

Blood and Water

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn briefly back to John chapter 19 and just for a short time this evening the words that we find in verse 34.

John chapter 19 at verse 34. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water.

God's timing is always right. This little detail that's recorded here by John who witnessed the crucifixion is something that sets before us what might appear to be just a passing observation without much religious or spiritual significance.

But when you look at it in the context of John's gospel as a whole indeed as we'll see of John's writings including his first epistle especially. We'll then begin to see that the reference here to blood and water coming from the side of Jesus is in fact very significant indeed theologically and spiritually for ourselves.

This timing of God was because it was the day of the preparation. It was close to the Sabbath of course and that Sabbath was a high day being associated with the Passover.

[1 : 26] Because of that there was a ceremonial regulation that bodies would not be allowed to remain on the cross if they were crucified into that Sabbath.

And it's interesting and it's solemn really that the Jews had no scruples about crucifying the Lord, about putting him to death. They had no scruples at all about that.

That was what they clamoured for. And yet they had a scruple about leaving his body on the cross so as not to transgress a ceremonial regulation. And that itself makes the point that they totally failed of course to see the significance of the one they were crucifying being taken up with the significance of minor things in terms of ceremonial regulations like that.

Now the soldier was probably just, well he was just doing his job really but he was, there are a whole lot of ideas I've shown us to why the soldier did this.

And ultimately of course God in his timing and God in his overriding providence is behind it. But in terms of the soldier's own action it's probably just on his part one final act just to make sure that this person is dead.

[2 : 42] He was already dead. He didn't have his legs broken like the other two. That was the practice in the gruesome aspect of crucifixion, crucifixion and all aspects of it is gruesome.

But bodies that were hung on the cross if they were still alive after a certain time. There was a little kind of wooden thing on the cross which you could almost sit on but most of the weight was taken on your hands and on your feet.

But in order to bring about death quickly if their legs were broken then all the weight of course then fell onto the hands and the body just slumped forward and that was the final act.

And that's probably what they expected when they came to Jesus that they would need to break his legs. But he saw that he was already dead so they didn't break his legs but this soldier pierced his side with a long spear that he would be carrying and at once there came out blood and water.

So it was just probably matter of fact on his part just to make absolutely sure he just gave him a thrust in any case. Probably without much feeling or perhaps there was a bit of contempt there.

[3 : 57] Who knows? But that's what he did. But John was there. And this gospel that was written many years later before John died is the mature thought of this great apostle of God.

And what thought it is. It's a gospel as somebody described that the smallest child can paddle in. And yet the biggest elephant can swim in.

It's one of those amazing pieces of writing that even the youngest Christian can get so much from. And yet even the most mature Christian can still feel totally out of their depth.

But here we find this observation and we'll look at some of the significance in it. The two elements that are mentioned, blood and water, are especially significant.

These are the two elements that John writes a lot about in this gospel and also in his first epistle. And as we'll see, these are the two elements that are really significant in terms of the Old Testament's representation, not only of Christ and his death, but indeed of the whole application of redemption to us.

[5 : 17] In the way that redemption is applied, these two elements of blood and water feature significantly. And there are three things. And we're looking at it especially in relation to preparing for the communion later on, on the Lord's Day, God willing.

There are three things that help us in that preparation arising from this rather simple detail. And I'm going to keep it very simple. First of all, here is evidence that Christ truly died.

Here is evidence that Christ truly died. Now then, he had been dead. He had died already in a spiritual sense. Christ died the death that we deserve, the spiritual death, the eternal death that we deserve.

He died that in that moment of great dereliction when he cried, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That is Christ experiencing in his own soul the death that we deserve, the penalty of sin.

But there is another aspect to that death which he then came afterwards to experience in order to complete his experience of death in every aspect of it.

[6 : 32] You know yourselves that death essentially is our separation from God. But there is an element to death in the physical sense where our soul and body are separated at death in the sense in which we die in this world.

The end of our course in this world is death in the physical sense. Our soul and body are separate. That's one aspect of death. But that's the one aspect of death that Christ had not yet died when it came to this moment.

The physical aspect of it. The grave is something that belongs to the wages of sin. That's why the grave is our lot.

That's why it's there in our experience as we end our lives in this world. And for our benefit, for God's people's benefit, the Lord needed to experience every aspect of death in order to free us from it.

The only way in God's scheme of salvation that we could actually be emancipated, freed from death even in the physical sense was for the Lord himself physically to descend into that grave and have his body in the sepulcher for the time and duration it was there.

[7 : 50] And therefore the Lord needed to die physically, which is now what's being described as he died on the cross in the physical sense. This soldier pierced his side and out came blood and water.

Now, there are various medical opinions as to what this might signify in a physical sense. I'm not going to go into that. There are too many medical people here for a start to try and theorize about these sort of things.

But some people have different ideas as to what this meant even in a physical sense. Some people would say, for example, that it's proof that he died of a broken heart. That such was the extent of his sufferings, that his physical heart, this part of his body, was rent by the sheer extent of his sufferings.

Now, whether that is true or not cannot really be fully established. There are other good medical opinions that say, no, that's not really possible unless you had a very diseased heart.

But let's leave that where it is. It's an interesting way of looking at things, but we can't actually be sure. What you can be sure about is that this is one of the great testimonies, one of the great proofs that he really died.

[9 : 01] That he did, in fact, experience death and died in the physical sense as much as in any other sense. He was dead already. One of the soldiers pierced the side with a spear.

At once there came out blood and water. That is someone who is dead. He's not unconscious. He's not about to die. He's dead.

What's hanging on the cross is the body of the Son of God. It is Christ's remains. He has already died.

And that itself is important. Because very early on in church history, after the time of the apostles, and indeed there may have been elements of it during their time, but certainly after that time, there was a heresy that arose in the church that claimed that Christ did not have a real human body. You'll find that in some of the early church writers like Augustine and others who wrote against these doctetists, they were called from a Greek word which means to seem or to be like something. And these heretics actually insisted that Jesus Christ did not have a real human body.

[10:17] That it only seemed real. And therefore, when it came to die, it wasn't really an actual death in the physical sense. Therefore, it couldn't be a physical resurrection either.

And that, of course, made problems too. But that was something the church had to face. And when the church faced it, here was something the church could go back to. Here it is written by John the Apostle who testified, having seen this event, that this person was dead.

And that from the side of that dead Jesus, there flowed blood and water. And you can take that, of course, also as something that's applicable to our own age.

There are many people today that don't believe in the possibility of resurrection, for example. And therefore, they take that back, similar to the people that Paul was arguing against in 1 Corinthians 15.

And say, well, if there's no such thing as resurrection, if resurrection doesn't really happen, if it's impossible, therefore Jesus couldn't have actually risen from the dead. There must be another explanation for the Bible passages dealing with what seems to be his resurrection.

[11:24] This is a real death, followed by a real physical resurrection. Without it, says Paul, we have no gospel.

We have no basis for our faith. We have no ground for our hope. We have nothing ahead of ourselves in terms of resurrection. Death is the champion.

Well, that's what the Bible goes out of its way to say is not the case. I will be your place. Oh, death is the declaration of God.

And that way, the way towards achieving it was by the death and resurrection of Christ. And it's interesting that this particular side of Christ, the pierced side of Jesus, is one of the very things that Jesus brought Thomas face to face with when he expressed doubt in the resurrection of the Lord. Remember what Thomas had said, unless I see the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And Jesus had overheard, of course, these words, although he wasn't physically present in the room.

[12:37] And when Thomas was present on the next occasion, a week later, and Jesus came in with Thomas there, he repeated just verbatim, word for word, the declaration of Thomas and his insistence in his unbelief that he wouldn't believe.

And he said, Thomas, reach out here on my hands. Thrust your hand into my side. And don't go on being faceless, but believe.

Whatever was the case afterwards, as Jesus stood in front of Thomas, one of the great evidences of his resurrection, as well as of him being the same person that had died on the cross, was this pierced side into which Thomas was invited to place his hand.

It was a significant wound. It was not a tiny piercing. It was a gaping hole. And that's what the spear had actually done.

And that's why this became to Thomas a great proof of the resurrection of Christ, that this in fact was the same person. Yes, he had really died. Yes, Thomas knew he had really died.

[13:54] Yes, now he was really risen from the dead. And now Thomas knew it. This is evidence that Christ truly died. This anonymous soldier, how little he knew the significance of what he was doing.

How little he knew how much a feature, how important a feature this pierced side of Jesus would become to his believing people in every generation afterwards, even beginning with his own apostle Thomas.

There it is. There's a sovereignty of God, a pagan Roman soldier, just to satisfy his own inclination. And yet there is so much in that as evidence of Christ's death and his resurrection following.

That's the first thing. It's evidence that Christ truly died. And that's what you bring to the Lord's table. Of course, you know that anyway. But it confirms your faith and what your faith is based upon.

You take this cup that signifies his shed blood. You take this bread that signifies his body broken for you. You take that and you take this verse with you.

[15:09] And you say, the Lord actually really died, the Son of God, in my nature and in my place. He died the death that I deserved. He died the death even to the extent of my spiritual eternal damnation.

He actually died that in himself, powerfully, victoriously on the cross. He went then to die my physical death. He entered into the grave for me. He's been there before me.

And I'm doing this in remembrance of him. Secondly, here are symbols of Christ's saving work. It's evidence of us that he truly died. It's also, here are the symbols of Christ's saving work. There are two great categories of elements in the Old Testament.

You might say just two elements, really. In the whole ritual that you find in the Old Testament. Yes, there are other things as well that are used. Certain commodities that are used for various items like incense and oils and all of that.

[16:13] But there are two basic, big elements that are all the way through the Old Testament. From the time that God gave the ritual of the sacrificial and ceremonial system to Israel.

And these two are blood and water. The Old Testament has an altar. Where blood is shed. The Old Testament has a laver. Where washing takes place. And these are the two great features of Old Testament religion. In our relationship with God.

In the people's relationship with God. And God's relationship with them. In his provision of redemption for them. As that was shown out in these ceremonies. And also in the application of redemption to them.

As that was shown out in the ceremonies as well. These two great elements that symbolize atonement and cleansing. The blood symbolizing atonement made by death.

[17:16] The water as it's applied or poured out or sprinkled. As it symbolizes cleansing. Washing from the defilement of sin. That corresponds in the New Testament way of taking that further.

And showing us how it applies especially to the death of Christ. And from the death of Christ to us. There's your justification. And on the other side your sanctification.

There's the removal of the guilt of your sin. By the blood of Christ. Having taken your death. Having died your death. Having shed his blood for you.

That is there to deal with. The guilt of your sin. What stands between you and God. In your judicial relationship to him. There on the other hand is the water.

There's the cleansing application of Christ's redemption to us. By the Holy Spirit. And that's for the washing of the defilement of sin. To make you clean.

[18:19] In other words. On the one hand you've got your justification. To make you righteous. On the other side. You've got your sanctification. To make you holy. So that you are as a complete person.

Eventually. Ultimately. Your justification is that now. But not your sanctification. But when God will bring all his people together. And when the whole church will be glorified.

That will be it. The blood and the water. That symbolize the death of Christ. And the application of its benefit to us by the spirit. The atonement that he wrought by his shed blood.

By his death. And the cleansing effect of it. As the spirit. Takes the things of Christ. And applies them to us. Washing us from our sin. Cleansing us. Sanctifying us. Finally making us to be ready to be with God forever.

That's what these two great elements. Represented all the way down through history. That's why they were so significant to John. Who knew his Old Testament so well. There came out blood and water.

[19:24] For him it's not just a mere observance. Of a detail that's hardly worth noticing. It's full of spiritual significance. It's there. It's there that he finds.

In a spiritual sense. The power that redeems. The power that brings sinners to God. And makes them acceptable in his sight.

And it's interesting that. When John came to write. This first epistle. That when you come to. Chapter 5 of. Of 1st John. He says something which is very.

Closely attached to what we find. In our text tonight. This is he. He's been talking of course about Jesus. This Christ who's been born of God. And everyone who loves the fathers.

This is in chapter 5 of 1st John. That's how he begins. He loves. Everyone who loves the father. Loves him. Who's been born of him. And so on. This is the victory that overcomes the world. Even our faith.

[20 : 23] Who is he that overcomes. Except the one who believes. That Jesus is the son of God. This is he. Who came. By water. And blood.

Jesus Christ. Not by 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. Agree. There's a textual.

Complication. There are some translations. You'll find they're different. But. It's not in this particular instance. These. Where it emphasizes. That this is he who came.

By water. And by blood. Not by water only. But by water. And by blood. That's the coming of Jesus Christ. Into the world. The son of God. Incarnate. Taking our nature.

[21 : 20] Coming into his mission. Coming into his ministry. How did he come? He came by water. And he came by blood. That's not. A significant. That's not a. A reference to his own baptism.

Water. And his death. In. Blood. It's a reference to. His ministry. And what it was about. He came by. Water. In the sense that.

The purpose of his ministry. Was to cleanse sinners. From their sin. And he came by blood. In that. That needed to be. Done first. Before the cleansing. Could take place. The blood is shed.

Before the water is applied. The atonement is made. Before the spirit comes. To apply the redemption. That the cross has purchased. What a great. What a great privilege.

We have. In those of us. Who've learned. The great truths. Of the gospel. In our catechisms. Even the way that. The catechisms. Are arranged. Marvelous thing.

[22 : 15] To look. At the arrangement. Of the catechisms. And the way. The one. The one thing. Leads in an orderly fashion. To the other. Atonement comes first. And then. The applying of. The benefits of that.

To us. By the spirit of God. On to our. Justification. And sanctification. And all of these things. That are attached. To the death of Christ. Well. What he's telling us here.

Is that. This is what he saw. That came out at once. Blood. And water. Take that then. To the old testament. Look at these two great elements. As they were used. All the way through there.

Look at them then. In the writings of John. Especially chapter one. Chapter five. Of first John. As he applies these two. To the coming of Christ. Christ came by blood.

He came to die. It's by his death. That he made atonement. Not by his life. Though that's not detached from it. Not by giving us an example. But by dying.

[23 : 12] And when you come to take. The bread. And the cup. God willing. This Lord's day. Yes. Yes. You're giving the Lord. Thanks. That you have the greatest example. Ever. Of what it means. To live a life.

That's pleasing to God. Let not that be absent. From your thoughts. But let it not be the first thing. Because the first thing is.

Not thank you Lord. For sending me. The greatest example. Thank you for providing. Me an atonement. Atonement. Thank you for providing. Blood.

That cleansed away. My guilt. That answered. The demands. Of your broken law. That made atonement.

So that I could have. Redemption. And as you come. You also come. Knowing that he came. By water. That it was for your actual.

[24 : 07] Cleansing. That he died. Though his atonement. Is making reference. To God. And pleasing God. Yet its effects. Its application.

To your life. By the Holy Spirit. That's why John. Includes the spirit. There in 1st John. These three. Bear witness together. The spirit. The water. The blood. You cannot separate.

The work of the spirit of God. From the blood of Christ. You cannot separate it. From the water. As it represents. The cleansing. The cleansing. Efficacy. Of Christ's death.

As it's applied. By the spirit. Didn't. The Lord. Make it clear. To Nicodemus. Puzzled. As he was. At that time.

Coming to Jesus. In the dark. Which. In John. Represents. His spiritual darkness. At the time. Truly. Truly. I tell you. Except. A man. Be born.

[25 : 00] Of water. And of the spirit. He cannot. Enter the kingdom. Of God. You see. Water. Spirit. Tied together. The spirit. That regenerates.

That brings to life. That applies. What Christ. Death. Has achieved. In a way. That cleanses. From sin. And goes on. Cleansing. Until we're perfect. And it's that death.

Of Jesus. That has. That has. That has actually. Procured. For us. Achieved. For us. The ministry. Of the Holy Spirit.

In the life. Of the church. In the life. Of God's people. That's. That itself. Is an amazing thought. Everything. To do.

With the way. The spirit. Works. In your life. Has been. Procured. Purchased. Obtained. For you. By what Christ. Did in his death.

[25 : 56] And resurrection. That's why. The apostles. On the day. Of Pentecost. Explained. In the preaching. Of Peter. What this phenomenon.

Was that had happened. When the spirit. Descended. And tongues of fire. Appeared. And all of these things. As they are detailed. There. What he said. Was this. Jesus.

Who was crucified. God raised. From the dead. And he. Has poured out. This. Which you. Now see. And hear. It's a result.

Of what he has already done. That's what Peter. Was emphasizing. It's come. From his death. And resurrection. He has poured it out. Interestingly. That's the word he used. And that's the word he used.

Isn't it. When you're. Thinking of water. And applying it. In abundance. It's being poured out. And he applied it. There. As the spirit. Had descended. At Pentecost. Christ. Had poured out.

[26 : 50] The water. That was represented. By the water. That flowed. From his side. On the cross. That's why it's important. To John. All about the spirit. And the work. Of the spirit.

In applying. The redemption. That Christ procured. So. This anonymous soldier. How little he knew. Of the significance. Of that wound. For the life. Of the church. It's evidence. That Christ. Truly died. It's evidence. Of Christ's saving work.

As it symbolizes. This atonement. And this cleansing. By the spirit. Of our sin. And thirdly. Here are witnesses. To Christ's work.

Continuing. We mentioned. First John. And read these. Verses in. Chapter five. And. The reference there. Including. The reference to the spirit.

[27 : 47] And. But you notice the way that. It mentions there. That. These are witnesses. Or testifies. The spirit is truth. These are the three. That testify. Or are witnesses. The spirit.

And the water. And the blood. And these three. Agree. They agree. Because they're bound together. In the ministry of the spirit. And what this means for us.

Is that. These elements. Are still witnesses. That the work of Christ. Goes on. In the sense. Not. In the sense of. Providing an atonement. That's already been done.

But in the sense of. Through the spirit. That he. Saves his people. That he's still. Bringing in people. For whom he died. Giving them eternal life.

And that's. One of the reasons. That we. Actually still. Emphasize in the gospel. That. The religion of Christ. Is a religion. That has these two things.

[28 : 44] At the very heart of it. The cross. On which he died. Or. That represents. Of course. His death as well. And. The work of the Holy Spirit. In regeneration.

Absolutely crucial. In the ministry of. Of the gospel. In the preaching of the gospel. In the testimony. Of the church. It is the cross.

That still draws. People. To God. In order to be saved. Yes. People are repelled. By it. But the elect of God.

Never will be. Maybe in the beginnings. Of their experience. In this life. They may be. There may be a time. As is with most of us.

When we don't see. Any attractiveness. In Christ. When the sight of him. Crucified. Repels us. It's not something. That you think. Is appropriate. For your life.

[29 : 43] Personally. Until God. Begins to work. In your heart. Then. As McJane put it. Then he understood.

The significance. Of the cross. That Jehovah. Said King. His savior. Must be. There is no alternative. He doesn't want.

An alternative. There is nothing else. For him. That fills his life. Like this. Can. And that's why. Jesus himself. Said. In John 12. That. I. If I be lifted up.

Will draw. All people. To me. What is it that draws. God's elect people. At specific times. In their lives. Of God's own choosing. What is it that draws them.

To God. It's the power. Of the cross. It's the power. That's in Christ. In his death. Especially. What is it. That's precious.

[30 : 37] To yourself. As you come. To the Lord's table. So many things. Your faith. Is precious. To you. The fellowship. Of God's people. Is precious. To you.

The sacraments. Are precious. To you. The worship. Of God. Is precious. To you. The Bible. Is precious. To you. The preaching. Of the gospel. Is precious. To you. But this. Is most precious. Of all. To you. The blood. That was shed. For you. And the application. Of it. In the cleansing. Work.

Of the spirit. Where would you be. Without both these. Without the blood. And the water. Without the atonement. And the work. Of the spirit. That is what makes us.

A people of God. And that will always be. What is precious. To God's people. Even for all eternity. With this thing that. Just strikes me just now.

[31 : 33] That. That verse in revelation. That is. We are celebrating. Every song. In heaven. Surrounding the throne. Unto him.

Who is he. He is the lamb. In the midst of the throne. As newly slain. That is how John saw him. As he was in Patmos. Given this vision. By God. And what is the song.

Unto him. Who loved us. And washed us. From our sins. By his own blood. That is your song. For all eternity.

That is the centerpiece. Of heaven. The song of the saved. As it focuses. On the blood. And the water. The atoning death. And the cleansing.

Regenerating power. Of the spirit. Applying the benefits. That the death. Has achieved. It is a simple thing. Isn't it really. To take. Bread.

[32 : 28] And wine. Just to pick up. A piece of bread. And put it in your mouth. And eat it. And follow it. With a cup. With wine. And take a sip of it.

Let it. Go down into your body. Such a simple action. But what profound things. Lie behind it. The blood. And the water. That flowed. From the side of Christ. They are realities. To you spiritually. And you think of them. As you remember him. In his death. And that's why. We can still insist. That it is Christianity. That continues to have. Moral impact. Where that Christianity. Is as it should be. Who built. So many of the hospitals.

[33 : 23] And the other institutions. That have benefited mankind. Was it Islam? Was it Buddhism? Was it any of these other. Great world religions? No.

It was Christianity. It was the religion of Christ. It was the love of God's people. Fired up by the cross. And regenerated by the spirit of God.

And that's how it still is. And should be. In our thinking. And that's why we still have. In the. Ministry of the church. Such as the Lord's Supper.

Along with. Baptism. Setting out. Both of these great. Issues. In regard to the death of Christ. And the benefit we receive. The atonement he rendered.

The Lord. And also. The cleansing. Power. Of the spirit. Taking the things of Christ. Making them known to us.

[34 : 29] How little that soldier knew. Of the significance of what he did. That here was evidence. That he was providing. To the end of time.

That Christ really died. That here are symbols. Of Christ's saving work. The two great elements. That represent. His death.

And his benefits to us. And that here also are witnesses. To Christ's work continuing. As the church lives out his life. Setting forth the blood and the water.

In the life of the church. In the witness of God's people. These are the things that they have. Central. To their witness. And many a word has been written.

And many. A poem and hymn. Composed. Over this great verse. Rock of Ages. For example. Is one that readily comes to mind.

[35 : 30] Rock of Ages. Clef. For me. Let me hide myself. Let the water and the blood.

From my ribbon side. Which flowed. Be of sin. The double cure. Cleanse me. From its guilt. And power.

There came forth. Blood. And water. Let's pray. Let's pray. Oh gracious and eternal God.

How much there is in the detail of your word. Even in these few simple words that you have given us. To contemplate this evening. Lord how much has come to be spiritually significant. From what was outwardly a mere physical fact. We bless you for all that it represents to us. For the ongoing power and efficacy. Of these things in our lives.

[36 : 36] We pray that they may prove. Increasingly significant and precious to us. And especially at this time as we prepare. To remember you once again. And remember you in the death that you died.

Oh Lord our God. Hold before our eyes we pray. The reality of these things. And give us as we contemplate them further. To be filled by your spirit.

In a way that would truly experience. The cleansing benefits. Of your atoning death. Hear us now and accept us we pray. For Jesus' name is God.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.