

19. The death of the Savior

April 26, 2015

One tombstone has this inscription:

"Pause stranger, as you pass me by; as you are now, so once was I; as I am now so you will be; so prepare for death and follow me."

Somebody wrote a little sentence next to it and it reads: "To follow you I'm not content, until I know which way you went."

The majority of people are afraid of death. Then, there are some people who are absolutely scared to death of death. They are gripped by an abnormal fear of death, a.k.a. thanatophobia. The main reasons are probably "UNKNOWN and FINAL." It is understandable in a way.

There are many books that tell individual stories of after-death. How credible are they? You can believe them as much as you can believe the politicians' promises.

Actually, if you are a student of the Bible, you know far more about death and after-life than scientists and self-proclaimed experts of these subjects, because the Lord explains to us in the Bible about the death and the life after death either in heaven or hell. And it certainly is not final. Many people would think that the life on earth is real and whatever happens after life is surreal. It should be the other way around. After all, death is only the beginning of a new world.

If we were ancient Jews from the first century, we would have no problem understanding all the sacrificial systems that are mentioned in the Book of Hebrews, because we were raised in it. But as 21st century Westerners, everything about the Jewish sacrificial system is foreign to us and difficult to understand.

To overcome this issue, I thought about a question we all could ask:

Why was the death of Christ an absolute necessity for our salvation?

All humans sin without an exception, period. The only place we deserve, after our death is hell because of our sins, unless the Lord pardons our sins. But to pardon us from our sins, it requires our blood, not one pint or two, but the entire amount of the blood from each of us. Yes, it means that pardon requires our life.

That's why the Lord allowed the ancient Jewish people to sacrifice animals on behalf of their lives.

Leviticus 1:4 Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.

Laying hands on the animal's head symbolizes transferring of one's sins to an innocent animal.

For the ancient Jews, they had the tabernacle as well as the temple where they could bring sacrifices for their sins to be atoned. But for the Gentiles, they were not allowed into this system, unless they converted to Judaism. Even then, they were not fully included.

But from A.D. 70, there is no temple for the Jews to sacrifice animals for their sins, because the Roman soldiers destroyed it. Without the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, no human's sins can be forgiven; every human is destined to end up in hell. There had to be a way for humans to be saved. That is where Jesus stepped in and took

all of our sins onto Himself and died for our sins, so that our sins would be forgiven, not just covered like the OT sacrifices, and we may have salvation and eternal life.

With that in mind, in verses 16 through 28, the idea of blood is tied to three specifics: Covenant, Forgiveness, and Salvation.

A. BLOOD AND COVENANT

Hebrews 9:16-21 For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. 17 For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. 18 Therefore not even the first Covenant was dedicated without blood. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, "This is the blood of the Covenant which God has commanded you." 21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry.

Some of your Bible versions say, "will," or "covenant," or "testament." They all come from the same Greek word "diatheke".

Unless you understand the rationale for the old arrangement from Leviticus 17, you will have a hard time understanding what it says in Hebrews:

Leviticus 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.'

With that in mind, Jesus said this to His disciples:

Luke 22:20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

To ratify the Old Covenant, Moses sprinkled the blood on the Book of the Law, the people, the tabernacle, and its furnishing. Not only was blood used for the inauguration of the ministry of the Old Covenant for cleansing, but it was used in the regular administration of the tabernacle service for ceremonial purification.

B. BLOOD AND FORGIVENESS

Hebrews 9:22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

Let's make it very clear here: Sin is sin. There is no big sin or small sin. Our smallest white lie is as horrible as someone else's most horrifying murder in the human history to our righteous and holy God. It cannot be smoothed out with other replacing words, such as, mistake, shortcoming, accident, or weakness. Call your sin sin, as I do the same for mine. Forgiveness will not even start unless we admit and confess and repent from our sins.

This is a foundational principle of God's dealings with men. Unbelievers think that sin is forgiven by time, by their good works, by their decent lives, or by simply death. But there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, and there is no perfect forgiveness without a perfect sacrifice.

Since God has ordained that remission of sins is through the shedding of blood from the Garden of Eden as we learned last Sunday, and since purification only comes through the sprinkling of blood, it is necessary that blood be shed and applied if the New Covenant is to be in force.

Matthew 26:28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

C. BLOOD AND SALVATION

Hebrews 9:23-28 Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another-- 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

All the earthly sacrifices were not as perfect as the one by Jesus Christ Himself who was the perfect Lamb of God – without a single sin in His life. He presented His life to the heavenly tabernacle and accepted by God the Father for us.

When the OT high priest sprinkled the sacrificed animal's blood once a year on the Mercy Seat which is the cover of the Ark of Covenant, did the blood change the nature of the gold cover? No, it was the same gold material. But it changed the relationship between God and His people. God could enter into communion with them because of the sprinkled blood which represented the atoning sacrifice. By the blood of Jesus, we who are sinners can enter into communion with the Holy God.

I asked you to underline the word 'once' in v26. Some of you who have a Catholic background might be offended by what I am about to say, but please hear me carefully. I am going to bring a problem with their flawed theology for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ that was done once and for all.

In Roman Catholicism the Mass is equivalent to "The Lord's Supper," or "the Communion." The word "mass" is derived from the Latin "missa." The mass is a series of rituals centered around the communion supper. It is also called the "Eucharistic Supper."

According to their theology, the mass is the sacrifice of Christ offered in a sacramental manner. The reality is the same, but the appearances differ. They also believe that Christ instituted the Mass when He said, "This is My body and this is My blood," in Matthew 26. Furthermore, Roman Catholicism teaches that when Jesus said "Do this in remembrance of Me," He gave the apostles and hence his future priests the power to change bread and wine into His actual body and blood. Therefore, during the ceremony of the Mass during the part of the liturgy known as the consecration, the priest changes of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. They use this long fancy theological word "Transubstantiation" for it.

Roman Catholics are quick to say that the Eucharist is not a re-sacrifice of Christ, but a "re-presentation" of the sacrifice. But it is difficult to conclude otherwise when we examine what the official Roman Catholic documents say and when a priest hands out a wafer to a Catholic believer and says, "This is the body of Christ," he literally meant it to be the actual body of Christ. And to receive that wafer, a believer should

say, "Amen." Contrary to what they try to say out of a wrong theology, it is wrong. They should call it "communion" and do it in remembrance of His sacrifice that was done ONCE.

At the beginning of this teaching, I said that people are fearful of death because it seems that it is unknown and final. To overcome their fear, they'd rather come up with their own idea regarding death and the afterlife. One of them is 'reincarnation'.

Reincarnation is the teaching that a person's soul, after death, goes to a holding place and after a while enters a new human body. This cycle continues over and over again for thousands of years until the person learns what needs to be learned, and then the reincarnation process ceases. They call it "enlightened" status. There is a great word from my home country Sweden for that – DUH!!!

People who follow Hinduism, Buddhism, New Ages, Scientology, and any other oriental mysticism embrace the idea of reincarnation. They don't have firm theologies for this other than wishful thinking. Many of Hollywood self-impressed celebrities are into reincarnation ideas.

A Christian who believes the Bible should not believe in reincarnation or even entertain a thought of it. People who believe in reincarnation are trying to avoid the divine judgment after their death by turning blind eyes. It is like a child who closes his eyes and thinks that everything that he doesn't like will disappear.

By now, some of you are thinking, "Wow, you just offended the people with Catholic and New Ages background." I didn't offend them; I merely spoke the truth from the Bible. The Bible is the equal opportunity offender against false theologies.

Listen, if you are born once, you will die twice – physically and spiritually. But if you are born twice, you will die one – physically; then you will be in heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ. Your judgment has already been dealt with and your sins have been forgiven. Why would anyone with the right mind want to avoid that?

D. APPLICATIONS

1) God's judgment is escapable only through Jesus Christ.

2) The true believers walk by faith, not by sight.

No matter what may happen on earth, a believer can be confident that Jesus is in control and his or her eternal destination is heaven by His atoning sacrifice.