

## Jesus is Better: A Study of Hebrews

*A Better Blood* (Hebrews 9:15-10:18)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on August 10, 2025

### Introduction

- ❖ **Let me be the first to admit that Christianity is a strange religion.** For those of us who grew up in church, it might not seem strange that we sang a song earlier about the blood of Jesus. About “how precious is the flow” – the flow of blood, that is. Washing us clean! You might think that’s perfectly normal. But to the rest of the world, that’s strange.
  - **I’m not surprised if some of you – who are newer to the faith – still feel squeamish to sing about blood.** If your non-Christian friends were to walk into service during a song like, I think they just might be a little worried that they might have walked into some cultish group that has a strange obsession with blood.
    - And we’re not even singing *There is a Fountain* this morning. That’s an old hymn. Its actual title is *There is a Fountain Filled With Blood*. Many of you know it. The first stanza goes like this: “*There is a fountain filled with blood / Drawn from Immanuel’s veins; / And sinners, plunged beneath that flood, / Lose all their guilty stains.*” It’s very poetic. But also very creepy.
- ❖ But this so-called obsession with blood is at the very heart of our faith. **Try as we may to sanitize our faith and avoid all this blood talk, the Scriptures simply won’t let us.** It’s found throughout the Bible. In Genesis, animals sacrifices are already normative in the worship of God. It only gets more intense and graphic in Exodus, Leviticus, and so on.
  - **City folk (like most of us) have no clue how bloody it gets when you slaughter a bull or goat.** We can’t picture the gruesome scene. Thick red blood gushing out and splattered everywhere! Well, today’s text tries to paint an un-sanitized picture of what Yahweh worship was like in the OT. It doesn’t pull back from describing how much blood was involved. How it was sprinkled and splattered on the tent of meeting, on the holy vessels, on the book of the covenant, on the worshippers themselves!
- ❖ **Now some Christians take solace in the fact that all of that takes place in the OT.** That was all under the old covenant. We don’t do that anymore. We’re the NT people of God. We’re under the new covenant. And that’s true. **But it also demonstrates how sanitized our view of the cross has become.** At the center of Christian worship is a bloody cross. We sing songs to the Lamb who was slain. At the Lord’s Supper, there’s a cup – red with the fruit of the vine – to symbolize the blood of the new covenant. And we drink it down!
- ❖ **Let’s face it, Christianity is a bloody religion.** I get it if you find all this blood talk disturbing. If you get squeamish. But the problem is that our attempts to avoid the blood will result in a diminished gospel. Leading to a diminished experience of the faith.
  - **Friends, according to the book of Hebrews, it’s actually all this blood talk that makes our faith better.** Offering better news than any other faith. And better promises than what was offered under the old covenant in the OT. I want to show you three things from today’s text: (1) Our need for the blood. (2) Our access through the blood. (3) Our assurance secured in the blood.

## Our Need for the Blood

- ❖ Let me start by showing you our need for the blood. **I want to make clear why this blood talk is necessary. And not just necessary but good.** All this blood talk is better than you imagine. Let's look again at chapter 9:15, "*Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*"
  - Prior to our passage, in vv11-14, the author of Hebrews had been arguing for why Jesus is the mediator of a new and better covenant. He's the Great High Priest who entered the "*greater and more perfect tent*" – the heavenly sanctuary of God. And he did so with his own blood to secure for us an eternal redemption.
- ❖ In v15, he references it again, calling it "*the promised eternal inheritance.*" In the context of Hebrews, the Christian's eternal inheritance involves a "*better country, that is, a heavenly one*" (11:16) and a future "*kingdom that cannot be shaken*" (12:28) situated on a new and renewed earth. **But at the core of our eternal inheritance is the promise to forgive our sins and transgressions.** That forgiveness is what opens the door and removes the barrier that was keeping us from enjoying this eternal inheritance.
  - **So it's fair to say that our author is focused, here in our text, on the new covenant blessing of forgiveness.** God is inviting sinners into a new covenant relationship with him – one that starts with a promise to forgive their sins.
- ❖ **Now, again, God's willingness to forgive sins is nothing new or unique to the NT.** He was forgiving sins all the way back in the OT. But what many assume is new and better about this new covenant is that (they assume) God's forgiveness is now freely given *without* the need for someone to shed some blood.
  - **They assume the new covenant has moved past all this blood-shedding business.** Throughout church history, there have been multiple attempts to depict the God of the OT in a much different light than the God of the NT. Suggesting that God has progressively softened up and grown more merciful over time. **In the OT, he was strict and exacting.** Demanding blood to be spilled to atone for the offense of human sins. **But by the time we arrive in the NT, his true nature is revealed in his tenderhearted Son.** God's true heart is filled with love and mercy. Which means he's now willing to forgive our sins – without exacting payment or penalty, without demanding blood to be shed. That's a nice thought, but it lacks any biblical basis.
- ❖ **The author goes on to stress how this new covenant could only have gone into effect after a death had occurred.** After blood was shed. We can't escape the need for a death to be paid, for blood to be shed. A death has to occur before we can be redeemed from our sins.
  - **He goes on, in vv16-17, to make an analogy, comparing the new covenant to a last will and testament.** Just as a will, which promises inheritance, is only enforced upon the death of the one who made it – in the same way, the new covenant that God made with his people is only effective upon his own death. That's why God the Son became a Son of Man, so that he could die and enforce his new covenant with man.

- ❖ Again, in vv18-21, the author points to the OT sacrificial system to prove his point that blood and death were always necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Look at v18, *“Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.”*
  - **He goes on to describe how the law of Moses commanded for the blood of calves and goats to be sprinkled on everything.** Specifically mentioning the book of the covenant and the people. *“<sup>19</sup>For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, <sup>20</sup>saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.””* That’s describing what took place back in Exodus 24. It was a covenant-binding ceremony.
- ❖ **In ancient times, when two parties entered into a covenant relationship – when they bound themselves to a covenant – lots of blood was involved.** Animals would be sacrificed, their bloody carcasses divided in two, and laid on either side of a path. Then the covenant partners would walk together, in between the bloody carcasses. Those dead, bloody animals represented the covenant curses that would befall either party if they were unfaithful.
  - **It’s like they were saying, “Let the same fate befall me if I break covenant with you. Let me be torn apart like these animals.”** That’s what the blood and carcasses represented (There’s a good example of that kind of covenant-binding ceremony in Genesis 15:7-20 between the LORD and Abraham. See also Jeremiah 34:18.)
- ❖ Well, the same idea is behind what took place in Exodus 24, when Moses collected in basins the blood of oxen. Half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar of God. Then Moses read the book of the covenant and sprinkled the rest of the blood on the people. Exodus 24:8 actually says that *“Moses took the blood and threw it on the people.”* That’s the moment they entered into a covenant relationship with the LORD.
  - Just try to imagine the scene. **Thousands of people standing there with splattered blood all over them.** Dripping down their faces. Soaked into their clothes. It’s like a scene from a horror movie. **But all that gory blood served a purpose – signifying the fatal consequences of breaking covenant with God.** It demands our death. The shedding of our own blood.
- ❖ And that’s why all the subsequent sacrifices from Exodus 24 and on were so bloody. **Our human sinfulness and covenant unfaithfulness warranted the shedding of blood.** So if there was ever going to be any forgiveness of sin, then some blood needs to be shed. Listen to vv21-22, *“<sup>21</sup>And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. <sup>22</sup>Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”*
- ❖ **But I realize some of you still wonder why God can’t just forgive without exacting punishment.** Without drawing blood. Without demanding a death. We would have a difficult time respecting someone who refused to forgive us of an offense until we killed a sacrifice or shed some blood. Why wouldn’t a heartfelt apology be enough?

- ❖ Well, it's true that it would be strange if I refused to forgive you without demanding your blood. But that's because I'm not God. I'm not the Ultimate Judge and Arbiter of all that is right and wrong. So I *should* be able to forgive your offense against me without trying to exact perfect justice. Because that's not my job or prerogative.
  - **But if God doesn't exact perfect justice – if he just accepts a simple sorry – then justice ultimately will *not* be served.** Because there's no one higher than God. There's no greater judge. So for God to be a just God – for perfect justice to be achieved – then every sin must be atoned for. Every offense must be punished. That's why without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.
- ❖ And that fact doesn't change under the new covenant. **It's a better covenant – not because it no longer demands the shedding of blood. No, it's better because, under this covenant, God is the only one who sheds blood.** He's the only one who dies. He took on "*flesh and blood*" so he could spill it for us. So that we don't have to shed our own blood and die as a penalty for our sins. That's the good news of the gospel!
  - Blood is still essential to the new covenant. **But don't you see how it's a better blood?** It's Jesus own blood shed for us. Satisfying the demands of justice. While, simultaneously, securing the gift of mercy. Which he showers upon all who believe.

### **Our Access Through the Blood**

- ❖ **Now in addition to offering us better blood (Jesus's and not our own), the new covenant also offers us better access.** Better access to God himself. Into heaven itself. This leads to our second point – our better access through the blood. Look at vv23 again, "*Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.*"
- ❖ **The author's point is that if the earthy tabernacle had to be purified by these animal sacrifices, through the sprinkling of blood, then how much more would the heavenly tabernacle need to be purified by a better sacrifice?** The blood of bulls and goats was never enough. It was always pointing to a better sacrifice that Christ would offer, as the better High Priest, who entered the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood.
  - **Unlike the Levitical high priests who ministered among the earthly copies, Jesus ministered among the heavenly realities.** They dealt with mere shadows. Jesus handled the true substances. That's the big difference. Look at v24, "*For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*"
- ❖ As we explained before, the high priests of old would enter the Most Holy Place (the Holy of Holies) once a year on the Day of Atonement to minister before the ark of the covenant. And the lid of the ark was called the mercy seat of God, and God's earthly Shekinah glory was said to have resided over the ark, on the mercy seat. Functioning like an earthly throne.
  - **But Jesus, the better High Priest, walked into the heavenly throne room, to appear in the presence of God himself.** And it says he went there "*on our behalf.*"

- ❖ **Meaning he went before God to plead our cause.** To offer his blood as a perfect atonement for our sin. And to offer his righteous life as the necessary qualifications for us to approach the throne of glory. That's something no other high priest could do. That's something only the Son of God could do. **Jesus doesn't just secure our forgiveness. He secures our access to his heavenly Father.**
  - We rightly praise Jesus for paying for the penalty of our sins. We're so grateful to be forgiven. But we often stop there. We don't go on to praise him for his better sacrifice. Think about it. **The saints of old were also grateful for forgiveness.** They enjoyed that blessing too. They knew what forgiveness felt like. **But what they couldn't have fathomed is the open access to God that new covenant saints enjoy.**
  
- ❖ I said before that a high priest of old would be inside that tent for some time, dutifully ministering in the Most Holy Place; on behalf of God's people; offering a sacrifice for the atonement of their sins. And when he'd finally emerge from that tent and appear before the people, the most he could say would be something like, **"Praise God, I've secured forgiveness for all your sins – for the past year.** Your consciences can be clean. Go home and try to sin no more. But you probably will, so I'll see you here again next year."

  - But the author of Hebrews goes on to stress, in v25, that – unlike the high priests who had to repeatedly offer sacrifices every year – Jesus *"appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."* (9:26)

  
- ❖ **So just as a high priest will eventually emerge from the tent and appear to the people after completing his high priestly service, in the same way, Jesus will eventually step out of the heavenly sanctuary and appear to us again in his Second Coming.** Not to deal with sin. But to save those who are eagerly waiting for his return. Listen to vv27-28, *"<sup>27</sup>And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, <sup>28</sup>so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."*
  - So when he appears again, Christ can say, "Praise God, I've secured forgiveness for all your sins for all time. Your consciences can be clean. **Now come into my Father's house and come before his heavenly throne and be with him forever.**" Jesus can offer us access to God that no one in the past could have imagined possible.
  
- ❖ **I realize there are some of you here who feel far from God.** You feel like your sins and transgressions have grown out of hand. You feel reluctant to draw near to God. Just being here in church is already a huge step, and you're not even sure if that was a good idea. You feel unworthy to approach God. Your conscience is weighing heavy on you.
  - **The bad news is that you're right.** What you feel, in this case, corresponds to what is true. You should listen to your conscience. **Your sins are many, so you're not worthy to approach God. But none of us are.** That's the bad news.

- ❖ **But the good news is that there once lived one man who was.** Who was worthy to approach God on the basis of his own sinless life. And he didn't approach God empty handed. He brought blood. His own blood that he shed on the cross. And if you're a believer – if you believe Jesus shed his blood for *you* – then rest assured that, by his blood, your sins have been put away, atoned for, and forgiven. And that's not all. The news is even better.
  - **By his blood – and by the purity of his life counted as yours – you have been purified and you've been given special access to appear in the presence of God in Christ.** You have no need to be afraid or to be ashamed. You can enter into the presence of the Living God at any time, for any reason.
- ❖ If you see my office door closed and you look in that door window and see me deep in study or deep in prayer, then you probably have the sense not to just barge in without warning. You might gently knock or come back at a later time. **That's what everyone would do. Except for my kids. Especially my four-year-old.** She'll bust through that door with no hesitation, with no apprehension, and she'll do it at any time, for any reason.
  - **Because she knows she's my daughter, and that she has special access into the pastor's office.** She knows her father won't be upset and will always welcome her. And, God forbid, she ever feels nervous or unworthy to come into my office and approach me, then what she needs to hear is, "You're my child. Which means you're always welcome. You can draw near anytime."
    - **Christian, perhaps that's what you need to hear from your Heavenly Father.** You need to hear, "You're my son. You're my daughter. Which means you're always welcome. You can draw near anytime." You have special access. Because of the better blood of our better Sacrifice.

### **Our Assurance Secured in the Blood**

- ❖ There is a blessed assurance available for all of God's children to enjoy. **But it's foreign and unfamiliar to many Christians because they're too busy trying to perfect and purify their own consciences.** Which means they're not resting in the finished work of Christ. This leads to our third and final point – our assurance secured in the blood.
  - In chapter 10, the author stresses how the old covenant and all of its prescribed sacrifices could never perfect those who seek to draw near to God. That is, they can never purify our consciences. **If they could – if they were effective in taking away our sins and fully cleansing our guilty consciences – then those OT sacrifices would've stopped.**
    - But the fact that they continue to be offered up is proof positive that they don't do it. Look at v1, *"It can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?"* (10:1b-2)

- ❖ **The author's point is that the abundant blood of bulls and goats and the constant rise of smoke from the altar don't serve to remove our sins and cleanse our consciences.** No, instead they remind us of our sins and press deeper on our guilty consciences. Look at v3, *"<sup>3</sup>But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. <sup>4</sup>For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."*
  - The author goes on to argue from Psalm 40 that the entire sacrificial system of the old covenant was always pointing to something better. **To Someone better who would come to do the will of God and offer a singular sacrifice that will take away sins and sanctify God's people – once for all and forever.** Look at v10, *"And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*
    - There, in his use of the word "*sanctified*," the author is not referring to that ongoing process of becoming more and more Christ-like in our nature and character. The verb tense "*have been sanctified*," suggests that he's talking about our set apart status as those who are pure and blameless because we're covered by the blood and righteousness of Christ.
- ❖ **Christian, the point is that Jesus's once-for-all death has once-for-all set you apart and drawn you in – all the way into the Holy of Holies – before the presence of God.** There is nothing else you need to do. You don't need to beat yourself up over your failures. You don't need to go on some kind of pilgrimage or take up some kind of Herculean task to prove yourself worthy of God. **Resist the urge – resist the temptation – to assuage your guilty conscience with anything else but the once-for-all finished work of Christ.**
- ❖ Listen to how the author describes Jesus's posture after he finished his high priestly work compared to other priests. Look at v11, *"And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins."*
  - **The Levitical priests were constantly standing. Because their work was never done.** Every day, they would enter the holy place, the front portion of the temple. And there they would attend to the golden lampstand and burn incense at the altar of incense. That was a daily chore. On a weekly basis, they would replace the bread of presence with a new loaf.
    - In the temple courts, on the bronze altar, every day the priests would sacrifice two one-year-old lambs as a burnt offering. One in the morning; one at night. They made these sacrifices and attended to these duties every day, 24/7. **The posture of a priest was to be constantly standing because your work was never done.** Because under the old covenant sins were never truly atoned for.
- ❖ **But in stark contrast, Jesus has a different posture. Jesus is sitting.** Look at v12, *"But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."* **Having offered for all time a single sacrifice, which truly atoned for our sins, Jesus sat down – satisfied that his work was done.** He just has to wait for his final victory. Look at v13, *"<sup>13</sup>waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. <sup>14</sup>For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."*

- ❖ At the end of the movie, *Saving Private Ryan*, Tom Hanks's character is dying. He led a company into enemy territory just to save one man, Private James Francis Ryan. And with his dying last words, Hanks's character tells Private Ryan, "*James... earn this. Earn it.*"
  - Those last words haunted James Francis Ryan for the rest of his life. The movie ends in present time, with Ryan, now an elderly veteran, standing over the Arlington grave of Hanks's character. With tears in his eyes, he asks his wife if he's led a good life, if he's a good man. You can tell that ever since that day, he's been haunted by the question, "*Have I earned it? Or have I wasted it?*"
    - Every time he neglected his wife. Every time he snapped at his children. Every time he failed and fell into temptation. He must have wondered, "*Did I just waste it? Did I fail to earn it? Was their sacrifice all in vain?*" **Can you imagine that kind of fear and anxiety hanging over you all the time?**
- ❖ But sadly, many of us can imagine exactly that. Because, even as Christians, we live our lives with a low-grade fear and anxiety – always wondering if we've led a good enough life or perhaps we've sinned one too many times and wasted Jesus's sacrifice.
  - **Brothers and sisters, don't forget. Jesus's last words, as he hung there on the cross, were not "*Earn it,*" but "*It is finished.*"** Once for all. For all time. It is finished. Let those words reverberate in your heart and mind. Jesus is sitting at the Father's right hand because all his work is done. So lay your fears and anxieties at the foot of the cross and find your rest in the finished work of Christ.