



1200 Lexington Road  
Wilmore, KY 40390

Pastor Daryl Diddle

(859) 858-3521  
office@wfmc.net

## “What’s Blood Got To Do With It”

Sermon Series: “Forgiveness”, No. 5

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### Hebrews 9:11-22

*11 But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

*15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

*16 In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, 17 because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. 18 This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 19 When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. 20 He said, “This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.” 21 In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. 22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

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Hebrews chapter nine is our text this morning, if you’d care to turn there with me ... Hebrews nine.

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Let me say... I am no great fan of Tina Turner, the singer, but I do admit I chose today’s message title based on her song from 1984, “What’s **Love** Got To Do With It?” a song from which you could not escape if you were, like I was, a teenager in the 1980s.

Throughout that song, she tries to convince herself that she *can* be in a ... “*relationship*” ... *without* the *complications* of actually *loving* with the other person. She tries to tell herself that such an arrangement is completely workable and fine.

But ... by the end of the song, she realizes that the love she was trying so hard to avoid is actually an inevitable part of the relationship. She really doesn’t *want* to *be* in *love*...she’d rather avoid it due to the confusions and requirements that it brings to her life; but in the end, she recognizes that there’s no getting around it.

All through the song, she asks, over and over, “What’s love got to do with it?”

But by the end of the song, she reluctantly admits that love, actually, has *everything* to do with it.

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It doesn’t take a Bible scholar to realize that *blood* is, you might say, “splattered” all through the Bible. From the account of the sons of Adam and Eve...Cain’s murder of his brother, Abel...all through the patriarchs, the judges, the kings, and the prophets...right on down to Jesus’ cross at Calvary and then all the apostles and Christ-followers who remember and speak of that event, blood is all over the place.

Truly, there’s more blood in this book than in a cheap horror movie.

Now, we who have followed Jesus for a while...whether or not we realize it, we sort of get used to that.

But for those who are investigating either Judaism or Christianity, or those who are newer to the faith and so begin reading their Bibles ... when they start to see all the red all over the place ... and I don’t mean the red words of Jesus ... they just have to wonder, “what is the deal with all the blood?”

And *then*, when you flip through a *songbook*...or...on days like today when we sing four songs in a row about blood...any observer or “newish” follower of Jesus has to wonder, “What is wrong with these people anyway?! *What* is their *deal* with...*blood*?”

What’s blood got to do with it?

And then...we get to a passage like this.

These verses from Hebrews that were read for us ... even though, historically, this has been understood to be one of the most central passages of Christianity, in our day today, an awful lot of people, certainly outside the Church but also many *inside* see this sort of talk as kind of gross ... ghastly even ... and they’d just as soon skip over it *because of* all the talk about ... *blood*.

They wonder, “Why we can’t have Jesus without all the talk of blood. What is this preoccupation with blood?”

“What’s blood got to do with it?”

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Well, the *short* answer to that last question is: *everything*.

But that’s not much of an answer, so we need at least *some* explanation.

And so the short *explanation* is: blood is life ... and the lack of blood is death. That's the physiological reality, right? Remove blood from our bodies and see how long we live.

But there's a spiritual reality about that too.

Because of our sin ... both that we've *inherited* just by being human, *and ...* that which we've, ourselves, committed ... we deserve death ... every one of us, because sin separates us from God, who is, Himself, life.

Because of sin, humanity was dead ... separated from God.

That was the situation ... the human predicament ... *until* God met Moses on a mountain and offered Him a possibility.

And that possibility was, if humans would offer to God, very precisely, a *substitute* life ... the life of a flawless, perfect animal ... *of God's choosing* ... God would be willing to understand that act as us realizing and admitting to Him that we are guilty of sin,

that we need forgiveness...redemption, *and*,  
that we are requesting it from Him.

And then, God would provide that forgiveness we need.

That was the offer.

We know He's willing to do it because the whole thing was His idea.

God's the one who thought it up,  
God brought it up, and  
God set it up ...

He set up the whole sacrificial system for the Jews in the first place.

The blood sacrifice ... the offering of an innocent, perfect life was what allowed people who were, themselves, dead in sin ... to be forgiven, and so to have a reinvigorated, ongoing relationship with the perfect God who is, Himself, life.

Because it's the blood that's the life ... and it's the life that's the blood ... that's why the blood of the sacrifice makes forgiveness possible.

Of course, whole libraries have been written about all that, but in short ... in *really* short ... *that's* why *blood* is such an issue in the Bible.

That's what blood's got to do with it.

You could even say that, next to the fact that God is love, the core message of the Bible – both testaments – is that the blood of a sacrifice is the way to forgiveness.

And, let me just add here ... that is also why God *is immensely gracious* as He's revealed to us in the Old Testament.

A lot of people have this crazy notion of God as a mean old guy in the Old Testament,  
but then He changes and becomes something of a pushover in the New.

None of that is true.

God is gracious, just and loving in both testaments, and in the Old, His love and grace is seen in the fact that He didn't **have** to make **any** allowance for our forgiveness for a relationship with Him to be possible.

God wasn't **required** in the least to come up with a way for His and our relationship to be restored.

He didn't **have** to do it,

but He **did**...

because He **loves** humanity **that much**.

He made blood sacrifice possible in the Old Testament because He **is**, and always has **been**, both **just** and **loving**.

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Now, that allowance of a blood sacrifice came in many forms for the Old Testament Jews, but the Day of Atonement was it's highest expression. On one day each year, the priest entered into the Temple's most holy place with the blood of the animal sacrifice and sprinkled that on the altar there in a couple different ways ... offering it to God on behalf of the people.

That is what allowed for the forgiveness that kept them in relationship with the Lord.

But here's the thing: because of the inherent sanctity of **human** life **over animal** life ... because humans are so much higher than all the other animals (since only we humans are made in God's own image) the blood of an animal sacrifice could never enduringly, or deeply enough, cover human sin.

The effectiveness of animal sacrifices was limited to, you might say, the **outside** of a person ... and only lasted **temporarily**, which is why all the other sorts of day-by-day and throughout-the-year sacrifices were necessary too; and ... it's why the Day of Atonement came around every year.<sup>1</sup>

Animals are **inherently less** than humans. The very best animal in the world is far, far **less sacred** and **less important** to God than the very **worst** human. That is an important thing for, especially our culture, to remember, and we see that in the fabric of the sacrificial system.

Animal blood **helps**, but it's not enduringly adequate.

For a sacrifice to be effective below the surface ... and to actually **last** ... **human** life ... **human** blood was needed. But since every human being shares in the lineage, and consequently the sin ... the corruption ... the imperfection of Adam and Eve, our forebears, no perfect human existed.

There was no human who could provide the perfect life-for-life sacrifice. That was the situation, and it seemed like an absolutely insurmountable problem.

But then...to everyone's shock and surprise...and especially the devil's...God surmounted the insurmountable...in Jesus.

Jesus, God's Son, is **fully God**. He does not share in our human origins in Adam and Eve, so He does not share our corrupt nature and our inherent bent to sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Murray, Andrew. The Holiest of All. Martino. 2011.

Yet Jesus is also fully *human*. Even though He was subject to temptation, just as we are, Jesus is the one of us who *chose* as God originally *created* and *intended* us *all* to choose: Jesus chose to do God's will and God's purpose *every, single time*.

Jesus did what no other human was able to do; He lived a life of perfect obedience to God, and that is why His is the one blood sacrifice that could *accomplish*, once and for all, the adequate payment for sin that *all* the previous animal sacrifices did *only partially*.

And *that* life-for-life sacrifice is what allows for...forgiveness...God's forgiveness of our sin against Him.

That's why blood has everything to do with forgiveness.

That's why blood is everywhere in the Bible.

Blood is what speaks of God's nearly unbelievable love for us rebellious, stubborn, broken people.

Again, there are libraries of books written on all this, but ... again ... *in short*, that's what blood, and specifically and uniquely the blood of Jesus ... that's what blood's got to do with it.

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But here's the thing: early in the last century ... the twentieth century – and it's no coincidence that that is the century in which more human blood was spilled in our world than all other centuries combined – beginning in the 1900s, so-called “polite and civilized people” began to react against the whole thought and suggestion that humanity needs a blood sacrifice.

More and more people began to think the need for ... or even the *mention* of the *thought* of the *need* for ... blood sacrifice, in order to be in right relationship with God, was grotesque and barbaric.

Never mind, of course, the many sorts of *truly* barbaric behaviors that defined the twentieth century: atom bombs, anti-personnel land mines, chemical warfare, aborting babies as a means of birth control, the widespread suppression of cultures through socialism and communism ... a list of truly barbaric acts is easy to make.

The fact is, twentieth century humanism had a lot of nerve, glancing at something that dealt with things of the soul so deep and mysterious ... and from another time and culture ... and then attempting to declare it, so smugly and high-handedly, bizarre or broken or barbaric.<sup>2</sup>

But that *is* where we are in our society today.

Our culture has a distaste for anyone who might have a claim on their life...anyone who might dare tell them what is good and how to live, so of course our culture has a distaste for the God of the Bible...and so naturally it has a distaste for even discussing the need for blood sacrifice in order to be in right relationship with Him.

But here's the thing: whether or not our culture likes it or accepts it, that is the Biblical reality of our circumstance.

The Bible clearly says: “Blood is required for the forgiveness of our sin.”

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<sup>2</sup> Wright, N.T. Hebrews For Everyone. Westminster John Knox. 2003.

And for forgiveness to be thoroughly *effective* and for it to *endure*, we need the blood of *Jesus*. Only *His* blood can bring us...can bring *all that is us*...into God's presence once and for all and forever.

And nothing less than His blood is exactly what Jesus agreed to offer. He gave up His life so that you and I could live.

That's why we give our praise to Him. There is no one else so worthy of our praise.

There is no one else who could have done what Jesus did.

That's what blood's got to do with it.

That's why blood...*Jesus'* blood...appears in our songs, especially in this season of the year...when we take the time to intentionally realize our need for God's forgiveness.

Now, we don't *worship* blood...even the blood of Jesus.

But we do acknowledge it's importance...it's necessity for forgiveness, and as this Hebrews passage is saying, it's far and away superiority over that of the old covenant bulls and goats and birds.

In all those songs we sang this morning, we're declaring the truth about forgiveness.

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“What can wash away my sin? What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

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“The blood that Jesus shed for me on Calvary – reaches to the highest mountain and flows to the lowest valley.” That means there's not a part of me that is not able to be overwhelmed and transformed by Jesus' life. Jesus' life is infinitely more powerful than any good or bad within me.

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“Are you washed in the blood of Jesus?” That's an artful way of asking if you've submitted your life to Jesus ... if you've experienced the forgiveness and transformation that He offers?

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“There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's (that's another name for Jesus, right?) Immanuel's veins ... and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.”

Because of the power of the life of Jesus and because Jesus chose to give up His life for us, there is no sin of ours that cannot be forgiven ... there is no stain upon us that is too deep for His life ... His blood ... to remove.

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We worship Jesus because the giving of His life ... His blood ... is what allows *us* to have life.

So, one last time, that's what blood's got to do with it.

That's actually why the carpet in this room is red ... and why the seats in here are red. Believe me...it's not to coordinate with wedding dress colors – it's terrible at that. All this red in here is to remind us that we live ... that we are forgiven ... only by the blood of Jesus.

The cost He paid for our pardon was immense. In fact, no person can give any more to another person than Jesus gave to us. The most valuable thing we have to give to someone else is our life ... that's the most precious thing we possess. Jesus gave that for us ... so we could be forgiven ... so we could be in relationship with God.

So ... do you *believe* ... *would* you believe ... that Jesus loves you *so much* that He gave His life to forgive you?

The evidence of that is the blood that He shed.

Wherever we see red ought to remind us of that fact.

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But let me just say one other thing about all this: wherever we see red ... wherever we see the blood of Jesus represented ought to *also* remind us that forgiveness always involves a cost.

God the Father's forgiveness of us cost the blood ... the life of Jesus.

And you know ... *our* forgiveness of *others* ... and *others'* forgiveness of *us*...that always costs something too.

No one is ever really forgiven unless some cost is paid.

What are the costs of forgiveness?

Jesus gave up His blood ... His life. Most of us are not asked to pay *that* sort of cost to forgive someone else, but *what do we give up* to forgive?

Maybe our anger or resentment of a person.

Maybe we're called to give up the need to be proven right.

In order to forgive, we give up our pride.

We give up our ability to say, "Ha – I told you so!"

We might give up some part of our reputation ... how we're seen in society.

In order to forgive, God might ask us to give up a place of hurt that we've carried around ... maybe that we've grown accustomed to ... maybe a pain that we actually enjoy pulling out and showing others from time to time ... for the sake of their compassion or pity.

When someone asks for our forgiveness, we may hesitate because we realize, "Wait, this will cost me."

You bet it will. As God shows us in the Old Testament and as Jesus demonstrates in the New, *forgiveness always costs*.

*But* ... the *great* thing is that Jesus has already paid the *steepest* cost ... and that's why He's completely justified in calling all who follow Him to follow Him in forgiveness ... and to pay whatever cost that might entail.

We who know and follow Jesus ... we owe that to Him because of the cost He paid to forgive us.

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So I wonder ... I wonder if the Spirit speaking to you about something related to forgiveness today?

Maybe something about the blood of Jesus ... about the cost He paid for our forgiveness?

Maybe someone's asked for your forgiveness, and up to now, you've been unwilling because of the cost ... but, my ... in light of the cost Jesus paid for our forgiveness, will you now pay whatever the cost may be to forgive that someone else?

The cost of forgiveness is part of forgiveness; the cost is what proves the love behind the forgiveness.

If God's speaking to you about that, ask Him to help you ... to supply the love you need to pay the cost to forgive.

God did that for Jesus, and because of Jesus, God the Father will give us what we need to forgive too.

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**Invitation:** If the Lord is speaking to you about some element of forgiveness, and if you'd like to come and kneel at the altar, do your business with the Lord there. ... Listen for Him ... and as you rise, say "Lord, I will do what you've asked me to do. I will understand the tremendous cost that You paid. I will accept the blood of Christ over my life and in my life, and I will pay whatever cost you're asking me to pay in order to forgive someone else.

Come and pray if you'd like. No one will intrude unless you want someone to pray with you.

**Closing Song:** "Jesus Paid It All"

**Closing Word & Benediction:**

There is always a cost to forgiveness. The cost can be steep at times ... none steeper than that which Jesus paid, but the one who forgives always pays a cost.

At the same time, the one who forgives also enjoys the blessing of the return of right relationship – both with the one who needs forgiveness and also with the Lord, who expects us to forgive as He's forgiven us.

The cost of relationship is sometimes steep, but God promises the freedom that comes – to both the forgiver and the forgiven. The freedom that comes is worth the cost. May we know that and experience that in our lives today.

Thanks for coming to worship. The Lord bless and keep you. Amen.

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