

SPIRITUAL HEALTH CHECKUP: Blood Pressure

Hebrews 10:16-25

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A few weeks ago I had my blood pressure taken on a Wednesday night by our health ministry team. I did that because we were taking pictures of some of our ministries to put on our website. I told Karen Katzfey as she got ready to take it that my blood pressure is always low. Naturally when she took it, it turns out it was a little high, at least for me. Many things can contribute to your blood pressure being high: your diet, exercise or lack of it, stress, family history, lots of things. Because I desire to be physically healthy and wanted my pressure to lower again, I started exercising more and last week when Karen took it again, it was back down like it normally is.

We have spent the last few weeks of this Lenten season drawing closer to the cross of Christ and the empty tomb by learning ways to become spiritually healthy, as we prepare for the joy, promise, and celebration of Easter. This coming week is what we commonly refer to as Holy Week.

I can't imagine what Jesus' blood pressure must have been like during this week with all the different emotions and events he would go through.

But I do know what his blood accomplished for me and for you.

I do know the difference the cross made in my life.

I do know what hope the empty tomb holds for us who call ourselves Christian. I do know that at the cross we get the opportunity to experience a love like no other.

The week starts out with Christ's triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem.

He enters knowing that a cross awaits him and yet still he comes.

The palm branches are waving and the people are shouting HOSANNA.

The week will end with Christ's crucifixion, the people shouting, "Crucify him," and then an empty tomb.

During this week the disciples will gather together in the upper room for their Last Supper with Jesus.

And Jesus will surprise the disciples, as Pastor Chris shared with us last week, with his act of love by washing their feet.

They will then partake of the Lord's Supper just as we will today.

The supper where Jesus will tell them that he is establishing a new covenant.

Jesus will eventually go to the Garden of Gethsemane and there he will pray so fervently that he will sweat drops of blood.

Now I don't know about you but there have been many times in my life when I have prayed fervently, passionately, deeply and even in the depths of those prayers, I did not sweat drops of blood.

Jesus will sweat drops of blood yet still he will continue to stand firm as he faces his cross.

Jesus will be beaten and whipped as they try to break him.

He will be bloodied beyond recognition the Bible tells us.

Still he will continue to stand firm and face his cross.

He will be mocked, have a crown of thorns pushed upon his brow, and be nailed to a cross with huge spikes.

Yet he will not waver as he faces his cross.

He does this because he knows that in order to establish a new covenant, the cross must be faced, his blood must be shed.

No longer will the old covenant of the sacrifice and blood of animals be sufficient or necessary because Jesus will be the once-for-all sacrifice.

I want you to turn with me to Hebrews 10:16-25 _pg_941.

As you do that let me set the stage a little bit so we can understand what a tremendous sacrificial gift Christ is purchasing for us with his blood.

A covenant is a binding agreement.

The old covenant that God had established with His people, Israel, required obedience to the Old Testament Mosaic law.

Because the wages of sin is death, the law required that people perform rituals and sacrifices in order to please God and remain in His grace.

The Old Testament Day of Atonement was the annual day of repentance for God's people.

Bibles scholars tell us that on that day, in excess of 100,000 animals were likely slaughtered in the Temple precincts. The blood would be collected by the priests and splashed against the base of the altar. The carcass of the sheep or bull or goat would be cleaned, carved up and burnt on the altar. The blood from so many animals would run in streams through specially-built gutters flowing outside of the city of Jerusalem and empty into a brook called Kidron, and turn it crimson.

Close your eyes for just a moment and imagine the sights, the smells, and the sounds of that day. The Temple virtually became a slaughterhouse.

But it wasn't enough. It wasn't enough to permanently fix our sin problem and restore us to intimate relationship with our creator.

No amount of death was enough to pay the price for the sins of the world.

One of the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah, had predicted that there would be a time when God would make a new covenant with the nation of Israel.

Jeremiah tells us in chapter 31:31, 33: "The day will come,' says the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. . . . But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day,' says the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people'"

Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law of Moses and create a new covenant between God and His people.

The old covenant was written in stone, but the new covenant is written on our hearts, made possible only by faith in Christ, who shed His own blood to atone for the sins of the world.

Everything that needed to be done for man to be right with God, to stand before him justified, blameless, free from sin, was accomplished through the work of Christ on the Cross.

Romans 5:6–8

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Hebrews chapter 10 is a reminder of the fact that Christ’s shed blood is the source of our Salvation.

Heb. 10:10 “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Look with me at Hebrews 10 starting with verse 16 – 18.

Now that we are under the new covenant, we are not under the penalty of the law. We are now given the opportunity to receive salvation as a free gift. Through the life-giving Holy Spirit who lives in all believers, we can now share in the inheritance of Christ and enjoy a permanent, unbroken relationship with God.

In fact, the entire book of Hebrews reminds us of the sacrifice Christ made for us and what God expects from us in response

This is the mind set of the Hebrew writer as he continues in verse 19 when he says:

READ Heb. 10:19-22

In essence these verses tells us, “In light of all that Christ has done for us

WHAT IS IT HE HAS DONE FOR US

Christ’s blood:removed the guilt of our sins

Washed us clean

And opened the way for us to come boldly into God’s presence.

SO NOW WHAT CAN WE AS CHRISTIANS DO...

How can we respond to such a gift?

First we respond with faith– we Draw near to God.

We can now come into God’s presence and not just come into his presence but come boldly.

Under the old covenant, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place in the temple because it was sealed by a curtain. And he only did this once a year on the Day of Atonement. Everyone else stood outside, unable to enter in.

When Christ’s body was broken and torn on the cross, the curtain literally was torn from top to bottom in the temple.

Opening up the way to God for everyone to enter in.

A new covenant – A new way.

Jesus tells us in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”

Our initial response to the Cross is drawing near to God by becoming a Christian according to His will.

When you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior, when you recognize that his blood has washed you clean of your sins, your first response is to draw near to God and worship him.

As the perfect Mediator, Christ accompanies Christians into the very throne room of God. Our faith and trust in God enables us to go there boldly.

Secondly we respond with hope.

Look at verse 23.

The definition of hope here is confident expectation and anticipation.

Confident because we know the God who is calling us to be faithful is faithful himself.

We know that what he promised will come to pass.

This confidence does not come from our own merit or achievement;

it rests in the faithfulness of God.

How do we hold fast?

We practice the same things Christ did.

We are transparent or honest with God and others.

We practice the habit of meditating on the Word of God, pondering the promises of God, memorizing Scripture.

We give God priority in our lives – praying and worshipping regularly.

Ultimately, we hold fast by allowing God to be at the very center of all we are and all we do.

Lastly, we respond with Love.

Look at verses 24-25.

To Spur or Provoke is the act of inspiring or stirring something up, the promotion of a specific action.

The Hebrew writers emphasis is not on what a believer GETS FROM the church family, but rather on what he CONTRIBUTES TO the church family.

We are to spur each other on in two areas:

One is Love- not as an emotion but as a choice to act regardless of our feelings.

And the other is Good deeds- works done for the good of others, and which will draw others to Christ.

We cannot do this on our own. We were never meant to do this on our own.

It is why we need to meet with one another.

Because God commands it and we need each other.

John Wesley said:

“There is nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian.”

There is a story about a man who had missed church for a number of weeks. The preacher had often called him and asked where he was, but the man kept putting the preacher off. Finally, one cold winter day, the preacher stopped by for a visit.

The man was sitting in front of his fireplace and welcomed the preacher. He tried to engage the preacher in conversation. However, the minister didn't say much. He just

walked over to the fireplace, pulled one of the logs away from the flame - and then went and sat down. They sat there in silence for the longest time, watching the fire. And as they watched, the fire on the log that sat off by itself began to smolder and then it went out. Quietly the preacher picked the log back up and tossed it in the fireplace with the other logs. Soon it was red hot again. The preacher and the man sat for a long time looking into the fireplace and then the man said "I'll see you at church next Sunday, Pastor."

The blood of Christ unifies all of those that have experienced its power. So our response of love is not an individual one but rather a response of connectedness to others in the Christian community who have been transformed by Jesus' blood also. We cannot be concerned only for our own spiritual well-being, we must also encourage others to stay fervent in their love and active in their service to God. We are responsible for each other. Not so we have perfect attendance at church but so our spiritual fire, our radiance doesn't grow dim. We need to keep being radiant followers of Christ so that others can see the light of his love until that day when Christ does indeed come back.

**A new covenant purchased through the blood of Christ on a cross.
A covenant that offers us Faith, Hope, and Love.**

As we come to the Lord's table this morning, let the blood of Jesus remind you once again that you are the precious child that his blood was spilled for. Your sins are forgiven because he was the once-for-all sacrifice that was needed. You have complete access to God because Jesus opened the way and Christ, himself, accompanies you into the very throne room of God.

Boldly enter in faith!

You can hold unswervingly to the hope of eternal life.

Stand Firm!

And you can share your faith, hope and especially your love by coming alongside of others and encouraging them.

So love extravagantly as Jesus has loved you!