

To God Alone Be The Glory

What a scene it must have been at the foot of Mt. Sinai! It's almost gruesome—bright blood splashed against the stone altar and sprinkled on the people. Ah, but a covenant on contract was being made, one so serious that it needed to be sealed with sacrificial blood. This wasn't the first covenant God had made with fallen mankind. He had promised salvation to Noah, Abraham, and others. But now it was time to establish the one that we call the Sinaitic Covenant because it was given at Mt. Sinai. In this covenant God detailed for his people Israel the way he wanted them to live. But it wasn't all just commands. The Lord went so far as to promise them blessings if they would walk in his ways. Since this sounded like a good covenant, his willing people answered, "*We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.*" Today we would sign a contract with ink. But back then, blood was used, "*blood of the covenant,*" as Moses called it.

What a great sermon text this makes for Maundy Thursday! Across the land Christians are observing the institution of Christ's Holy Supper. In the upper room our Lord Jesus invites his instructed disciples of all times, "*Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*" 'Blood of the covenant': the same words Moses used to describe the stuff that sealed the covenant between God and Israel.

Of course, the covenant made at Mt. Sinai was long ago surpassed, but the covenant our Savior established that first Maundy Thursday remains until he comes again. That's why tonight we look at THE COVENANT OF BLOOD.

Let's go back to Mt. Sinai. For three days the people of Israel have been camped at the base of the mountain. God has appeared to them in a thick cloud over that mountain and has given them his commands. Moses recorded those commands and their applications in the verses before our text. God has spoken, and now the people are to voice their agreement. What a solemn moment in Israel's history this is!

To prepare for the ceremony, Moses has built an altar at the foot of the mountain. This altar symbolizes the presence of the Lord. Around the altar are twelve stones to symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel. The stones and the altar look like they are coming together to strike an agreement.

Strong young men now prepare some sacrifices for that altar. They bring the blood from those sacrifices to Moses. Half of it Moses sprinkles on the altar and half on the stones which represent the people. All present know what this means: they have just signed an agreement. A gracious God and his grateful people are now bound together in a covenant relationship by the blood from those sacred animals. The blood is the visible sign of their togetherness. Moses says it this way: "*This is the blood of the covenant that the*

LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

This day, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the animal blood that Moses has splashed on the altar and sprinkled on the people is a reminder that sinful people don't get to come close to a sinless God, much less enter into a covenant relationship with him—not unless a merciful God makes it possible. The blood makes it possible. It proclaims, “In the days ahead when you Israelites so quickly and so frequently forget God's commandments, and with your sins you fracture your fellowship with him, it will take blood in order to heal the breach.”

Why blood? Because according to God's sense of justice, the only appropriate consequence for sin is death. Blood is the proof that death has taken place, because when blood is shed, death occurs. From this time (Moses' time) until the promised Messiah comes, the Lord will count the death of animals as if his people have paid for their sins with their life.

Although you and I are here at Mt. Sinai with Israel, you and I also know the future. So you and I realize that the blood of the sacrificial animals is pointing ahead to the promised Savior. This Savior, with his holy precious blood, will unite God and **all** mankind by removing all sin. So all that blood here at Mt. Sinai on the day of our text, and all the blood of the other sacrifices throughout for the next 1500 years, is foreshadowing the blood of God's own Son. Only Jesus' sinless blood will be able to remove sin's stains. That's why,

as gruesome as it sounds to people who are not used to it, Christians love to sing about Christ's blood, the blood of the covenant which brings forgiveness from God. It is precious blood!

From Mt. Sinai let's skip ahead to Maundy Thursday. Here we see the Savior's precious blood, along with his true body, in the Supper he instituted that night. But what does this new covenant in his blood mean to us? Well, what do we see when we look honestly at ourselves? How have we done keeping our Father's holy will as he outlined it in the Bible? What does it mean to us when, service after service, we stand before God's altar with those words on our lips, “I am by nature sinful” and “I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions”? What does it mean whenever we recite, “And forgive us our trespasses”? Do such words come from a penitent heart that sees sin's grime embedded under every spiritual fingernail and ingrained in every tissue?

I hope so, because then the new covenant in his blood, which the Savior instituted that Maundy Thursday, packs meaning for us. In the Lord's Supper the Savior comes to you and me personally and individually. He speaks to us the words we need to hear, “Eat my body; I gave it into death for you. Drink my blood; I shed it for you. My death counts for your sins. Your sins are forgiven; go home in peace.”

Can there be a sweeter way for Jesus to offer us God's forgiveness? Some might

say, “I’d settle for a hug from him or some other blessing.” But a hug or another earthly blessing could easily be misunderstood. That’s why Jesus gives us the very body and blood he offered on Calvary’s cross to pay for our sins.

When we have forgiveness from God, we also have fellowship with God. At the time of our text God wanted to impress on his people that they had fellowship with him. So at the Lord’s invitation, Moses and a group of Israel’s leaders climbed part way up Mt. Sinai to sit down for a meal in the presence of the Lord. Our text even says that they “*saw the God of Israel,*” not in all his glory, of course. That day on Mt. Sinai God graciously dimmed his glory, but what a blessed sight he allowed those 70 men! Though we aren’t told exactly in what form God appeared to them, the mention of his feet on the sapphire-like pavement suggests some human form. It’s enough to say that the God of all glory and might came to them, yet His hand was not raised in anger against them. Instead, because of the blood of the covenant, they could sit in his presence and eat in peace. What a close fellowship God gives along with his covenant of blood! What more blessed way is there to assure us that we are at one with God! No wonder this sacred meal is called Holy Communion!

Have you noticed that there are actually three communions happening in Holy Communion. First, the bread is in

communion with Jesus’ body and the wine is in communion with Jesus’ blood. I don’t understand what I just said. Not with my logic. How can bread also be Christ’s body? But it is. Jesus said so. And that’s good enough for me.

The second communion is the one most of us think of: communion between us and God. We’ve been hearing about this kind of communion all evening. The blood of the covenant sets us at one with God.

The third communion is between believer and believer. When you receive Holy Communion, you are celebrating the oneness that the Holy Spirit gave you with everyone else who believes in Christ. But it goes a step further. Receiving Holy Communion with fellow believers is like proclaiming with your actions, “Hey, everyone, I believe the same from God’s Word as you do.” No wonder it makes sense to state publicly what we each believe before we commune together. Our oneness is celebrated here. And we know we have oneness with each other because we have publicly stated what we each believe.

So, fellow Christians, come and be assured of God’s forgiveness through this blessed covenant of his blood. Be assured of your fellowship with him. And when it’s time to go home, depart in the peace of Christ.