

The Bible: Our True Story
 Act Four continues—
“There is power in the blood”

(Read **Hebrews 9:19–22**)

Meditation #1– “So much blood”

Someone once said, **“The Bible is a Book of blood... and a bloody book!”**

Of course, it would be easy to think that these words were said only in reference to the Old Testament part of the Bible. As we just heard from Hebrews 9, the OT sacrificial system demanded the slaughter of countless animals; the pouring out of innumerable buckets of blood on Israel’s altars; it required that blood be sprinkled over people, Temple vessels, curtains and religious objects. As Hebrews 9 says, **“the Law require(d) that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness!”** Yes, it’s easy to see how the Old Testament is a Book of blood and a bloody book!

But, the truth is that the New Testament is also filled with blood... and it’s not the blood of bulls and goats either! The New Testament is filled with **the blood of Christ**.

Starting with this day we call “Good Friday”, the blood of Christ began to be graphically displayed in horrific detail! Just rent out Mel Gibson’s movie, “The Passion of the Christ”, and you’ll quickly see what a **bloody** mess Jesus became: beaten with sticks; scourged with bone-laced leather whips; a crown of thorns forced down over His brow; the nails in His hands and feet; the spear jabbed into His side! **That’s an incredibly bloody sight!** In fact, it’s enough to make you turn your head away! **Good Friday was a very bloody day!**

And yet, the blood of Good Friday was just the **beginning**...not the **end**... of the New Testament’s obsession with **Christ’s blood**. Skim through the NT epistles and you’ll discover verse after verse referring to that precious blood. Let me give you a small sample:

- Romans 3:25– we are justified through “faith in His blood”.
- 1 Cor 10:16—we participate in Christ’s blood.
- Ephesians 1:7—we have redemption through Christ’s blood.

- Ephesians 2:13—we've been brought near by Christ's blood.
- Colossians 1:20—God has made peace through His blood.
- Hebrews 9:14-- we are cleansed by Christ's blood.
- 1 John 1:7—we are purified by Christ's blood.
- Revelation 1:5—we are been set free by His blood.
- Revelation 5:9—we've been purchased by Christ's blood.
- Revelation 12:11—we have overcome Satan by Christ's blood.

That's a lot of talk about blood! And, although we may prefer to talk of 'nicer' things, there is no subject more compelling on a day like today—Good Friday!

**Pause to sing—“When I survey the wondrous cross” (#258)
(#122 in Chinese Hymnbook)**

(Read **Exodus 12:21–23**)

Meditation #2- “The blood of life”

Why do the New Testament writers focus so much on Christ's blood? And how did they know that this blood (which dripped onto the dirty streets of Jerusalem and up the hill of 'Golgotha') would bring God's peace, freedom, cleansing and justification to a dark and sin-sick world?

To answer that question, we must go back to the bloodiness of the OT and its system of sacrifices. There's one verse in Leviticus 17 upon which the whole OT system of blood sacrifices was based. Ten simple words explain it all:

'For the LIFE of the flesh is in the blood... (Leviticus 17:11)

For most of us, the first thing that comes to our minds when we think of those OT sacrifices is death! For us, the image of 'blood' being poured out on ancient altars was a system of horrible cruelty! But, let me say: **that's not what God was on about! The sacrificial system was not about death, but about life!** “**For the LIFE of the flesh is in the blood!**” In other words, God's focus was not on the death of these animals but how their lifeblood might serve to bring life to someone else!

When a butcher slaughters an animal, where is his mind focused? Is it focused on the animal's death; or is it focused on the life-giving food that will come from it? Of course, it's the latter! And that's why he can take an animal, slit its throat and drain its blood; because, in his mind's eye, he can already see the various cuts of meat and how each might be cooked and served for human consumption! The focus is on life, not on death...on how the life of this sacrificed animal will give life to others!

Surely, this was the focus of the OT sacrificial system! Every time sin seriously defiled, diminished, and corrupted a human life, that person was commanded to bring a sacrifice whose blood would "make atonement"– that is, to bring reconciliation and life back into that person. The life–blood of that animal would serve to restore the sinner back into the ways of life! Why? Because "the life of the flesh is in the blood"! Life for life! (You could compare it, in this way, to a modern blood transfusion!)

Of course, this concept of sacrifice ("life for life") was in place well before any formal Sacrificial System was put in place in Israel. Go back to the time just after the Fall, when God sacrificed an animal, drained its blood, and used the skin to clothe Adam and Eve to take away their shame. The lifeblood of that animal was sacrificed in order to renew the lives of **Adam and Eve**. Life for life!

This same practice was seen when **Noah and his family** came off the ark after the Flood. Because there was very little food growing on earth, God allowed clean animals from the ark to be slaughtered and their blood drained so that this family could have food to eat. God allowed the life of these animals to be sacrificed in order to bring life to Noah and his family. Life for life! This same principle is at the heart of **the Story of the Exodus**, read to us earlier. In God's plan to liberate His people from Egypt, He called on every family to slaughter a sheep and, while the meat was roasting for the evening meal, the blood that had been drained was to be painted on the doorposts and lintels of each home. Although these sacrificial animals were slaughtered, they could still give life to those who ate their meat and sheltered under the marks of their blood. Life for life!

Of course, the pagan nations surrounding Israel also made sacrifices. But they believed that the blood would appease their angry gods and satisfy a divine blood-thirstiness. **This was not the case in Israel!** Every Israelite knew that God was the source of life, and that He had initiated this sacrificial practice to bring His fallen people back from death, to life. **'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'.** (Leviticus 17:11)

Hopefully, this helps to explain why **Jesus' blood** is spoken about so often in the NT ...and with such reverence and awe! For Jesus was sent to us from heaven, as God's sacrifice of life. When **we**, the human race, had diminished ourselves by sin and corruption, **Jesus' sacrificial blood was offered to bring us back to health and wholeness! His blood was shed on the cross for us**, not because God was angry or needed to be appeased, but because **God wanted to save us, cleanse us, heal us; to bring us from back from death** through the life-blood of His Son! And He still does!

Isn't this what Jesus is trying to tell us in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel?

"Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. (John 6:53)

The blood of Jesus is the blood of life!

Pause to sing— Hail thou once despised Jesus (#295)
(Chinese Hymnbook #78)

(Read Ephesians 2:13–14a)

Meditation #3- "The blood of unity"

The Bible makes it clear that every human being has come from one common ancestry... one family tree...one stock. We are all the descendants of Adam and Eve. Whether we like it or not, we are all from the same **blood...a blood that was placed in us by God, the Father of all humankind!**

Sadly, however, somewhere along the line, the human race has forgotten this truth. Somewhere along the line, people began to believe the lie that we are all different, unconnected individuals, separated by things like the texture of our hair or the colour of our skin. We allow culture and language to fool us into thinking that we have nothing in common --- that nothing will ever be able to unite us.

This is the reason behind racism and nationalism, scepticism and suspicion. It's the reason for sabre-rattling and political posturing. It's ultimately the reason why we have wars! How foolish we are!

How will we ever find peace for this world? How will our divisions be overcome? **The OT answer** came through the blood of sacrificial animals, whose blood was meant to bring peace between arguing neighbours and warring nations. But **the NT answer**, of course, is found in **the blood of Jesus...a far more powerful blood...a blood that is able to bring reconciliation and peace and bring warring nations and peoples together!** How?

Think about Jesus as He was led to His trial and, then, to His crucifixion. Think about the beatings and scourging. Now, the question that Jesus had to struggle with during this time was quite simple: Should I fight for my rights? Should I destroy those who seek to destroy me? Or, should I lay down my rights and give in to their brutality? Jesus, of course, chose the nails! Why? Because He saw, in His enemies, His own flesh and blood! And that's why, from the cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them!" This is the only way there can be peace! For through Christ and His blood, there is hope for the world as people begin to acknowledge the one common blood of humanity—that same common blood that was poured out on the cross! We are, then, called to take up our cross...to give up our own rights...to humbly seek the good of others! Only then can a movement of unity emerge and a common desire for peace will sweep the land—through Christ's blood!

We all came from one family. And although sin has rent asunder that which God had originally joined together, God is determined

to bring all things together again in His Son! So, let us also fix our eyes on Jesus and be amazed at how His blood can bring unity back into this divided earth! For, as St. Paul said, “**Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**¹⁴ **For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one...**¹⁶ **and in one body reconciled both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”**

How grateful we are that, through the ‘commonly human’ blood of the God/man, Jesus Christ, and His **once-for-all** sacrifice on the cross to take away our sinful behaviour, the violent shedding of blood on this earth can finally come to an end...**once and for all!**

The blood of Jesus is the blood of unity.

Pause to sing—In the cross of Christ I glory (#265)

(Read Revelation 12:7–11)

Meditation #4– “The blood of victory”

These Good Friday meditations on Christ’s blood would be incomplete if we didn’t talk about the victory over Satan that was accomplished by Christ’s blood.

Even though the Gospel stories reveal little of the cosmic battle that Jesus was fighting as He hung on that cross it is, nevertheless, it was a battle that He had spoken about only days before. In John 12, Jesus tells His disciples, “**Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.**”

Of course, one needs to remember that it was Satan who instigated Christ’s crucifixion! He was the one who stirred up the Chief Priests, Pharisees and Teachers of the Law to oppose Jesus. He was the one who entered Judas’ heart and caused him to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. He was the one who convinced Pilate to turn his back on this innocent man and wash his hands of the whole affair. It was Satan who got the crowd excited at the first sight of blood and encouraged them to shout,

“Crucify Him, crucify Him!” And so, in one sense, Satan was putting every effort into destroying the Son of God... mustering all his forces to make sure this man was brought down by the sting of death!

So, how did Jesus turn the tables? How did His blood win the victory? It all started when Jesus willingly went to the cross... willingly endured its shame..., willingly placed His life in the Father’s hands...willingly gave His life as a ransom for many. By standing firm against Satan’s whispers of doubt and by refusing to use His divine power to bring His own suffering to an end, Jesus fought a battle against Satan as a man...a perfect man...a man who was willing to die for this eternal cause! It demanded His blood...it took His life! But that’s the whole reason why Jesus was victorious!

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of it in this way:

By his death he broke the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

The Apostle Paul would later describe the cross as something which “**disarmed the powers and authorities..., (and) made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**” (Col. 2:15)

I know it’s hard to fathom what is being said here, but when Jesus descended into Hades (the place of the dead), He filled it (paradoxically) with Life! As Hebrews describes it, Jesus had an indestructible life! That’s how He could enter Hades and set the prisoners free! That’s how He derailed Satan’s entire game plan! Not by His death...but by the on-going, unstoppable life found in His blood!

And so, no matter how you understand Christ’s victory, there’s really only one truth that is important: **Christ’s blood** has forever freed us from the hands of the Evil One! His blood stands as the ultimate sign of **our victory** and **Satan’s defeat!**

Of course, this doesn’t mean that Satan will stop trying to deceive and destroy us! Not at all! But it does mean that we know where we stand...and so, whenever Satan attempts to bring us down, we have one simple reply! The blood of Jesus!

Indeed, that's the picture we see in Revelation 12! Although the dragon voice of Satan rose up to accuse the people of God, we're told that **"they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony."**

With them, and with the Apostle Paul, we can forever declare: **"Who shall lay any charge against God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died..."**

The blood of Jesus is the blood of victory!

Let me quickly summarize what we've been thinking about this morning:

The Bible is a book of blood and a bloody book...but not because God

is some sort of bloodthirsty and cruel deity! To the contrary, God is the author and sustainer of life! That's why...

1. The blood of the sacrificial system was the blood of **life**.
2. The blood of the sacrificial system was the blood of **unity**.
3. The blood of the sacrificial system was the blood of **freedom** from oppression and Satan's bondage.

But, of course, the NT blood of Jesus has come to supersede the entire OT sacrificial system! How? Because, once and for all, His blood brings life; His blood brings unity; His blood brings freedom! By His blood, God has offered this dying world the one, final blood transfusion through which we find eternal life.

Amen.