

The Blood of the Covenant

Maundy Thursday

April 2, 2026

Exodus 24:3-11

“And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, „Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

You can't have life if you don't have blood. That seems obvious enough, especially when it comes to your physical wellbeing. But there's a deeper meaning here. Back in Genesis 9, God told Noah and his family that they could eat meat, as long as they first drained it of blood, because the blood is “its life” (Genesis 9:4) and they were not to eat life in order to stay alive.

With that, the Lord declared that blood is life, and both are very precious things. Without blood and without life, one is only dead. And those who are dead cannot be the people of God, for He is the God of the living.

In Exodus chapters 20-23, Moses recites God's Law to the people of Israel. He's started with the Ten Commandments and continued with a whole host of other matters. In verse 1 of chapter 24, the LORD says to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to the LORD, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.” Moses and the elders are going to climb Mount Sinai and worship God from afar, but far nearer than He has permitted before. Previously, He declared that anyone who stepped foot on the mountain was to be stoned. But now Moses and the elders are going to step foot on the mountain, representing the people of Israel down below.

But there is preparation to be done, because the people aren't holy, and neither are the elders—and unholy people cannot come into God's presence and live. So Moses comes to the people, and he tells them all the words of the LORD. He tells them all the rules of the LORD, what they are to do if they are to be holy. The people listen to all the words and all the rules; and they answer with one voice and say, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” There. The people of Israel have promised to keep God's rules and live holy lives. They're going to do the right thing. That ought to give the elders confidence as they climb that mountain and approach the presence of God.

But it is not enough. Though the people honor God with their lips, their hearts are far from Him; and within forty days or so, they'll be bowing down to a golden calf and calling it their god. It's nice that, for the moment, they want to be holy; but their intentions don't make them holy. It's not enough.

Moses knows this. The next morning, he builds an altar with twelve pillars. The people know that altars are for one thing—sacrifice, and the twelve pillars means that this sacrifice is for all of them. Since there are no priests yet, Moses has young men sacrifice oxen to the LORD. He collects the blood—real, thick, red blood, blood that is life. He takes half of it and throws it against the altar, a presentation—an offering—to God. Then He takes the Book of the Covenant, those words and rules of the LORD, and he reads it to the people again; and again they say, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” The next thing Moses does is astonishing. He takes the other half of the blood from the

oxen and he throws it on the people. He says, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

There's nothing romantic or magical or pleasant about this: it's blood. Looks like blood, smells like blood, stains like blood. But remember: the Lord has declared that blood is life; and in a way, Moses is throwing life upon these people. Because this blood is shed, the LORD's covenant—with all His words and His rules—is ratified. It's in effect, and the Lord will be faithful to His covenant.

So now that the sacrifice has been made, now that the blood of that covenant has been shed and the people have been covered by it, Moses and the elders can go up the mountain. They can be in the presence of God. He does not lay a hand on them; in fact, He gives them food and drink in His presence. He counts them as His holy people and leaves them unharmed. Why? It is not because the people promised to keep His Word. It is because blood was shed in their place to cover them: so serious is sin that a covenant between God and man cannot be sealed except by the shedding of blood.

This goes back to Adam and Eve: before the fall, they could be in God's presence—they could walk with God in the Garden. But once they fell into sin, they became unholy. They brought death into the world. They surrendered life and couldn't be in the presence of the Lord of the living. But the Lord had a plan to restore man: innocent blood would be shed in man's place. One who need not die would give His life for them.

Ultimately, it was not the blood of oxen that would make people holy and acceptable to God, but the blood of God's own Son. As our epistle for this night from Hebrews 9 says, "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:13-14). Blood is life; and by shedding His blood and offering His life on the cross in your place, Christ has restored life to you.

That is why you are here, because Christ is your life and He is here. This is Holy Thursday, when we hear of the Last Supper that Jesus had with His disciples, and when we especially remember His instituting of Holy Communion. The disciples were gathered with the Son of God, present with them in human flesh. But Jesus was about to be betrayed and crucified. Would the disciples act with faithfulness and courage? Not at all. Jesus warned them beforehand, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (Matthew 26:31). He said this neither to belittle them nor to issue a challenge. Rather, He simply told them the truth. No matter how much they desired to be courageous and faithful, they would still fall away. When Peter protested, Jesus told him that he would deny him three times before the rooster's crow. Jesus' words were proved true soon enough. When they went to the garden for prayer, the disciples fell asleep as weak flesh overcame willing spirit. When Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled. When confronted, Peter denied Him three times. So why did Jesus tell all of this in advance? To remind them that, just like their ancestors of Moses' time, their good intentions were not enough to be pleasing to God. He told them so that they might not trust in themselves, but trust in Him.

The Last Supper is much like our Old Testament lesson from Exodus 24. By their exclamations and protests, the disciples essentially echo their ancestors' pledge, "All that You have commanded we will

do.” Jesus gently tells them, “No, you won’t. If you could, I wouldn’t have to die.” But because they cannot do all God has commanded, Jesus is about to ratify a new covenant between man and God. He is going to offer Himself as the Sacrifice for sin. Because a covenant between God and man cannot be sealed without the shedding of blood, He is going to allow His own innocent blood to be shed for the salvation of mankind.

He is going to do this for His people throughout the ages, unlike those oxen that were slaughtered for the people of the moment. For the people of Exodus 24, Moses threw the sacrificial blood on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” To His disciples, after giving them His body in bread, Jesus takes the cup of wine and says, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28). He doesn’t say “the blood,” but “My blood.” He doesn’t say “poured out for the twelve of you,” but “poured out for many.”

Poured out for you. For your salvation.

Christ is the Sacrifice for your sin. And because you were not there, He comes to you now. He gives you His body which was given unto death for you on the cross before He rose again from the dead. He gives you His blood, shed for you for the remission of sins to seal God’s covenant of salvation with you. In this new covenant, He does not throw the blood upon you so that you are stained and bloodied. He feeds you His body and blood in this holy Supper, to strengthen and preserve you in the one true faith unto life everlasting.

This priceless gift cannot be overestimated. So many believe that Christianity is all about our pledges and commitment, about our saying to God, “All that You have commanded we will do” and “I will never fall away.” But it is not so. With such sinful frail flesh, before you know it you’ll find a golden calf to bow to, a false god that you fear, trust or love more than God. You’ll grow weary of prayer and meditation as the disciples did in the garden. You’ll be scared of what following the Lord’s will means, and so you’ll opt for another plan, deny His and fall away. Heaven is far higher up than Mount Sinai: if you are to get there by your intentions and efforts, you are never going to arrive in the presence of God for eternity. Only hell awaits.

That is why Jesus comes to you. He, who has sacrificed His body and shed His blood for you on the cross, now comes to you in His Supper to give you that body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. This Supper is not for those who say, “I believe I have done God’s words and rules so well that I deserve to come into His presence,” for such an attitude leads only to condemnation. No, it is for those who say, “There is nothing about me that deserves God’s grace or gift of eternal life. I cannot and do not trust in me. Rather, I acknowledge my sinfulness and my unworthiness, and I trust in Christ to save me.”

So He does. The One who has entered the presence of His Father in the Holy Place of heaven by His own blood, comes to you to give you His body and blood, so that you might be delivered with Him to heaven for eternity. It is not your will and not your doing that does this. It is all the work of Jesus Christ—sacrificed, risen and coming again. Coming again to take you to heaven, bought by His blood...because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.