ Well, the first part of the Reading, verses 11-18 are connected to the blood that the Old Testament priests would collect from the daily sacrifices and then place upon themselves to purify them for their service in the LORD’s Temple. Even more though is the blood that the High Priest would take from the sacrifice of a bull and a goat on the Day of Atonement each year to sprinkle upon the Ark of the Covenant as a reoccurring act showing the people the seriousness of their sin. More on that in just a moment.

→ The second part of the Reading, verses 19-25 uses the idea of “lettuce” and the original Greek grammar of the New Testament to encourage and motivate all of us as Christians to respond favorably to the bloody sacrifice of our Savior today and every day until He returns to take us with Him to our eternal home.

I. Christ’s Work vs. the Earthly Priests’ Work

⌘ Verse 11 begins with a statement that certainly calls into question the reason for centuries of sacrifices offered by thousands of earthly priests over the span of approximately 1400 years in the Old Testament. It says, “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins”.

→ That really begs the question, “If all of those sacrifices could ‘never’ take away sins, then why did God command that they do them in the first place?” Think of it this way: God had the big picture; the end goal of His Son, Jesus as the once “for all time...single sacrifice for sins” (v.12) in mind all along. But before that saving act could take place, He needed to teach His people about a whole host of things so that Jesus’ sacrifice could make sense to them.

→ You see, they did not understand the seriousness of their sins, for example, because they lived among people where sinful behavior and attitudes were the norm. So He instituted the bloody sacrifice of animals, where the guilty person had to lay his hand upon the animal and then kill it himself, to teach that the guilt of sin requires death.

→ And so the reoccurrence of sin each day by each person required more death and more blood to be shed.

⌘ All of this served as an elaborate and enormous illustration from God for His people, pointing forward to God’s promise that His Son would one day come, born of a virgin, born as the Son of God in human flesh and blood, but unlike all other human flesh in one very important way.

→ He was without sin! This meant that He had no guilt. Therefore no sacrifice; no death was required for His life.

⌘ This is why verse 14 says of Jesus, “For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified”.

→ 1 Timothy 2:5-6 says, “There is one God, and there is one mediator (i.e. priest) between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all...”. There we are told of the wondrous mystery regarding Jesus and His nature. When He willingly went to the cross in your place and mine, He did so simultaneously as The great High Priest offering the perfect sacrifice for all people and as the perfect sacrifice Himself; giving His own life; shedding His own blood to pay for and cover over your guilt and my guilt and the guilt of every sinner of all time, once for all!

✘ Just before He died Jesus proclaimed, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30). In verses 8-9 before our text, we’re told that Jesus’ sacrifice indeed did away with the need for anymore sacrifices for sin. God’s law requiring them had been fulfilled because the penalty of death had finally been paid by someone who did not require a sacrifice for Himself and His own sin.

→ It is for this reason that verses 17-18 connect Jesus’ sacrifice to our forgiveness of sins. In verse 17 he quotes the LORD’s promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:34, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more”, and then he explains in verse 18, “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin”.

→ In Jesus’ sacrifice friends, your sins are all forgiven. They have been cast into the deepest depths of the sea (Micah 7:19) and there is no longer a need for blood sacrifices to be made.

II. This Determines the What, How & Why of our Lives

✘ And that bloody salvation work of Jesus changes everything, for the people of His day, the people before His day and everyone today as well. But there is still one similarity – it’s still all about the blood!

→ You see, the Temple was where God promised to be present among His people, just as He promises to be still today here in this holy place. But before Christ’s sacrifice there was a heavy thick curtain that separated the Ark of the Covenant over which God said would be His “Mercy Seat” or throne of grace from the people and the impurity of their sin.

→ The only way the High Priest could safely enter through that curtain and into God’s presence was by the blood of the sacrifice that he carried with him and sprinkled over the Ark. Entering without that blood invoked the fear of certain death.

✘ But now because of Jesus’ sacrifice, verses 19-21 says a very important turn has taken place in our view of entering into God’s presence. It says, “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God...”.

→ You see the dividing curtain of our sin has been torn down and thrown away by Jesus. No longer do you or I need to think of approaching God on His throne with fear or trembling. Why? because His blood shed in our place, literally is our ticket in. 1 John 1:7 says, “...the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin”.

→ Now we have confidence to enter here before God in His holy presence because we are washed clean and covered by His blood. His death has paid for our sin and guilt. He has offered Himself as the sacrifice. He has purchased us for the Father by His blood.

✘ Because of that; since Jesus has done it all for us and is our “great priest”, it’s now time for ... a bowl of “lettuce”!

→ Three times, in verses 22, 23, and 24 the preacher to the Hebrews uses a unique form of Greek Grammar that our Greek professors taught us to recognize as “Let us” verbs or “salad subjunctives”. The technical term is called a “hortatory subjunctive clause” but what it is this: a

statement urging others to join in some particular action. In Scripture these “let us” verbs instruct us how to live wisely in God’s household; in His heavenly community here on earth.

→ They are not merely suggestions; they are a form of a command from God that applies both to the speaker and to those who hear him.

- ✘ So, the first part of the Christian “lettuce bowl” in verse 22 speaks to “how” we are able to enter before God’s throne with confidence instead of fear. It says, “...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”.

→ This is talking about us living out God’s miraculous transformation of our hearts, minds and souls in His life-giving water and word of baptism. As it says, this affects not only our inner thoughts and attitudes but also our bodies. “Let us” walk and talk, and act and look like the forgiven Christians Jesus has made us to be. Romans 12:1 shows what this looks like when it says, “...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...”.

- ✘ The second piece of “lettuce” is in verse 23, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful”. This answers the question, “Why should I care about remaining faithful in what I believe?” The answer is straight forward, because Jesus has not wavered in His love and commitment and promise of forgiveness and salvation. He “is faithful”.

→ So the least you and I can do is remain faithful to Him and what He has taught us regarding what is true and what is not in the pages of His Holy Word. He made us and gave us life. He suffered and gave His life to save us. So He’s the one that gets to determine what is true, not us or our world.

- ✘ The third part of the Scriptural salad tells us “how” this plays out in our worship life and in our interaction with others here in our Christian body of believers. Verses 24-25, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...”.

→ This is perhaps the hardest part of the salad to swallow in our current American culture, because it gives us the directive from God that we are obligated to be about one another’s Christian business. I am supposed to be stirring you up just as you are supposed to be stirring me up “to love and good works”.

→ Now remember, this is NOT connected to how any of us earns or receives our forgiveness or salvation. That’s already been covered by the blood of Jesus! But, because Jesus’ sacrifice for us has now made us “blood brothers and sisters” of each other, then if you see me not loving others as I should, or I see you not living in “good works” as Christ has gifted you to do, then as hard as it might be in our “live and let live” world today, we are to stir each other up in Christian support and respect and accountability.

→ And there is one particular habit of love and good works that the preacher identifies as being foundational to our lives together as Christians. He says, “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some”. He’s talking about what we’re doing right here and now, gathering together as Christ’s body in public word and sacrament worship. Let us not neglect or take for granted how important this connection with our Lord and with our fellow brothers and sisters in the faith really is. This; this is where our souls are fed by Christ Himself in His body and blood as well as in His Word; read, proclaimed, studied and discussed in His presence and led by His Spirit.

→ With this the last part of verse 25 says we are to “encourage one another”. Why? Because living as a Christian in this sin-filled world is tough. The devil and our sinful desires are working

24/7 to pull us away from Jesus; to make us lazy in our faith; to ever-so-gradually get us to turn our backs on the life-saving bowl of blood and “let us” that Jesus has given to us.

Conclusion

✘ So Jesus has given us Himself and He has placed us within His Church because He loves us all; because He wants us to be with Him forever.

➔ That’s why this text ends with the words, “all the more as you see the Day drawing near”. Jesus is coming, of that there is no doubt. And He wants you to be prepared for eternity. He wants your eternity to be with Him and with all of His people together.

➔ Lord, may it be so, in Your name. Amen.