



2024 Weekly Devotions

Week of: March 25th - 31st

Sermon: March 24th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus

March 25

Nothing But the Blood of Jesus (Hebrews 9:22)

Why was the blood of Jesus Christ necessary? Could someone else's or some animals' blood been propitiation enough to satisfy the Father's wrath against our sin? We know that the Bible in Hebrews 10:4 says, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." We also know that the blood shed for the remission of sins had to be spotless. In other words, the blood of the One who would qualify to die for the sins of humanity could not be sin-stained blood. By now, I hope that you know that would eliminate every person born to a man and woman because of the inherited and imputed sin nature that we all receive from Adam. When Adam sinned, sin infected his DNA, and it has been passed down to every mere human since then.

So, we all know that only the blood of our Redeemer Jesus was able to satisfy the just wrath of God against sin and to pay the penalty due us because of sin. Jesus had to be born of the virgin Mary because through her he would receive His humanity and He had to be conceived in her by the Holy Spirit which protected Him from the "bad blood" of man. He was born fully God and fully man as a result of the virgin birth - the amazing and miraculous way He was conceived and brought forth into this world to save us. Nothing but the blood of Jesus could wash away our sins and nothing could make us whole again except His precious and spotless blood.

God designed creation and His plan of redemption so that without the shedding of blood there would be no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). Let me illustrate that for you from the book of Exodus. I hope you will find this thrilling and encouraging as you see His beautiful plan pictured in shadows and types in the Old Testament fulfilled in Jesus Christ in the New. Let's walk through a few passages in various chapters of Exodus. In chapter 19 verses 21 and 24 we learn that the people, excluding Moses, were warned not to get too close to the foot of Mt. Sinai as they would perish in His holy presence. Let me make sure you get this. Because of their sin, they could not enter into His presence. In other words, they had no access to God.

Then an interesting ceremony takes place in chapter 24. In verses 4-8, we read that Moses built an altar at the foot of the mountain and some young man offered burnt offerings on the altar. Moses took half of the blood from the sacrificed animals and put it on the altar, and the other half he sprinkled on the people. It sounds gross but without blood there is no atonement. Now, notice that once the sacrificial blood was shed, offered, and covered the people, access to God (still limited to a degree) was possible. See 24:9-11. Now we read that not only Moses, but Aaron, two of his sons, and seventy elders of Israel were allowed to come onto the mountain and enter into the presence of God. What made the difference? **NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD!**

You see, the representatives of Israel were now invited into the presence of God because the blood of a sacrificial substitute had been shed to make atonement for the people. As I mentioned in a sermon recently, I hope you see the parallel with what took place in Egypt the night the Passover was instituted. It was the blood of the lambs that were sacrificed for the lives of the people that spared them. Nothing but the blood would keep them safe that night as the death angel meandered through the villages bringing death to all the firstborn who were not covered by the blood. Brothers and sisters, the blood of Jesus is still the only thing that can wash away our sin. "Oh, precious is the flow that makes us white as snow. No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus."

March 26

O Great Redeemer (Isaiah 61:1-2)

Jonna led us in the beautiful song, "O Great Redeemer." Why do we need a redeemer? The Bible teaches that everyone is in need of redemption because, "We all fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The very next verse says, "...and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (v.24). We need to be redeemed church family because we are slaves to sin and death until we are. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23a). Redemption is freedom that is gained through the payment of a price. In this discussion, it is the release from the bondage we are in because of our guilt in sin.

Jesus said, "I came to serve, not to be served, and to give my life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). His life was the price he paid to redeem us or set us free from the guilt of our sin. Paul wrote about this to the Galatians where he said, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). In other words, his death was in exchange for our lives. The fact is there was no other way for us to be redeemed than by perfect shed blood of a sacrificial substitute adequate to make atonement for us. Paul said, "In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14). Lately, I have been overwhelmed by the continuity of the Scriptures. Let me show you another reason.

I am today writing about our Great Redeemer who came to die in our place to deliver us from the slavery of sin and to give us life. We tend to think of Jesus only from a New Testament vantage point which is unfortunate. In the prophecies of Isaiah, we are told that one would come who would "proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, and set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Isa. 61:1-2). As Bible students, we will recognize that passage quoted in Luke 4:18-19 when Jesus stood to read from the scroll in the temple announcing that he was the one come to accomplish this redemption. Isaiah's prophecy was all about the redemptive work of Christ long before he ever arrived to do it.

Friends, Christ knew all along that is why he came to earth as the God man. His mission was to redeem us, and he knew it would take his life to accomplish the task. He once told his disciples, "Greater love has no one than this, 'that someone lay down his life for his friends'" (John 15:13). He did just that which is why it is easy today to write a point to ponder focusing on our Great Redeemer. I know you already know, but I want to make just a few statements to highlight his greatness. He was our eternal king to whom the heavens bow at his command. Even as he rules the world in power and might, he condescends to come to us and even grieves our fallen condition. His immortal hands took on flesh as he came to pay the price due God for sin. His alone was the one atoning sacrifice that could get the job done.

I rejoice, and sometimes cry, when I read the beautiful account of the revelation given to John in Revelation 5. When no one was found worthy to open the scroll in heaven or on earth, one of the elders around the throne told John to stop weeping because there was One (Rev. 5:4-5). That part is awesome in itself but what gets me the most is what He looked like when He stood in the midst of the throne. He was seen as a Lamb slain after being described in verse 5 as the Lion of Judah who conquered. Here we get a picture of what it cost the Creator of the universe, the Lion who conquered Satan and crushed his head, to redeem us. We see him in verse 6 as a Lamb who was slain. O Great Redeemer indeed. The Lion of Judah humbled Himself and allowed himself to be slain as a sacrificial lamb whose blood was shed to give another life. He was slain but is alive! What a Savior.

March 27

O Sacred Head Now Wounded (Isaiah 53:3-7)

Do you ever just pause and consider how remarkable is the way God chose to save us? Friends, I hope you will never lose sight of the fact that Jesus Christ took on flesh as our King and allowed himself to be mocked, rejected, beaten, battered, and crucified from a voluntary place of humility and shame all the while He was completely innocent of any wrongdoing. May we never lose our love for Him and what He did to save us.

Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ," was probably one of the hardest movies a Christian could stand to watch. This is likely because of the grotesque manner in which his passion (suffering) took place. The mock trials, the lies, the unfair treatment, and no defense was hard enough to see. Frankly however, it was the beatings, the scourging, and the inhumane crucifixion that is most difficult to handle. I will never forget Roselyn Stell yelling in the theater so long ago when we went, as a church, to watch the movie. As Jesus was being brutally beaten and then whipped, bless her heart, she couldn't take it anymore and yelled out, "Stop! Stop!" It truly was hard to stomach.

The truth remains dear ones that it was brutal, gruesome, and horrific. What makes it even worse is that He was God, that He was innocent, and that He came to rescue us, and we killed him. The song that Brad sang, "O Sacred Head Now Wounded", was not pretty. It was slow and kind of sad. It was meant to be as it called us to feel the pain of the Suffering Servant and to be moved by the reality of His sacrificial death and the voluntary way in which he gave his body to be broken and blood to be shed for our forgiveness. We should pause at times and force ourselves to reflect on the price that he paid and make ourselves look on his bleeding, dying body.

As Brad sang, we heard lyrics that reminded us, "He suffered for our gain. It was our sin and yet it was his deadly pain." He truly took on the sins of the world. Please don't miss that meant he took the wrath of God against all sin. The cup that he was to drink was the cup of God's, His Father's wrath. That should have been our pain and our punishment, not his. Oh, that we might find the words, the language, fitting to express our love and gratitude for what He did. Better than words dear friends, would be a life offered as "living sacrifices" for his glory which as Paul wrote to the Roman Christians would be our reasonable service (Romans 12:1-2).

I find it helpful to occasionally read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. You might think that Gibson's portrayal of the crucifixion of Christ was too rough. You would be wrong! Isaiah described the prophecy this way, "His appearance was so marred, beyond human resemblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind" (Isa. 52:14). He was beaten so badly that you could not recognize him, even to the point of disfigurement. O Sacred Head Now Wounded might be an understatement of epic proportions. He was not just wounded family, he was pretty much beaten to within an inch of his life in an ungodly way and then crucified in a manner to extend his agony, pain, and suffering. He did it because of my sin and yet I still sin at times even now. Like Paul, we can all cry out, "O wretched man that I am" (Romans 7:24).

It is so sad and yet it had to happen this way. He loved(s) us so much that he sent his own Son to save us. Jesus loved us so much that he was willing to come and go through that for us. He loves his bride, and nothing will ever change that. He already did the most difficult, unbelievable, amazing act to save us. How in the world can we doubt him at any point in our journey? He gave his life to save us, and He lives His life, in part, to keep us. Our Sacred Head will never lose His Bride. He gave so much to save her.

March 28

Behold the Lamb of God (John 1:29)

Most likely you have heard the old saying, “He is too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.” In my opinion, that is one of the stupidest statements ever made. My guess is that it comes from people who are convicted or feeling guilty because someone else is shining “light” on their darkness that makes them uncomfortable. I submit to you today that one of the keys to living a victorious Christian life is to be as heavenly minded as you can be.

Brad sang the beautiful Andrew Peterson song, “Behold the Lamb of God” on Sunday and lead us to see Him and worship as we beheld Him in our hearts and minds. Taken from the statement John the Baptist made in John 1:29, we are directed at the outset of the ministry of Christ to keep our eyes on Him. To behold is to focus on and to make the object of your affection that which you meditate on and consider. To consider is to truly think about Him and to process all that He is and the truth that He proclaims. Paul told the believers in Colossae to set their minds on things above. Dear ones, this world is not currently set up to help you walk in a manner worthy of God’s call on your life. The world competes for your attention and your heart so that you will behold it and be drawn away from the One who came to take away the sins of the world and to be Lord of your life.

The world is so good at winning your heart because your heart is prone to self-indulge and to sin. Commercials work for this reason. HGTV works for this reason because we are so easily entrapped by the allurements of this world and our hearts are seldom satisfied with what we have. Christian contentment is indeed a rare jewel in our world today, even among believers. We must learn to behold the Lamb of God on a daily basis. This is why spending some time with Him every morning before you step into the world is so important. Often, whoever wins the affections of your heart in the morning will control your attitude, focus, and the direction of your life for the day.

As you behold the Lamb of God, consider some of what the lyrics reminded us of on Sunday. As you meditate on Christ, consider the fact that he came to take away your sins. Friend, that is of the utmost importance because if he did not, you would still be in them and therefore the rightful and just wrath of God would remain upon you. To state it differently, if Jesus had not come to take away your sins, you would still be going to hell. As you behold him today, think on the truth that he died and rose again. The way he took away your sins was to stand in your place to pay your debt.

We often joke about the challenge of reading the book of Leviticus in the Bible. Admittedly, it contains some “strange” ceremonies, laws, restrictions, and such, but it also has some beautiful pictures or shadows of truths that point to the fact that Jesus will come to take away our sins. For example, in chapter 16 we read about the Day of Atonement. This is the day when Aaron was to make the sin offering for the people. Part of the ceremony involved taking two male goats from the people for the sin offering. One would be sacrificed, and its blood poured out at the altar. The other, the Azazel, which means scapegoat, was to be released into the wilderness. Aaron, the priest, would place his hands on the head of the scapegoat and confess the sins of the nation of Israel, symbolically transferring their sin to the goat. The goat that carries the people’s sins away.

This ceremony was a foreshadowing of the atoning work that Christ would accomplish by dying as a sacrificial lamb and in essence, taking away our sins. So, it is true that Leviticus can be tough to plod through, but there are nuggets of truth buried in the text that will bless your heart if you dig in, spend the time, and look for Jesus. When you find Him, behold Him. He will provide the strength for victory over this world as you do. When Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:1, 16 that “he does not lose heart,” it was because of what he said in 2 Cor. 3:18, “As we behold Him, we are changed from glory to glory, and we are sustained for the Christian life.

March 29, 2024

Galatians 3:13

This week's devotions constitute a rare "tag-team" whereby Pastor Robert and I each take a few songs and attempt to write devotions that connect the biblical lyrics with biblical texts and reflections. As always, our hope is that Sunday was encouraging to you not only because of the immense talent of our musicians (although we most certainly admire and benefit from their gifts) but also, and more importantly, because of the biblically saturated, Christ-exalting songs that you were able to hear. The goal of these devotions is to further cement the biblical truths of last Sunday's music into your minds and hearts.

Today's passage deals with an idea that was quite prevalent in our music, that is the biblical reality of Christ as Redeemer. Several of the song titles included the term "redeemer" or "redemption" and this is more than appropriate. In fact, today's passage tells us that Christ did in fact "redeem us from the curse of the law". There are three questions I would like to pose and answer in today's devotion dealing with the topic of redemption.

First, what does redemption mean? The term "redeem" means to purchase out of a previous state of bondage. To redeem is to free an individual from a previously enslaved state. In the biblical storyline, redemption is accomplished when Christ redeems us from the curse of our sin (namely death, both temporal and eternal).

Second, how was redemption accomplished? Jesus' act of redeeming us from sin which leads to death was accomplished by dying in our place, thereby enduring the wrath of God that was due us so that we could be free from sin's curse. This means that the cross was absolutely necessary for our salvation.

Third, why was this necessary? The answer is that God is a just God and, therefore, the evil of sin, which is chiefly committed as an affront to His right authority, must be punished. God cannot simply excuse sin because sin has ordained consequences which are right and good. It is incredibly evil and therefore wrong for mankind to rebel against a holy God, and this means that God's ordained consequence for sin is both right and just. Furthermore, our God is a holy and just God. He will not excuse evil because He simply cannot excuse evil, and this means that someone must pay for our transgression.

On the cross, Jesus died in our place. In doing so, He suffered the consequences of our sin and redeemed us from the curse of being enslaved to sin and deserving of God's wrath. Christ is the only One who could accomplish such a feat as He was perfect, and therefore not deserving of His own death due to sin. Jesus therefore is celebrated as our Redeemer. Without Christ, we are sunk, doomed to die for our sins but because our Redeemer lives, we have every reason to believe that what He did on the cross (the tree as mentioned in verse 13) is gloriously sufficient to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This is why we sing, and it is why it was more than appropriate for us to fixate on Christ as our great Redeemer.

March 30, 2024

2 Corinthians 5:17

We spoke yesterday about the subject of redemption. Redemption was a prominent theme in the musical on Sunday precisely because it is a primary blessing of the work of Christ. The Christian gathers to worship Jesus in large part because it is Christ who bought us out of our sinfulness. There are many ramifications of redemption and one of them was front and center in the song entitled “Redeemed”.

This song was undoubtedly familiar to many of you as it is widely played on Christian radio. One portion of the song says, “I am not who I used to be, I am redeemed.” Those two realities, namely that we have been redeemed and that we have been changed, are inextricably connected in the Scriptures. The good news of the Gospel is not just that Jesus has purchased us from our sin, the good news includes the fact that His redemption includes our regeneration (a fancy word that simply means given new life) and that regeneration means that we are not who we once were as we have been remade. Christ did not redeem us so that we would be forgiven, He redeemed us so that we would be restored to life through a right relationship with the Father. Our salvation, therefore, is not simply about our future, it is about our present as well. God gives us life with makes us new and that newness is fleshed out in our day-to-day living.

This is Paul’s point in 2 Corinthians 5:17 when he says that he is a new creation. His “newness” is not tied to his physical body. When Paul was converted on that road to Damascus, he did not appear different physically. He was still the same person with the same physical characteristics and the like but his inward being was radically transformed.

How did this happen? The answer is that Paul’s sin, which characterized him in his lost condition, was atoned for making possible a reconciliation with the Father which leads to the indwelling of the Spirit who breathes life into our otherwise cold, dead hearts and imbues us with a beautiful and enduring life. This “new life” transforms that is present in us through the Spirit transforms us in our inward parts, making us a new creation.

We, dear Christian, are a new creation and Paul wants us to know that our being as redeemed disciples of Christ will never pass away. Look at his language, the old things have “passed away”. The phrase denotes death. Literally, Paul says that the old me is dead and the new me has come. Whereas Jesus came back from the dead, the death that He defeated will never come back to bite those who are in Christ. Instead, we can have confidence that the work Jesus began through redemption and regeneration will never be overwhelmed, God will finish what He started (Philippians 1:6).

This truth, that Christ has overwhelmed the grave, paying for our sins, redeeming us from bondage and making us new, is reason to worship. We worship in joy, we worship as we marvel, we worship as we long for the completion of our redemption and we worship in hope that the same Christ who overcame death will see to it that we overcome all obstacles in our way that would seek to deter us from our eternal destination in heaven with Jesus.

March 31, 2024

John 14:19

The final song in our musical included a chorus of “Because He lives”. Growing up in a traditional church setting, the old hymn by that title brings back many beautiful memories. I recall many services concluding with this precious song and the words come back to mind often... “because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future, life is worth the living just because He lives.”

What a beautiful Gospel message that old hymn portrays. The simple truth is that we have hope precisely because Jesus lives. If Jesus is still in the grave, then we should “eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” (1 Corinthians 15:32). The very fact that Jesus is alive is the sole ground of our assurance and hope.

How can we have hope in resurrection if Christ has not been raised? What reason would we have for joy and peace and assurance if we did not have the knowledge that Jesus is risen? The Easter season is so meaningful to believers precisely because it is the time in the calendar that we gather to remember that Jesus is ascended on high and promises the same eternal life and bliss to us who would believe on Him alone for our salvation.

Brother and sister, when was the last time you truly considered the joy that comes from knowing the risen Christ? When we see the world around us, how it seemingly falls further and further apart, what hope do we have? The answer is that our King is coming back, and He has proven that no enemy, not even death Himself can prevail over Him. When we get the diagnosis that we didn’t want, what hope do we have? The answer is that we have no reason to fear death because, in Christ, death is simply a doorway to eternal joy. When we are racked with disappointment what hope do we have of a better future? The answer is that Jesus has promised that He goes and prepares a place for us, and He will return to get us and bring us to Himself. When we deal with pain, what hope is there? The answer is that we look forward to a day where we are no longer in pain but living, eternally, with our resurrected Jesus.

This truth, namely that Jesus has risen, forms the very backbone of our hope and joy. It makes us unflappable and immovable and eternally grateful. What other blessings must come our way if we really believe and accept the fact that Jesus has risen from the grave and has given us assurance that we will rise as well? What else must go our way if we know that our eternal destiny is secure? Oh, dear brother and sister, I pray that as we sang last week and as we prepare to worship on this Easter Sunday morning, we have stirred our hearts yet again with the glorious realities that Jesus has risen. His resurrection was enough to spur the early church onto faithfulness, even in the midst of severe persecution and angst, and His rising is enough to do the same for us as we walk the path, He has set out for us which, inevitably, leads to resurrection alongside our risen and triumphant King.