

Blood and Water

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now for a short time to the passage we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 19. We can read again at verse 34. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

He who saw it has borne witness. Because his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth, that you also may believe.

I know that next Lord's Day, you're due to remember the Lord's death and the Lord's Supper. And it's always been my practice, as most of you will know, in the week preceding that, to try and focus upon something to do with the death of Jesus as a preparatory to the Lord's Supper, as we anticipated.

So today I'd like to look at this verse with you. Some of it possibly will not be new to some of you at least, but I hope that together we'll know the Lord's blessing as we look at this very interesting detail, very significant detail, about the crucifixion and what happened particularly on this occasion.

Now God's timing, of course, is always significant. We know that from our own lives. We know it too as we read the Bible. We can see how God's timing is so significant in the events that take place in the history of God's people.

[1 : 34] And as God establishes certain things for his people to observe, the timings by which he actually establishes them are very significant. For example, we'll go way back to the Passover in Egypt, the timing of it then, and how it was to be established permanently for the people of Israel until the days of the Old Testament were over.

And this timing here is significant because this was not only a Sabbath, but a Sabbath the Jews regarded as a high day. It was a particularly important Sabbath that was kept in a way that was significant at this time of the Passover.

And it's interesting that the timing that is given us here really tells us itself something significant about the Jews and how they were here behind the putting to death of Jesus, though, of course, God presided over that, as we know.

They had so many scruples, so many things that they just wanted to observe minutely in the laws that they made up themselves, including here that the bodies would not actually be on the cross on this high day, on this Sabbath day.

Yet they had no scruple whatsoever in putting Jesus to death on that same day. No scruples whatsoever about crucifying Christ and sending him by that away from them, out of their sight as they saw it forever.

[3 : 11] Now, the soldier was completely unaware, I'm sure, of the significance of what he was doing. He simply wanted to make sure that Christ was dead, and in order to do so, though he knew that because when he came to break his legs, he saw that he was dead, but he pierced his side with the spear.

We don't know what his own motives were in doing so. We're not told. Did he just want to make absolutely sure? Who knows? But for John, what happened immediately, I did that, he did that, was really significant.

Immediately, immediately, he says, there came out blood and water. And for John, blood and water are two hugely important symbolic elements.

You only have to read through the first part of his gospel, for example, to realize that, especially the emphasis there in different chapters on water, away from chapter 2 into chapter 3, chapter 4, the woman at the well, all of that has water significantly in what is told us and it's all symbolic as to Jesus and to the establishment of God's kingdom and to the way in which the New Testament in its abundance surpasses that of the old.

But John was there and he tells us in verse 35, he who saw it has borne witness and his testimony is true and he knows that he is telling the truth that you also may believe.

[4 : 41] So in other words, what he's telling has happened, he saw as symbolically important and important in order to the production of or even the strengthening of the faith of God's people.

He saw a significance in these two elements of blood and water. And the gospel of John is really, you could say, the apostle's mature thought on the death of Christ and his resurrection.

His mature thought about what the death of Jesus really means and why it is significant and why it is followed by the resurrection and the way it was.

The whole of his gospel is really a retelling of the significance of that death and resurrection in all the different accounts that we have of the experiences of these disciples and of others as they saw and witnessed Christ's ministry.

Now he saw significance in these two elements and we'll see hopefully that they are significant too in relation to the Lord's Supper, in relation to our remembrance of the death of Christ.

[5 : 55] There are three things that we can mention about them. First of all, here is evidence that Jesus truly died. Here is evidence for John as he writes as an apostle and conveys the truth.

Here is evidence to him and to you and I today that Jesus really died. Secondly, here are two symbols as to why Jesus died, the blood and the water.

They are significant as telling us the purpose of Jesus' death. And thirdly, here is also a direct connection as we said with the Lord's Supper.

Here is first of all evidence that Jesus died. Of course, Jesus had already died in the spiritual sense in which he cried out on the cross, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

When you think about the death of Jesus, you're not simply thinking of this physical matter that took place here when he died in that physical sense when his spirit left his body as we ourselves do when we die.

[7 : 03] The death of Jesus involved spiritual death, it involved damnation, it involved the penalty that was due to you and to me for our sins. He died that in his soul.

He died that on the cross when he cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That is what spiritual death is, being separated from God. And Jesus, in the mystery of that moment, which we cannot describe other than to say that the eternal aspect of that death, of that damnation, Jesus experienced within the limits of time.

But that's the death he died. And the other aspect of death, this physical sense of death, is also something that was required of him to experience.

Because the grave where our body is laid was also to be his lot. He needed to have every aspect of death experienced in order that he would prepare for his people that they did not come under the dominion of death and that they be freed from that.

He needed to have this physical death also experienced on his own part. And it's interesting how John, verse 42 here, because of the Jewish day of the preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

[8 : 32] Isn't that surprising in a way? It doesn't say as you would expect, they laid the body of Jesus there. That's what they were carrying. They were carrying the dead body of Jesus.

They had taken it from the cross, they were conveying it to this tomb, but instead of saying they laid Jesus there, John significantly says, they laid Jesus there.

Because this was an aspect of Christ's own experience. What it meant for him in his human nature to experience death physically.

His soul and body separated and his body as a dead body being laid in the tomb. The Jesus who continued to live while his body was in the grave is the Jesus that John meant when he says there they laid Jesus.

it is an experience of his person, the person of the Son of God experiencing physical death. Now there are various medical opinions as to why blood and water came from this wound caused by the spear.

[9 : 46] I'm not going to go into that. Some experts differ as to their interpretation of why it would be that blood and water came from the side of Jesus. But for John it was evidence that he was truly dead, that he was indeed dead at that point.

And John faced later on when he came to write his epistles and indeed this gospel as well, but it comes out more so in the epistles, he faced a heresy in his own day. He was the last of the apostles left alive in this world and near the end of his life he faced a heresy that said that Jesus didn't have a real human nature, that he only seemed to be human, and that he seemed to act like a human being acts.

But it wasn't real because the idea would be God does not actually have a physical side to him and anyway for him to be connected with anything to do with humanity would be to besmirch himself with sinful humanity.

That was known as the docetic theory from a Greek word meaning to seem. And they were saying this seems to be the case but it's not true. Now for John as an apostle he had to counter that and you can see it coming across more clearly in his epistles especially the first epistle but it's there here as well.

He pierced aside the soldier once there came out blood and water he who saw it as born witness. And if you put that along with what else he's saying here at the end of the chapter you'll know that this is John saying this is the evidence that I had reliable evidence that he really died.

[11 : 25] Some people today though it's not new question whether Jesus ever existed. I saw an article recently where somebody was trying to argue that there was so little evidence that Jesus had ever existed that the church had probably made it up as disciples had made up these stories or people that followed God of Israel and different ways in which they came to the idea that this person existed for real.

But this article was saying there's very little evidence for that. Actually there's far more historical evidence even out with the Bible that Jesus existed than that Julius Caesar existed.

There's plenty of evidence even out with the Bible but when you go to the Bible it's very obvious they don't try to prove the existence of Jesus. The pages of the Bible tell you about the Jesus who existed in the way that they tell you in this world.

And scripture because it is God's word it's an amazing thing that because you're reading something today that's utterly reliable because you're reading something today here that tells you exactly what happened how it happened and indeed given some interpretation as to why it happened.

What is happening effectively is this that you and I are being conveyed back in time as if we're standing physically the moment it happened beside the cross of Jesus.

[13 : 03] This is so reliable it's just as reliable for you today to read this as if you've been standing there with those who are looking at the cross while Jesus was crucified on it and if we lose that sense of the reliability and the truthfulness of this word of scripture we're in trouble.

We've got a big problem. Nothing is then dependable of what you understand about your own life about this world about God or any of these issues. Because all that you understand about these issues these people that we are as God's people about the church about God himself about his personhood about Jesus it all comes from this word of scripture.

And that's why so much attempt is made to undermine the trustworthiness of the Bible. When you put it aside and say you can't really trust it you can't be reliant on everything it says and you can see where that leads and that's why as a nation at least partly mainly as a nation why things are the way they are.

When you put the Bible aside say it's no longer relevant it's no longer trustworthy what are you going to put in this place? You're not going to have a vacuum. You're not going to have neutrality. You're going to have human so called human wisdom.

Human wisdom by itself is always contrary to God and always anti-God and always has been and always will be. That's why you need the wisdom of the Bible the wisdom of the cross and that's why here the testimony is testimony that is true and he's saying this is testimony that is true so that you also may believe.

[14 : 53] Here is evidence that Jesus truly died. Here are two symbols secondly of why Jesus died the blood and the water. And when you go back to the Old Testament you could say in summary and it does really very much in summary briefly that the Old Testament symbols of salvation you could say are pretty much confined to blood and water the way these were used in the rituals that God gave to his people in the Old Testament.

Blood and water. Blood associated with the altar where sacrifices were laid. Water with the matter of cleansing ceremonially where that was related to the likes of the labor that the priests used for cleansing as they went about their business in the temple and in the tabernacle.

Blood and water you could say are very much at the very heart of things in the Old Testament ritual that symbolizes and represents salvation from God for his people.

And that's why here they are significant to John as he wrote his gospel because these two elements are symbolical on the one hand of atonement of Christ's death being an atonement for sin, a rendering to God in our place, a giving to God of himself in his death in order to atone for sin.

And on the other hand the water as it symbolizes our cleansing from the guilt and pollution of our sin, particularly our pollution.

[16 : 38] So you could see in a sense these correspond to not only the atonement and the cleansing of the Holy Spirit by taking what Christ has done and applying it to us in our lives, it's also symbolical you might say in relation to that our justification on the one hand and our sanctification on the other.

Where we are set right with God and righteousness, where we are cleansed actually from the defilement of our sins. And it's interesting that John takes up these elements again in his first letter.

You remember there in chapter 5 of 1 John, I just pointed to you, chapter 5 of 1 John, where John says there in verse 7, verse 6, this is he, the son of God, Jesus, this is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by the water only, but by the water and the blood.

And the spirit is the one who testifies, because the spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify, the spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.

It's saying there that Christ's death and the cleansing effects of Christ's atonement by the Holy Spirit are made effective. They are dynamic witnesses to the salvation that God has provided for us in Jesus Christ.

[18 : 11] And these are two essential elements of the mission of Jesus. This is how he came. He came by water and by blood. He came, in other words, was himself baptized, of course, though he needed no washing from sin.

He didn't have any of his own, but he was baptized in order to identify with his people in their need of cleansing. And he came by blood. He came to die.

Isn't that itself an incredible thought? B.B. Warfield, I think, the famous American theologian, I think, if I remember rightly, was the person who made this comment, where he thought about the Son of God prior to his coming into the world, while still in eternity, prior even to the creation itself being created, saying to the Father, I will go and die for sinners.

I will go and die for sinners. Have you ever really taken that in? It's not something you should think about, and I should think about every day, that God should say this?

That the Son of God should commit himself from all eternity to die for people who knew were utterly undeserving of it, and deserving only of the death that he died, in order to save them from it.

[19 : 42] God died. The two symbols of why he died, because you see, it wasn't enough that Jesus wasn't enough for us, and indeed it wasn't enough for God, in the salvation that he set about achieving or procuring for us, it wasn't enough that he sent his Son into the world to take our nature, to live as a human being, and then just to die a physical death in his humanity, that would have given us a perfect example of what a human life should be like, but that would not have saved us.

It would have left our sin actually untouched in terms of providing for God an atonement that he would accept for it.

We have to make up for our sins. We have to make up to God the debt of our sins. And as we are clearly told in the Bible again and again, you and I as mere human beings cannot do that.

Our sin disqualifies us. But that's why he came. In the great words of Romans chapter 8, God sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin, where?

In the flesh, in the human nature that he took. he condemned sin in the flesh. Blood and water as they describe the atonement and the effect of the atonement in cleansing.

[21 : 28] How well do you know that today for yourself? how much of significance does this blood and water have in your own experience?

I'm not asking you how well do you know it in the description of the Bible? I'm not asking you how familiar are you with it in the way the gospel is proclaimed? I'm not asking at all how much you understand theologically of the meaning of these words.

We can have all of that and still not be saved. Remember what John is saying here about Jesus' death. He who saw it as born witness, his testimony is true and he knows that he's telling the truth that you also may believe.

Is there anyone here today who has not yet come to believe in a saving sense? To believe in a way that has embraced this Jesus?

That has given yourself wholly to this Jesus to be ruled by him? with the desire that he will indeed be your savior to cover your sins, to wash you from sin, to present you before God holy, acceptable as he alone is able to do.

[22 : 48] Because you see we can't do it without that believing, without that faith. In Hebrews chapter 11 we have a very interesting list of those who lived by faith.

And included in that are the people of Israel crossing the Red Sea. By faith they crossed the Red Sea as on dry land.

And then what does it say? Which the Egyptians attempting to do were drowned. what is that telling us? It tells you that on the one hand there were people who managed to get across the Red Sea by God's miraculous power by their faith or through their faith in him.

They trusted him. And those who tried to do it without that faith perished. And that's how it is for us today, friends.

you try and reach heaven without faith and you'll perish. And you don't need to even try it because Jesus has done it for you.

[23 : 59] And everything you need you already have in him who died this death. The blood and the water that came from his side testifying to the reality of his death but also the purpose for why he died.

To render an atonement to God to provide a cleansing for us against our sins. Isn't that what the great hymn writer wrote in these famous words, Rock of Ages?

Rock of Ages cleft for me? What does that mean? Cleft, split into let me hide myself in thee.

Let the water and the blood from thy riven side which flowed be of sin the double cure. Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

The rock of ages cleft for sinners. Is that your rock? Is that your foundation? Are you coming to face death and eternity with anything other beneath your feet than the rock that is Christ in the blood and water that represents atonement and cleansing for us as sinners.

[25 : 24] So there's evidence that Jesus truly died. Secondly, there are two symbols here of why Jesus died and here thirdly is a direct connection with the Lord's Supper.

we mentioned 1 John chapter 5 and these verses that we read a minute ago where we find that he came by water and by blood.

And you notice there as well that they are regarded as testifying, that they are witnesses, the water and the blood are witnesses, the atonement that was rendered, the cleansing, they're witnesses to the salvation that is in Christ and to God's provision of salvation.

In other words, as you think about God working through his Holy Spirit yet today, as that work of applying what Christ achieved goes on in the life of God's people, you find that the ongoing witness through the likes of the gospel and the Lord's Supper are testifying continually glory to the death of Christ and to the purpose for which he died.

The Holy Spirit draws us to the cross of Christ. And you can see that from what we've said already, that the Spirit and the water and the blood bear testimony, they are witnesses to us.

[26 : 58] And when you apply that to the Lord's Supper, as you know, the cup with the wine and the bread represent Christ and his death.

There's no water used. They represent his death in the way in which he died the death of the cross.

And as you take these elements, as you take these symbolic elements to yourself, again, you think of this scripture, this blood and water that came from the side of Jesus.

And what you're effectively doing is reaching out and taking these elements as they represent this death for you. And you're saying as you take them, the bread, and as you take it into your mouth, and as you eat it, and as you digest it bodily, and as you take the cup, and as you drink of that cup that represents the blood of Christ, you're saying, I am taking this atonement and this cleansing to myself and you.

I'm renewing my vows before God and my testimony, that I believe his testimony, that I believe and I accept the testimony of these elements, this blood and water of which the Bible tells me, and this cup and this bread that represent him in his death at the Lord's Supper.

[28 : 25] The Lord's Supper, in other words, is itself a channel of blessing and it's a channel of blessing in the way in which God uses it that provides us with the blessing of salvation through what we observe and through what we do.

That is why Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me. He didn't just say, think about this in remembrance of me. there is of course your mind as you use these elements, as you use the scripture along with them.

You think about things, you think it through, you use your intellect, but you're doing this, what he means is you're doing this in taking the cup and taking the bread. Take, eat, take this cup, do this, so that the actions of doing are so important significantly, symbolically.

Because when you take the elements spiritually, by faith, you're taking Jesus. You're taking his death to yourself and all its provisions.

You're taking to yourself the blood and the water that came from his side, symbolically. You're taking the reality of what they represented. You're taking the atonement that he rendered, the cleansing that he died to effect, and you're saying, that's what I need, that's what I want.

[29 : 55] What that death achieved is what I'm coming to the Lord's Supper again to receive to myself. You may have been there many, many times before. That doesn't matter.

You want again to be able to renew that action of taking, so that spiritually at the same time, you will be taking to yourself the benefits of Christ's death in his salvation.

And as you take the bread and as the bread enters into your body, and as you take the cup with the wine, and as that wine also enters into your body, you're also seeing something symbolical there in a wonderful way.

because just as you experience that physically, so you're actually feeding spiritually upon Christ crucified and the benefits of his death, which is how our confessional faith puts it.

Now I can't explain that to you. We don't have an adequate explanation of how God himself operates by blessing these elements to us that are themselves physical and remain physical and don't change into anything other than they are, but yet he uses them in a spiritual fashion so as to actually feed spiritually his own people, and by their faith they draw into themselves through the Lord's Supper and through the Word the saving benefits of Christ's death.

[31 : 33] That is why it's important if you should be there that you be there. there are some people here I know who should be there, and I hope will be there, even if they have not been there before or for some time, because we are in fact putting aside a wonderful provision from God to feed our souls through it if we don't take the Lord's Supper.

It's not an insignificant refusal. It doesn't depend on whether you're good enough or I'm good enough. You never will be good enough. The point is Jesus is good enough for us.

And if you say in your hearts of hearts, Jesus is good enough for me, then you should be at the Lord's table. You should be availing yourself of the benefits of the sacrament.

When you do this, do this in remembrance of him. So do it. Leave yourself behind.

Focus on him. Focus on the blood and the water. And if you say the blood and the water are all you need for your redemption, that's where you should be. where they are represented in the elements of the Lord's Supper.

[33 : 10] The soldier, as we said at the beginning, little understood, if any at all, the significance of his actions. People of God have been grateful to God ever since he did this.

For what John records of the blood and water that came from the side of Jesus. And are the words of another hymn writer not yours and mine as you anticipate coming to the Lord's Supper or to remember the Lord's death once again?

I am thine, O Lord, I have heard thy voice and it told thy love to me, but I long to rise in the arms of faith and be closer drawn to thee.

Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, to the cross where thou hast died. Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, to thy precious bleeding side.

May God bless this word to us. Let's pray.