

The Blood-Sweating Christ
Luke 22:39-46
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Today we have assembled on the Lord's Day to partake of the Lord's Supper. When we do this, we symbolically remember the totality of our Savior's redemptive work. By partaking of the Lord's Supper, we remember our Savior's death upon the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. By assembling on the Lord's Day, we remember our Savior's victory over death and the grave on the first day of the week. Through this combination of the sacrament and the weekly cycle, we remember both the cross and the empty tomb.

We partake of the Lord's Supper, and through the symbolism of the bread and the wine, we remember the cross and our Savior's shed blood and broken body.

We assemble on the Lord's Day, and we remember that the women who went early to our Lord's grave on the first day of the week to anoint His dead body, found an empty tomb. We assemble on the Lord's Day, and we remember that on the evening of the first day of the week, the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, and the resurrected Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

The Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day says it all. The Greek word translated "Lord's" in Lord's Supper and in Lord's Day is a special adjectival form of the Greek word for lord. This Greek adjective is found in only two verses. It is found in 1 Corinthians 11:20 where we find the term "the Lord's Supper." It is found in Revelation 1:10 where we find the term "the Lord's Day." In secular usage, this adjective referred to the Roman Caesar and could be translated into English as the word "imperial." Jesus, not the Roman Caesar, is the true Savior of the world, and the Lord's Day belongs to Jesus as the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth and as the One to whom the nations have been given as His inheritance. On this imperial day, this Lord's Day, we are privileged to share this imperial meal with Him who is the Lord of lords and King of kings. For He says to us today,

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

We will today prepare for partaking of the Lord's Supper by meditating upon an event that occurred in the Garden of Gethsemane. We read in Luke 22:44,

44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Here is an observation made only by Luke, which seems appropriate in that Luke was a physician and thus would be

more interested in such an unusual physiological phenomenon. Luke the trained physician compared our Lord's sweat at Gethsemane to great drops of blood. A few commentators have suggested that the comparison is here merely to the density and volume associated with bleeding and that no actual blood was literally involved. Yet the vast majority of commentators from St. Augustine downward have been of the opinion that what Luke intended to communicate was that the sweat coming from the pores of our Lord was so mingled with blood that it became like big clots of red blood dropping down to the ground.

I want to examine this phenomenon this morning under three headings: **atonement**, **torment** and **toil**.

First, let's look at this phenomenon as **atonement**. Luke says that as Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, He was in agony. This was the beginning of our Lord's descent into that lonely ordeal of suffering which is the atonement for our sins. We read in Matthew's account that here at Gethsemane, Jesus began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Here at the beginning of His passion, our Lord is already shedding blood. Matter of fact, both at the beginning and the end of His passion, our Lord shed an unusual combination of blood and water. Here in Gethsemane, our Lord sweat as it were great drops of blood. Then at the end of His suffering upon the cross at Golgotha, a Roman soldier pieced Jesus' side with a spear to confirm that Jesus was indeed dead, and out of Jesus' side flowed both blood and water. Medical experts have commented on both of these unusual events. In times of extreme inner stress, blood can mingle with the sweat as it comes from the pores. And extreme mental agony

and sorrow can literally lacerate the human heart with the result that coagulated blood and water like serum collect in the heart sac. So the sweat like great drops of blood at the beginning of our Lord's agony and the flow of water and blood from His pierced side at its conclusion are both physiological possibilities according to medical science. Of course, we would believe Scripture's testimony about these unusual physiological events associated with our Lord's agony regardless of what science had to say. Medical science knows of no parallels to our Lord's resurrection from the dead, and yet we still believe our Lord rose from the dead on the third day because of Scripture's testimony. The Bible and not science is our only infallible rule of faith and practice. Nevertheless the medical testimony about the sweat like great drops of blood and the medical testimony about the flow of water and blood from Jesus' pierced side are helpful not as the foundation of our belief in these events but as a confirmation to the Bible's infallible testimony.

Yet, as interesting as this may be, our major interest in these two events is not their physiological feasibility but their religious symbolism. The water and the blood together represent the atoning work of our Lord. The blood represents our Lord's sacrificial giving of His innocent life as a payment for our sins. The water represents the effect of this atoning work when applied to the individual. Water cleanses and water gives life, and the atoning work of Christ does both. The atoning work of Christ washes away the stain of sin, and it brings to life the soul that was dead in trespasses and sins.

As we think about the water and blood which first came from Jesus' pores at Gethsemane and then flowed from His side at Golgotha, we are reminded of the two sacraments Jesus ordained for us. The wine of the Lord's Supper represents His atoning blood, and baptism is the sacrament administered with water.

Notice that our text says that the bloody sweat of our Lord at Gethsemane fell to the ground. An angel was present, but he was there not to collect the Savior's blood but to strengthen the Savior for His bloody work. What saves us is not the actual material substance of the blood. The angel did not collect the blood in vials to bring to the heavenly temple. The blood fell to be absorbed in the ground. What saves us is not the physical atoms, not the actual material substance of the blood. What saves us is the act of Jesus' shedding His blood as an atoning sacrifice on our behalf, as the giving of His human life in our place as the punishment for human sins.

If our church had vials containing the blood of Christ and the sweat of Christ and the watery fluid that came from His pierced side together with some wooden splinters from the cross upon which He died, that would be totally meaningless. Such things would contribute nothing to our salvation. The cross and the blood save us not through literal physical contact with them but through the Holy Spirit's enabling us to trust in Jesus' shedding His blood upon that cross as the basis for our forgiveness and deliverance.

We have looked at the sweat as great drops of blood as a part of our Savior's atoning work. Let's next look at it as a sign of our Savior's **torment** in the sense of His inner anguish. When we think of our Savior's shedding His blood on our behalf, we first think of the wounds on our Savior's body violently inflicted by external and mechanical means. The thorns were pressed into His brow, the whip lashed His shoulders and back, the nails were driven into His hands and feet, and the spear pierced His side. Yet this is not when Jesus' bleeding began. Jesus shed the first drops of blood before any of these violent instruments touched His body. He shed the first drops of blood there in the garden of Gethsemane. Here we are reminded that the most significant suffering of our Savior was not physical but mental and spiritual. The blood shed at Gethsemane was not drawn from our Savior's body by external implements. It was forced from His body by inner spiritual agony. Evil men did not take our Savior's blood at Gethsemane. Our Savior voluntarily gave it by His decision to do the will of His Father in heaven.

At Gethsemane, Jesus was praying about His going to the cross. The cross was threatening to Him not as a Roman instrument of physical torment but as the place of the curse. There Jesus would take upon Himself the guilt of His people's sins, and God the Father would turn His back upon Him in His humanity. That is when Jesus would cry out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" At Gethsemane, the Father confirmed that this was indeed His will for the Messianic Son. Jesus submitted in obedience with the words, "Your will be done, not Mine." Jesus came to do the will of the Father. Yet the very idea of the coming ordeal caused Jesus such inner agony that He began

shedding the blood of the atonement. There as He communed with the Father in prayer, He began agonizing over the approaching loss of that communion at the climax of His atoning sufferings upon that Roman cross.

Back in Genesis 22, God gave a picture of the atoning work of Jesus. This is when God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a blood sacrifice on an altar at the top of Mount Moriah. When Isaac and Abraham were climbing up Mount Moriah, they had a conversation.

Genesis 22:7-8

- 7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"
- 8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.

The parallel to that conversation between Isaac and Abraham that is found in the life of our Lord is His prayer to His heavenly Father at Gethsemane. The contrast is that Jesus responded to His conversation with His heavenly Father by sweating as it were great drops of blood. Jesus knew that there would be no ram with its horns caught in a thicket to replace Him upon the altar. Jesus knew that He would have to endure more than the physical pain of a sharp sacrificial knife. Jesus knew the suffering, both spiritual and physical, that awaited Him at the cross of Calvary.

We have looked at the bloody sweat of Gethsemane as atonement and as torment. Our last point will be to look at it as redemptive **toil**. I am basing this thought on the New Testament's contrast of Jesus with the first man Adam. As it says in 1 Corinthians 15:22,

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

I see a point of contact between Christ and Adam in sweat because sweat was an integral part of God's curse upon Adam for Adam's sin in the garden.

Genesis 3:17-19

- 17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.
- 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.
- 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

The curse upon Adam was that he would have to toil and sweat and also endure thorns and thistles in order to eat bread. Jesus came to deliver His people from the curse that had been put upon Adam for his sin. In order to do this, Jesus had to bear this curse Himself. We see Jesus sweating at Gethsemane. He there

sweats a bloody, atoning sweat as He prepares to do that atoning work which will enable Him to feed us, His people, with the Bread of Life. He will go to the cross with thorns drawing blood from His brow so that our brows may one day be delivered from that sweat which symbolizes the curse upon the race for Adam's sin.

Three days after His suffering and death, Jesus was resurrected with a glorified body which was freed from the suffering of the curse symbolized by blood and sweat. This glorified state was symbolized in the Old Testament by the attire of the high priest. The high priest of Israel had on his brow not sweat but a gold plate inscribed with the words, "Holiness to the Lord." And all the priests in Israel wore garments that prevented them from sweating.

Ezekiel 44:17-18

- 17 "And it shall be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house.
- 18 "They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat."

The high priest's golden plate over his forehead with the words "holiness to the Lord" and his linen clothing that did not cause sweat symbolized the freedom from the curse which Christ obtained through His glorified resurrection body.

And we begin to experience this freedom from the curse as Jesus applies His atoning work to our hearts.

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Jesus has begun freeing us from the curse by giving us new hearts. He will finish freeing us from the curse by giving us new bodies when He returns at the end of this age.

Beloved, I exhort you today to come to this Jesus with the bloody and sweaty brow. I exhort you to come to this Jesus who offers to feed you with the Bread of Life and to remove the curse of sweat from your brow. The alternative is to remain in Your sins unforgiven and undelivered. Those who remain in their sins unforgiven and undelivered will one day experience the curse in all its intensity. They will go from the sweaty brow to the parched tongue in payment for their sins. They will say together with the rich man in Hades,

Luke 16:24

24 ... "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

If you will not have Jesus bear your curse for you because you love your sins too much and do not want to be delivered from them, then you will have to bear that curse yourself for all eternity. The choice is yours.

