

The Time of Reformation

Rev. Michael Fintelman

Psalter: 368:1, 2

Scripture: Hebrews 9

Psalter: 232

Sermon Text: Hebrews 9:10

Psalter: 126

Psalter: 128

The time of reformation.

—Hebrews 9:10

The text we will consider as a doorway for this message can be found in Hebrews 9:10, just the last phrase: “the time of reformation.”

The Time of Reformation

1. In Scripture
2. In history
3. Today

Each year, many in Reformed circles mark the last day in October as Reformation Day. Reformation Day is largely forgotten across this great land and sadly forgotten in too many churches as well. Generally, it is celebrated only as Halloween.

The practice of Halloween finds its roots around the eleventh or twelfth centuries with the ancient Druids from Western Europe. They dedicated October 31 for a festival called “Samhain” (pronounced, “saw-win”), which means “end of summer.” They believed that on the eve of Samhain, the dead rose up out of their graves to wander freely about the earth and make trouble by harming crops

and causing domestic disturbances. During the darkest hours of the night, a chief spirit referred to as the Lord of the Dead also was believed to call up all the lost souls for resentencing. Wayward souls were sentenced to spend twelve months in the afterlife in an animal form. The Druids were afraid of these so-called dead spirits and the animal bodies they had, so they sacrificed to their gods in hopes for some kind of protection. They believed they were surrounded by strange ghosts, witches, and spirits, and cats represented very wicked people who had been punished and reincarnated as cats. Thus the association of Halloween with ghosts, goblins, morbid afterlife events, and black cats.

The custom of jack-o'-lanterns comes from Ireland. In their tradition, a man named Jack was unable to enter heaven because he was too miserable, but he had played too many tricks on the devil to go to hell. As a result, he was said to be condemned to wander over the world with his lantern lit with an ember from the fires of hell. The Irish were afraid to receive the same sentence, so they began the practice of hollowing out turnips with a lighted candle in them to scare away his spirit from their homes. Today in America, the pumpkin has replaced the turnip.

In the 1400s during the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church was flourishing but felt challenged on how to address this Druid custom. They decided to compromise. They allowed people to join the church and still allowed them to continue these occult customs. But they said they would make a few small changes. Instead of praying to the heathen gods, they guided the people to pray to the dead saints. As a result, Rome called November 1 "All Saints Day." Mass on that day is called "All Hallowed Mass"; when it was celebrated on the eve of October 31 the name was referred to as "All Hallowed

Eve,” which was later shortened to “Halloween.” Thus, modern Halloween practices come as a result of Druid practices of the occult and witchcraft, and the Roman Catholic practice of praying to the dead.

Is it enough, however, just to teach our children that Halloween has unbiblical roots and leave it at that? Not at all. We should replace ungodly practices with good and godly ones, and the Lord has given wonderful opportunity to do that!

The Lord guided Dr. Martin Luther to nail his ninety-five theses protesting the Roman Catholic religion to church doors in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517. In the years prior to that historic day, the Word of God had become increasingly muddled by the erroneous teachings of Rome. From the time of Luther and onward, the Protestant Reformation took shape and the Word of God was more and more uncovered through faithful preaching. Biblically Reformed churches multiplied and began to dot the landscape in Europe and beyond.

So what made these faithful churches distinctly Reformed? The answer is simple. They taught and preached that the Bible, the Word of God, was the only rule of faith and practice.

1. In Scripture

What does the phrase, “the time of reformation” mean in Hebrews 9:10? To answer that question, we must consider this phrase in the broader context of one of the main messages of the entire book.

The epistle to the Hebrews was written to show how the Lord Jesus Christ is superior in every way. He is a superior King; He is superior to the Old Testament priests; He has a superior covenant. Paul uses the word “better” twelve times in this book to highlight that point. Jesus Christ is “so much better than the angels” (Heb. 1:4). “He

is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb. 8:6). Jesus Christ, the “greater” and “better,” fulfilled all that the “lesser” in the Old Testament simply pointed towards.

In the Old Testament, it was good and well to have all those sacrifices, but they were only symbolic. They pointed to a higher reality. They had to make way for the fulfillment who was Jesus Christ Himself. When He arrived on the scene in history, the entire external Old Testament sacrificial system became obsolete. We find Paul teaching that in Hebrews 9:9–10.

In verse 9, Paul writes that the Old Testament sacrifices were a “figure [that is, symbolic] for the time then present [the Old Testament time], in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect [or complete].” In other words, the Old Testament sacrifices could not do the job of completing salvation; they could only point to how. Verse 10 continues, “Which stood only in meats and drinks [these things were only external meat and liquids], and divers [various ceremonial] washings, and carnal [physical, external, fleshly] ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.”

In other words, all those Old Testament practices accomplished their purposes in their time. The word *time* is noted twice in these verses to emphasize that now was a different time. What was that time? A time of reformation! Literally, making straight, reshaping, or re-forming. Who and what makes matters straight and who reforms? The answer is found by asking: what is the whole book of Hebrews about? And what does the next verse say? “But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building [creation]” (v. 11).

So Paul is writing that the time of reformation is the

time of Jesus Christ. He is the One who was not created by human hands. Christ is the original, divine Reformer! He is the one who makes all things right and reshapes the crooked to make it straight. Paul writes that the Old Testament was good at its time, but now the time of reformation was upon them—and that reformation is to be found in the person and work of Jesus Christ Himself, who is perfect and complete. As perfect and divine, He has both authority and ability to make the crooked straight (Isa. 40:4). Indeed, He makes all things new (2 Cor. 5:15, Rev. 21:5). The Jews in Paul's time wanted to cling to old, external ways, so he labors to show them they were now living in the New Testament reformation time of which Jesus Christ Himself was the initial and sole Reformer.

So what is to be reformed by Scripture's definition? It is to be Christ-centered. It is to see Christ as the purpose and goal for all things. It is to follow the One who initiated the original Reformation and is the original and ultimate Reformer in the fullest sense of the word. To be Reformed is to understand every portion of Scripture in light of Jesus Christ Himself. It is to believe that all truth flows ultimately from Him (John 14:6). But if Jesus Christ was the original two thousand years ago, how has that unfolded throughout history?

2. In History

Solomon writes that there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9). By the 1500s, the church had fallen into many errors: not only the error of sinful living, but, worse, the error of wrong theology and doctrine. They were doing what mankind does naturally, what Jews were struggling with in Paul's day. They were caught up in the externals at the cost of sound doctrine.

Rome was teaching that beside the Word of God, you had to add some good works to your faith and make it

meritorious. It was principally the same problem Paul faced among the Hebrews. They desperately needed reformation, so God convicted men in their hearts by the Holy Spirit to get back to the clear message of salvation in Christ alone as found in the Bible. In light of that truth of God's Word, they were convicted of the error of Roman Catholic theology. Thus the Protestant Reformation began to take shape in the late Middle Ages.

It began with a few forerunners to reformation: John Wycliffe ("The Morning Star of the Reformation") and John Hus. Then came Luther with the bold move to nail his theses to the castle doors in Wittenberg. Luther was the central figure of the Protestant Reformation because he so loudly and clearly championed the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He was followed by men like Calvin and Zwingli in Switzerland, who further ironed out details of the doctrine. Soon the Protestant Reformation spread across Europe, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

What emerged from all of this is what is affectionately called by the Reformed community *The Watchwords of the Reformation*. Those five Watchwords of the Reformation are: 1) *Sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone; 2) *Sola Gratia*—grace alone; 3) *Sola Fide*—faith alone; 4) *Solus Christus*—Christ alone; 5) *Soli Deo Gloria*—glory to God alone. Let us consider each one briefly.

- *Scripture alone* teaches that the Bible alone has authority for both faith and practice—not the Bible plus tradition, as Rome taught. Rome taught that tried and old practices are equal in authority to Scripture. The Reformers responded that tradition has its place, but not in the realm of authority. The Bible alone holds exclusive authority within itself and needs no augmentation. Jesus taught the same in Matthew 15:1–11.

- *Grace alone* teaches that God’s salvation in Jesus Christ is not based upon any human merit or choice. This focus is on the will of mankind. The Reformers and the Bible teach that our will is corrupt, but Rome (and many churches today) teach that we can still spiritually choose good prior to the presence of grace. The Reformers responded that only the grace of God can give the grace to respond to God’s call. By nature, we have no natural spiritual ability or desire for the things of God in Christ. “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7).
- God’s grace is received by *faith alone*, not a combination of faith and works. It is not what we practice plus what we receive that gives us grace. Ephesians 2:8 states clearly, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”
- *Christ alone is Mediator*. He is the only one, Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:5. Dead saints are not even partial mediators. Jesus Christ accomplished salvation alone, and He alone saves us and mediates for His church. He doesn’t need the help of any dead priests.
- *Glory to God alone*. The formula is not God, plus dead saints, plus church hierarchy which share in glory. Rather, God alone receives all the praise and glory in a sinner’s salvation. “I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another” (Isa. 42:8).

Many Reformed leaders taught these five watchwords tirelessly—and in some cases, even died defending these

truths. As history marches onward, where does this leave us today?

3. Today

The Protestant Reformation transpired in the 1500s, but this did not go unaddressed by Rome. Rome experienced what is often referred to in Roman Catholic circles as “the counter reformation.” It was a movement that lasted approximately a hundred years in the same time frame. During the counter reformation, Rome established major reforms such as:

- Organization of seminaries for priests so they would be better versed in their beliefs with the intent that all their study would keep the priests busy and distracted from immoral shenanigans.
- They cracked down on wild lifestyles of priests and others who were living in the irreligious mode of eat, drink, and be merry.
- They established religious orders of nuns and priests who would carefully practice a regime of external religious rites like special diets, self-inflicted pain, sleep deprivation, etc.
- Rome made decrees regarding things like art. No more nude or vulgar art could be painted and displayed.
- They made decrees regarding music. Only the most solemn music could be played. All the rest was not tolerated.

So they cleaned up their act—externally. Interestingly (from a historical point of view), this counter reformation won many people back to the Roman Catholic Church who had joined the Reformed movement. But there was

a huge difference between Rome's counter reformation and the Protestant Reformation. That is, the Roman Catholic counter reformation only involved externals. They did not change their doctrine and it has not changed to this very day.

What about us? Are we truly Reformed in doctrine? Do these five watchwords of the Reformation ring in your soul and conscience? Or are we more concerned about the externals in life like Rome? Sadly, too many are, even in Reformed churches, at the cost of failing to adhere to and emphasize the grand doctrines of grace!

Remember Paul's day. Who was worried about losing all external practices at the cost of doctrine? It was the church! At the time of the Protestant Reformation, who wanted to hold to old traditions and external practices and therefore a time of reformation had to take place? Was it world or church? It was people in the church! So we ask: is it possible these same errors might be repeated? Sadly, yes. That is why the church needs to be "Reformed and ever reforming." The original Latin for that seventeenth-century slogan reads, "*Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est.*" The translation is, "A Reformed church must always be reforming itself." We always need to be going back to the basics of the core doctrines of grace; that is where errors begin and that is where we desperately need to be kept straight and Reformed. The grand old doctrines of grace are the good old paths. The Lord spoke many years ago in Jeremiah 6:16, "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Walking in the good old Reformed paths gives rest to the soul.

So, the question comes to us: are you truly Reformed? Much that is called Reformed today sadly can't pass this biblical test. Paul says being Reformed is being of Jesus

Christ. The Protestant Reformation was all about the exclusive Christ and His exclusive Word. Are we following Christ alone? Are we true sons and daughters of the Reformation?

Behold My Coming Servant: Eight Encouragements for the Discouraged

Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven

Psalter 257:1, 2, 4

Scripture: Isaiah 42

Psalter 123

Sermon Text: Isaiah 42:1–4

Psalter 292:1, 2

Psalter 292:3–5

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

—Isaiah 42:1–4

In Isaiah 40, the prophet Isaiah is tasked with bringing a message of forgiveness. In Isaiah 40:1–2 we read, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.” The payment was made for Israel’s sins. In Isaiah 41, Isaiah takes the nations and their idols to task, confronting them as if in God’s courtroom. He shows them what they really are: a delusion, a vanishing wind. He says in Isaiah 41:29,

“Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion.”

The contrast in chapter 42 cannot be more stark. This time he points to the real help of man: “Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.” This message came to the Israelites who were in exile because of sin. They were discouraged because of their circumstances. Maybe you are presently discouraged because of the circumstances of your life. There is little progress in your spiritual life. You have prodigal children. Our country is headed for moral self-destruction. You face unemployment. Family members don’t respond to the gospel. Trials test your faith. You are backslidden. There is much darkness and very little comfort. But God comes to you like He did to the Israelites with a message of comfort and encouragement. With the help of the Lord, I want to consider the theme “Behold My Coming Servant! Eight Encouragements for the Discouraged.” There are two thoughts to consider as we look to the coming Servant. First, we behold His character and find four encouragements. Second, we behold His commission and find four more specific encouragements. As we move through our text in Isaiah 42:1-4, we will see these eight encouragements coming to light as the Servant, Jesus Christ Himself, speaks to us from these well-known and cherished verses.

Behold His Character

Isaiah begins this chapter with the word, “Behold,” or, more literally, “Look here!” Behold my Servant! It seems almost a contradiction in terms. Behold the Servant? You would think Isaiah was pointing us to a king who was strong to deliver, but a servant? When you think of a servant, you think of someone with a mop in one hand and a pail of suds in the other. You think of someone who is at

the beck and call of his master. Who is this Servant? He is the Servant of the Lord. He is the Messiah! He is Jesus, the Advent Savior! He is the Deliverer who came to serve. This is really the glory of Christ! Philippians 2:7 states it this way: “[He] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.” He has come to encourage His people. Israel had failed in representing God to the nations around them; they had committed spiritual adultery with idols. They had *failure* stamped on their lives. You and I are not really any different; we have the same stamp on our lives. That’s why we are called to look upon and to believe upon this Servant always. Spurgeon says,

The darker all things else become, the more eagerly look for His appearing, whose coming is as a morning without clouds. When the lower lights are burning dim, behold the lamp above. Our great comfort is that *the Lord Jesus Christ is always to be beheld*...He is no delusion. Those who look upon this Servant will never be ashamed or disappointed.¹

Christ has come to succeed where you have failed! Christ as the coming Servant is not only the Servant of the Lord but also the Servant of sinners.

Isaiah highlights for us four characteristics that qualify Christ to be the Servant of the Lord. Each of these characteristics is also an encouragement.

Encouragement #1: Christ is the Strengthened Servant

Read in verse 1, “Behold my servant whom I uphold.” Literally, this would read, “Behold my servant, whom I grip or strengthen.” Imagine a toddler learning to walk. His mother or father grips him under the arms and teaches him how to walk, strengthening him and providing

1. Charles Spurgeon, “Christ’s Work no Failure,” Sermon on Isaiah 42:4, preached on January 30, 1887, <http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/1945.htm>. Accessed November 23, 2009.

stability as the child totters around the house. This is the only way he can walk; he is utterly dependent on his parents for strength. As the Servant of the Lord, Christ was utterly dependent upon His Father for everything. He came as the Servant in His human nature. He was subject and answerable to God. He was strengthened by the Lord Himself. Derek Thomas notes, “At every point of his ministry Jesus was dependent upon the strengthening power of His heavenly Father, ministered to Him by the Holy Spirit. His work as the Redeemer—every aspect of it—was carried out in utter acquiescence to the will of Almighty God.”² Christ as the coming Servant is not powerless. He has divine strength as His aid. The idol gods are powerless and a delusion, but Christ is given power from God. He is no delusion. Jesus was upheld by His Father, and no power could overcome Him. Already at His birth, Christ is upheld by His Father. He is strengthened during the temptation in the wilderness. He is strengthened in Gethsemane. He is strengthened before Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod. He is strengthened upon Calvary. He is raised again from the dead. He is the strengthened Servant.

He has come to redeem captives like you and me from bondage. He is no weakling. He is no delusion. He was strengthened in order to uphold the weak. Are you weakened by storms and trials of life? Are you lacking strength of faith? Are you weakened because of failure? “Behold My strengthened Servant!” Are you wavering in your faith, not sure which way to turn between following the world or following Christ? “Behold My strengthened Servant!” Are you discouraged, wondering what the future holds for you and your family without a job? Here is cause for encouragement: “Behold My strengthened Servant!”

2. Derek Thomas, *Isaiah Simply Explained*, Welwyn Series of Commentaries (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1991), 278.

He is the Servant sent to minister to churches that have no servant to grip them and to strengthen them. Are you weary of this life, weak, and discouraged because of the battle? The strengthened Servant is coming again to take His people to Himself and to turn their weakness into eternal strength. When He comes again as the strengthened Servant, there will never be a moment of weakness again, never a moment of discouragement; there will only be eternal strength and joy. He has come for the weak and the trembling.

Are you attempting to support and strengthen yourself at this moment? Are you proudly asserting your independence from Christ? Then Christ cannot help you. He calls you to let your proud and stubborn independence go and to depend on Him alone. Are you willing to sacrifice a life of sin and independence for a life of dependence on Christ? Perhaps you are counting the cost and thinking, "But I cannot let go; I don't want to let go." This strengthened Servant has the power to crush the self-strengthening. Listen to Christ's own warning, from Luke 20:18: "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." Will you fall upon Christ? Will you be broken and weak and rely upon Him for strength and salvation, or will you be ground to powder?

Encouragement #2: Christ is the Chosen Servant

In verse 1, Isaiah says, "Behold my Servant, mine elect." God does not simply choose anyone to be His Servant. By calling His only begotten Son to be His chosen Servant, God is actually saying that Christ is the excellent Servant. He is the second Adam to serve the purpose of redemption. He was chosen from before the foundation of the world. He is designated for the purpose of redeeming His

people from exile. He is sent to restore the weak and set the prisoners free.

The apostle Peter says that Christ “was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet. 1:20). Revelation 13:8 speaks of Christ as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. God’s wisdom has purposed to bring salvation through His Son, His chosen Servant. Behold My chosen Servant!

It’s as if God is laying out the resumé of Christ. Under the heading of qualifications, God puts “*chosen!*” He did not have to choose Christ. He is not obligated to deliver sinners. He could have simply left you to perish. But see the grace and the encouragement in this word “chosen.” Man has not chosen Him, but God has—He calls Him “my” chosen Servant. God has chosen Christ because you and I cannot help ourselves. God has chosen Christ so that He could choose sinners like you and me. Just like Israel, we have *failure* stamped all over our lives. We are full of disobedience, idolatry, sin, rebellion, proud independence, and self-reliance. Why would God choose people like us? It is because Christ is the chosen Servant! He saves and sanctifies sinners because of His chosen Servant. What a wonder, and what an encouragement that God has sent Christ! He could have left us to figure things out ourselves, but He says now, “Behold my chosen Servant!” Why would you choose any other deliverer? Self-chosen deliverers cannot help you; at the end of the day, they are a delusion. Only this chosen Servant of God is able to deliver you from all your sins and troubles. Where are you looking? Are you beholding the chosen Servant of God? Are you placing all your hope and anticipation in the chosen Servant of the Lord?

Encouragement #3: Christ is the Beloved Servant

Christ is not only strengthened and chosen, but He's also the Beloved Servant. Read again in verse 1, "Behold, My beloved Servant, My Servant in whom My soul delighteth." Parents, think of how you delight in your children. You see them grow and develop, moving from one stage of life to another. You delight in them when you see them start walking, saying words, going to school, getting jobs, starting to drive. You love them because of who they are and what they do. Likewise, God the Father takes profound delight in Christ—in who He is and what He does. This is seen at Jesus' baptism where the Spirit descends upon Him like a dove and His Father says, "This is my well-beloved Son." There is reciprocal delight in the relationship between Father and Son. The Father delights in the person and work of His Servant, and Christ as the Servant of the Lord delights in doing the will of the Lord (Ps. 40:7–8).

Christ is sent as the beloved Servant for the unlovable—those who are ugly and hateful because of sin. There is nothing in us that would make us beloved in the eyes of God. Paul says in Ephesians 1:6 that God has made us accepted in the Beloved. Here is the root of our encouragement: the beloved Servant. He is the ultimate object of the Father's affections and good pleasure. Don't you see the great lengths to which God has gone to redeem sinners? He sent His only beloved Son, so that whosoever would believe in Him would have everlasting life (John 3:16)! You and I have self-destructed because of sin and ensured our rejection, but God now sends a message of comfort! He has sent His beloved Servant to make sinners like you and me the objects of His affection. The unlovable delighted in! Hallelujah!

Do feel yourself the object of God's wrath and hatred because of sin in your life? Confess that sin, forsake it, and

find acceptance and affection through the beloved Servant of the Lord! Let sin go and cling to Christ, the beloved Servant. You will lose nothing, but gain everything.

Encouragement #4: Christ is the Anointed Servant

God says in verse 1, “I have put my spirit upon him.” Imagine if a military general ordered his troops into battle without equipment—no armor, no air support, and no weapons. They would never succeed without it. Likewise, God equipped Christ in His human nature for the redemptive work laid out for Him. Christ received the Spirit in fullness to equip Him for the mission of delivering His people. At His baptism, the Spirit came upon Him; throughout His life, the Spirit sustained Him and helped Him. The Servant of the Lord was fully equipped with the Spirit of God. In this prophecy, God was determined, “I will put my spirit upon him.” He sent His Servant, and He equipped His Servant with the Spirit’s presence and power. The Father was present with the Son through the Spirit; God was personally present with His Servant.

Behold the anointed Servant! Here is great cause for encouragement. This Advent season, you are directed to look to and believe in an anointed Savior, who possessed the Spirit in full measure so that poor lifeless sinners could be brought to life by the Spirit of God. Christ was strengthened and equipped for service. He experienced the Lord’s presence through the Holy Spirit so that sinners who have alienated themselves from God might experience the blessed presence of God in their lives. Spurgeon comments, “While the Holy Ghost abideth upon the great Servant of Jehovah we cannot know a fear. The anointing on the head will descend to the skirts of the garments.”³

3. Spurgeon, “Christ’s Work no Failure,” accessed November 24, 2009.

Even the weakest believer on the lower ends of the skirts of Christ will receive the Holy Spirit. Those who struggle with sin and fear they are being overcome have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. Those who are weak in faith have the Holy Spirit strengthening them for service. Just as Christ did not fail because He had the Spirit, so those who are in Christ cannot fail because they have the same Spirit. Did Christ not say before He left this earth, "I will send you another Comforter" (John 14:16)? He knows what we need, and He is never far from His people. He was anointed with the Spirit and He anoints His people with that same Spirit.

Christ as Servant is so full and so rich. He encourages His people despite sin and unbelief, despite backsliding. He bids you look to His qualifications to be the Servant of the Lord. Do you see your weakness? Look to the strengthened Servant! Do you recognize your state of rejecting Christ because of sin? Look to the chosen Servant! Do you see that you are cause for God's hatred because of sin? Look to the beloved Servant! Do you see your lack of power to live the Christian life and your lack of the presence of God? Look to the anointed Servant!

Behold His Commission

We wish to see four more encouragements that Christ's commission brings us. The Servant of the Lord is not only equipped, but He is also commissioned to complete a task. This was His great delight because it was His Father's will.

Encouragement #5: Jesus has come to set up judgment

Verse 1 says, "He will bring judgment unto the Gentiles."

Verse 3 says, "He will bring forth judgment unto truth."

Verse 4 says, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for

his law.” Why does Isaiah repeatedly use the word judgment? What encouragement is there in judgment?

The word judgment here is not used in a negative sense but in a positive sense, referring to God’s righteous government in the heart of men. Alec Motyer defines justice as “the Lord’s truth and the truth about the Lord.”⁴ Christ has come to make known this truth and to cause it to go out. He is both the agent of truth and the content of truth; He is the living embodiment of the gospel. He has come to set up His government in the hearts and lives of His people—both Jew and Gentile. He will succeed where Israel had failed. Israel was to be a light to the nations, but Christ came and proclaimed Himself “the Light of the world.” Hell and darkness were unleashed to prevent Christ’s mission, and yet He persevered in bringing judgment as we read in verse 4, “He shall not fail nor be discouraged.” His gospel cause shall never fail. He will not fail nor be discouraged in this task of setting up judgment.

We live in a world that is starving for this judgment, for the gospel. The gospel is twisted and distorted, and many are led astray. So often we are discouraged because we see truth languishing. Behold My Servant who will bring judgment unto truth. His mission in this regard is not one of failure, but of success. Office-bearers, don’t labor without hope, but behold the Servant of the Lord who will convert sinners and lead His people from darkness to light. You might be tired and exhausted from leading the congregation, but here is Christ, the Servant who will not fail nor be discouraged until He has set judgment in the earth. His gospel will go forth. He will persevere in the gospel ministry. He sits in heaven, but He works on earth. Maybe some of you are engaged in evangelistic ministry in the church

4. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 320.

and you cannot find fruit on your labors. Press on; be encouraged! Christ's ministry of judgment is turning sinners to Him. He will not let His Word that you speak fall to the ground. Parents, be encouraged for your children. Here is the Servant of the Lord who has been sent as the Deliverer. He will not fail nor be discouraged until He has set judgment in the hearts of all His people.

Encouragement #6: He comes in meekness

Verse 2 says, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." His mission is marked by meekness and humility, quiet gospel deeds and proclamation. There was no royal reception for Him with fireworks; He was born quietly and laid in a manger. There was no fanfare announcing His birth except for the heavenly host singing for the shepherds. He was not announced with royal pages traversing the land of Israel saying, "The King is born! The King is born!" Instead, He was forced to flee to Egypt. Christ did not stand on the rooftops shouting out; He quietly went about His Father's business. He healed the demoniac without fanfare. He gave sight to blind Bartimaeus without attracting much attention to Himself. He did not fight back when His captors took Him, bound Him, abused Him, and killed Him. He was not loud and brash. He was not known for His thundering rhetoric. And still today, Christ works quietly, arresting sinners and bringing them to terms with their sin, to terms with God.

This meekness of Jesus is the very foundation of our salvation. He lowered Himself to be born in the likeness of sinful flesh, in a stable, and humbled Himself to the death of the cross. He submitted to the will of the Father in every way. Our lack of meekness stands in stark contrast to that of Christ. But Christ has come to teach us meekness: "Learn of me that I am meek and lowly of heart"

(Matt. 11:29). Is this the Deliverer that you anticipate, or do you look for another? Are you looking for a man with polished rhetoric, intelligent communication, drawing attention to himself through his charisma? Are you looking for religion that is loud and brash and living for the experience, but devoid of quiet strength and meekness? Is Christ the Servant too lowly for you?

Encouragement #7: He undertakes a commission of comfort and care

Christ undertakes this commission of comfort and care for bruised reeds and smoking flax as we read in verse 4. The prophet uses a picture from nature of a bruised reed to show how Christ deals with broken and needy sinners. A bruised reed is weak, soft, and liable to break. Reeds blow back and forth with the wind. If a powerful wind would come they would snap and fall over—bruised. A bruised reed is a child of God who is sensible of sin and misery. They are bruised by sin and can't see light at the end of the tunnel. They are restless, looking about for help from another and find it in Christ but dare not reach out and grasp mercy.⁵ What use would Christ have for those who are weak and faltering and bruised? But Christ deals with reeds who are bent over because of sin. He works constantly and compassionately to set them up again. Christ deals with bruised reeds very tenderly. The Servant has come to deal gently with you, child of God. He comes for the brokenhearted and bruised.

The picture used here is of one who is oppressed and yet the Servant does not crush him but strengthens him, because He Himself is strengthened by divine power. Have you backslidden and despair of hope and mercy? Behold

5. Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 4.

Christ and His tender care and comfort! Have you just come to knowledge of sin and misery, and are bruised and broken fresh from the world which has ravaged you? Know that Christ will continue His work to strengthen you. Has the Spirit convicted you afresh of sin and has it brought you very low? Christ deals tenderly with bruised reeds. He will not break you but will strengthen and sustain.

Isaiah also uses the picture of a light or a wick that is burning with a feeble flame from lack of oil and is about to expire. The flame can be put out very easily. Christ does not quench the smoking flax. When you blow out a candle, there is nothing but smoke with a quickly dying ember. Imagine working above that smoking wick. Smoke brings tears and is difficult to work in, yet Christ persists to bring forth light. He begins the work in those who are just coming to faith. Perhaps you are sputtering and smoking. Behold the Servant who deals tenderly with you, not snuffing you out completely but working to fan your faith to flame again. Perhaps you think you are backslidden beyond repair. You emit toxic smoke because of sin. Your light has gone out, and yet Christ maintains a spark in you. He doesn't let you grow cold completely, but He persists in fanning the flame of love and zeal. Matthew Henry states it this way: "Jesus Christ is very tender toward those that have true grace, though they are but weak in it, and accepts the willingness of the spirit, pardoning and passing by the weakness of the flesh."⁶

Christ has come to set up judgment in the earth; He has come in meekness; He deals gently and tenderly with those who are bruised and smoking; but He has also come to liberate.

6. Matthew Henry, *Commentary*, Isa. 42:3, Bibleworks 7.0.

Encouragement #8: He has also come to liberate

Jumping ahead to verse 7, we read that He has come “to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.” Christ is the liberating Servant. One of the primary purposes of Christ’s coming was to liberate spiritual captives. Isaiah is not speaking primarily of liberation from exile or from political oppression, though God would indeed deliver Israel from that. Isaiah is speaking primarily of spiritual liberation. He is speaking of spiritual blindness being reversed. Our minds and hearts have perverted the knowledge of God, but Christ is the great Liberator. We’ve been blinded by sin from the beginning, Christ has come to undo this. We have bound ourselves in prison, but Christ has come to release sinners and set them free by His truth.

What hope and what perspective Christ offers us this Advent season! People engaged in church ministries are often discouraged because sin has bound people and blinded them to the realities of the gospel. But be encouraged to present Christ to them—present the Servant to them! He has come to open blind eyes and to set the prisoners free. His gospel light shines brightly so that those in the deepest and darkest dungeon of sin can be set free. Lives and hearts embroiled in the problems of life can be restored by the gospel by this Servant who will not faint or be discouraged.

“Behold My servant!” Behold His encouraging person and His encouraging work! Behold Him in His first coming, and behold Him for His second coming! Behold Him for acceptance and behold Him for holiness. He is sufficient as the Servant of the Lord and, this Advent season, He demonstrates that He is willing to be the Servant of sinners. Amen.

Precious Blood

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Psalter: 401:1, 4

Scripture: 1 Peter 1

Psalter: 391

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1:18–19

Psalter: 280:1, 4

Psalter: 82

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

—1 Peter 1:18–19

One little creature mentioned in Proverbs 30:25–28 is the coney, often called a rock rabbit today. It is a feeble animal, the wise man says. It has no means of self-defense. Hawks and other animals of prey have immediate access to the coney when it leaves its home in the rocks. So at the slightest sign of danger, conies flee to the rocks. They burrow into the rocks so deeply that even a snake can scarcely follow them. Similarly, believers are to make their home in the Rock, Christ Jesus, to find safety.

Once, after preaching a sermon on conies, I was in Australia, where I saw conies sitting on a pile of rocks. I reached for my camera, but the conies immediately disappeared. I thought, this is the way we as Christians ought to be. We are defenseless as conies without Jesus, the rock of our salvation. We should flee to Christ at the slightest sign of danger.

Today let us consider what it means to shelter in Jesus as our Rock of salvation, how we are to do this, and why it is important to do so. Our text is 1 Peter 1:18–19, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” We will focus on two words: *precious* and *blood*, considering the centrality, cost, and capability of Christ’s blood.

The Centrality of Christ’s Blood

If something is precious, it is valuable. The Bible uses the word *precious* seventy-five times. It speaks of human life as precious. One of the captains sent to seize Elijah says, “O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be *precious* in thy sight” (2 Kings 1:13). The blood and the death of saints are called precious. Psalm 72:14 says, “*Precious* shall their blood be in his sight,” and Psalm 116:15 says, “*Precious* in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”

The redemption of the soul is also precious, says Psalm 49:8. Proverbs 3:15 says wisdom is more precious than rubies. Psalm 139:17 says the thoughts and loving kindnesses of our God are precious. In 2 Peter 1:1 and 4, the apostle Peter speaks of faith and God’s promises as precious, and in 1 Peter 1:7, he describes even our trials as precious, for they refine us as gold. But most of all, the Bible speaks of Jesus as precious. He is precious in His sympathy, precious to those who believe, precious as the cornerstone of our salvation, and precious in shedding His blood. Nothing is more precious than the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Bible speaks of blood 450 times. Blood is precious, for it is the most valuable thing in our bodies. Blood is essential to life. Our bodies may be perfectly framed, but

if drained of blood, we die. The life of the flesh is in the blood, the Bible says.

Spiritually, the blood of Jesus Christ received by faith gives us spiritual life. In God's eyes, blood is sacred. Twice Hebrews 9 tells us that God cannot be approached without blood (vv. 7, 18). "Without shedding of blood [there] is no remission" of sin (Heb. 9:22). That is the primary message of the entire Bible. When Adam and Eve fell, God shed blood to clothe them and cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:21). In Genesis 4, God showed He was pleased with Abel's sacrifice, which involved sacrificial blood. Hebrews 11:4 confirms that there can be no approach to God, no fellowship with Him by faith, no enjoyment of His favor, apart from blood.

When Noah was released from the ark, the first thing he did was offer bloody sacrifices of thanksgiving to God. God's establishment of a covenant relationship with Abraham involved the slaughter of animals that were cut in two and laid in two paths. God Himself walked between the carcasses, sealing the covenant with blood. Later, in Genesis 22, Abraham and Isaac went up Mount Moriah to offer a sacrifice. Initially the sacrifice was to be Isaac, but God provided the blood of a ram instead, teaching us the great principle of substitution. As the ram took Isaac's place to appease the wrath of God, so Jesus Christ takes our place by His blood shedding.

Exodus is a blood-soaked book. In it God commands the Israelites to sprinkle their door frames with the blood of a lamb so that He might pass by their homes without killing their firstborn. Again, life is preserved by means of a substitute. Fifty days later, this lesson is reinforced when Israel reaches Sinai. God gives His law out of the covenant of grace to show His people how they should live. To ratify that covenant, sacrificial blood must be sprinkled, first on the altar, then on the book of the covenant, represent-

ing God's side of the covenant. Then it is sprinkled on the people, with the declaration, "Behold the blood of the covenant" (Exod. 24:8). We can only imagine being in that crowd as the blood of sacrifices falls upon us, and we cry out in response, "All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient" (v. 7).

The foundation and power of God's covenant is in sacrificial blood. Only by blood can God and man be brought into covenant fellowship. That is reinforced by God's prescriptions to Israel on how to worship Him. Blood is central to worship. The first thing visible to an Israelite who approached the tabernacle or temple was the altar of burnt offering. That is where the sprinkling of blood continued without ceasing from morning to evening. The worshiper would see blood upon the altar, on the sides of the altar, and flowing around the altar. When the priest entered the Holy Place, the most conspicuous piece of sacred furniture was the golden altar of incense, which was repeatedly sprinkled with blood.

The Holy of Holies was unapproachable without blood. Once a year, the High Priest entered that sacred place walking backwards, sprinkling blood behind him and then on the altar seven times. He was required to do that before he could finally turn to face the holy God of Israel who dwelt in the *shekinah* cloud above the mercy seat, asking Him to turn away His wrath from the sins of the people. The message is clear: Israel cannot worship God without blood. Blood is at the center of biblical worship.

Wherever you look in the Old Testament—be it at the birth of a child, in the highest festival, or in the deepest repentance—the way to life and fellowship with God is through blood. Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 18:30 indicate the wages of sin are death. Substitutionary, bloody sacrifice is the only way to escape death.

The New Testament also teaches this. When John

spoke of Jesus, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). When Jesus spoke of Himself, He said His death on the cross was the reason He came into the world. His bloody death was the necessary condition of the redemption that He came to bring. He linked the salvation of sinners to His own blood shedding. His death gave birth to life. That is what we must focus on when we speak of the precious blood of Christ. The expression "blood of Christ" is not intended to mean something crass or crude but to serve as a synonym for the gospel, for redemption, and for the salvation of sinners. The blood of Jesus is a synonym for His suffering and obedience that satisfied the justice of God so that He could justify those who believe in Jesus.

Jesus repeatedly taught that His blood must be believably and experientially received if we are to be saved. He said, "Except ye drink my blood, ye have no life in you." "He that drinketh my blood hath everlasting life." "My blood is drink indeed." "He that drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him" (cf. John 6). When He instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood that is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. Drink ye all of it" (cf. Matt. 26:28). So Jesus confirmed the teaching of the Old Testament offerings that we can live only through death, in this case the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and by experientially receiving that death as a substitute for our own.

Paul's epistles underscore the centrality of Christ's blood. Paul repeatedly uses such expressions as "being now justified in his blood," "faith in his blood," "the blood of his cross," "redemption through his blood," and "made nigh by the blood of Christ."

The author of Hebrews repeatedly speaks of Christ's blood. "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place,

having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:12). “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (v. 14). And Hebrews 12:24 says that you are come “to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

Peter, too, reminds his readers that they were elect “unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2). And John declares that “the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). He even writes of seeing Christ’s blood in heaven. He saw a Lamb slain on the throne and heard the elders sing before Him, “Thou art worthy;...for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood” (Rev. 5:9). John describes the redeemed as those who “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). He says the redeemed overcame Satan “by the blood of the Lamb” (12:11).

From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, from the closing of the gates of Eden to the opening of the gates of the heavenly Zion, blood runs through Scripture, uniting all. Substitutionary blood gloriously restores what sin destroyed. Through His blood, the second Adam undid what the first Adam did, and so He reconciles sinners to God.

In Germany, there is one particular church building where a beautiful lamb is carved in stone above its entrance. A man at work on the steeple of the church once lost his footing and plunged to the ground below. A flock of sheep happened to be grazing there, and the fall of the man was broken by a lamb. The lamb was killed, but the man’s life was saved. Out of gratitude, he cut into the stone over the doors of the church the lamb that saved

his life. So, too, you and I, friends, are fallen in Adam and prone to sin. But if we become believers, we are saved from the penalty of sin and death by Christ, God's lamb, who is without blemish and without spot. He rescues us from danger by interposing His precious blood.

Are you resting in Christ's atoning blood for salvation? Do you believe that God's justice is satisfied only by means of that blood? Do you value the blood of God's Son as highly as your heavenly Father does? Do you realize that all peace and holiness and hope of heaven are bound up in the atoning blood of Immanuel? Or are you a Christian in name only, taking this blood for granted, seeing little or no beauty in Christ and His atoning sacrifice? You do not meditate about Christ's blood. You do not treasure it. You do not realize, as Octavius Winslow says, that "there is no acceptance for the sinner, no cleansing for the guilty, no pardon for the penitent, no sanctification for the believer, but in the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God."

Let us pray for grace to know and experience more fully the power of Christ's blood. Ask Christ to open your understanding of the efficacy of His blood, to grasp its necessity, to embrace its satisfaction, and to receive its beauty. Trust Christ to give you deeper insight into His blood, that you may think of His blood as God thinks of it. Trust the eternal High Priest to work out in you the merits of His blood so that you may abide in the sanctuary of God's presence. Ask for grace to draw nearer to God to meditate more on His blood shedding, that His blood may become spirit, life, power, and truth to you.

The Cost of Christ's Blood

The Bible speaks not only of the centrality of Christ's blood but also of the cost of His blood. Though salvation is free to us, we must never forget its costliness to God. It cost the Father the death of His own Son. It cost the Son

suffering and death. It cost the Spirit the constant work of applying the blood of the Son to sinners.

God had only one Son, and He gave that Son for people who rebelled against Him. He gave the best He had for the worst He could find. Oh, what a price the triune God paid in the blood shedding of Immanuel! When we think of the blood of Jesus, we should think not only of His circumcision as an infant and His sufferings throughout thirty-three years, but especially of the last days of His life when he endured unspeakable suffering in Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha, experiencing the essence of hell.

In Gethsemane, Christ's blood exuded from the pores of His skin as He crawled on the ground like a worm and cried out, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39). Jesus was torn by the grief of being separated from His three best friends, who slept while He agonized with God. He also began to experience God's abandonment and wrath against sin. The death He began to taste was God's unmitigated hatred of our sins, dear believer. Our sins sank Christ to the ground. Our sins made Him crawl in agony. Our sins made Him cry out, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38). Our sins spilled His blood in Gethsemane.

Gabbatha involved more blood shedding. Christ's enemies crowned Him with thorns, which pierced his skull. When I was in Israel a few years ago, a tour guide let me cut a snippet of a thorn-bush branch. I put it in my wife's knapsack, but it kept pricking through. Merely touching it drew blood, so we eventually threw the branch away. Imagine making a circlet of these thorns, then smashing it down into our Savior's skull. Blood must have gushed from the top of His head. These thorns were the price of our sins.

Next, soldiers fixed Jesus to a post and began scourging Him with a device we can best describe as a mop

intermixed with oxtail bones. They hit Him as many as forty times, each time catching flesh with the bones and leaving wounds that wept rivulets of blood. Bleeding from His head and His back, Jesus then had to carry His cross to Golgotha—all because of our sins.

At Golgotha, Jesus was put on a cross beam, and nails were pounded into His hands and feet. Our sins, dear believer, put Him there.

The cross was lifted and put into the ground. Reportedly there is no pain worse than when the cross hits the bottom of the dug hole. Pain screeches through the body hung on the cross, the flesh tears, and more blood is shed. Jesus then hung there for six long hours. After three hours of unspeakable pain, He entered the abyss of unanswered prayer (Ps. 22:1–2) and unmitigated shame, when God the Father “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus experienced something far worse than physical suffering in the last three hours of His life. He felt the agony of being abandoned by His Father. The cry of dereliction, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” was pressed from Him in the agony of separation. In the midst of darkness, when His Father turned from Him; when heaven, earth, and hell rejected Him; Jesus Christ suffered alone for your sins and mine. In this hour of horror, Immanuel poured out His soul in the bloody death on the cross.

During these final hours, a sense of sin dominated Jesus’ consciousness to a frightening degree. In Gethsemane and in the first and last words on the cross, Jesus called on God as His Father. But then He cried, “Eli, eli”—“my God, my God.” In that awful moment, He felt sin even more intensely than His Sonship. Jesus felt less like the Beloved in whom God is well pleased, and more

like the chief of sinners who was cursed as vile, foul, and repulsive.

Isaac Ambrose, a great Puritan author, says we should follow the trail of Christ's blood all the way to the cross and through the next six hours, reminding ourselves wherever we see blood that this was done for *our sins*. Oh, what a price our sins have cost the precious Savior! Every sin I still commit is another injury to this precious Savior. How His precious blood ought to teach us to hate sin and never to trivialize grace because it is free. Let us heed Paul's warning not to abound in sin because we are saved by grace. We must remember what our sin cost the Lord Jesus Christ. He had no comfort at Golgotha. When Jesus most needed encouragement at Golgotha, no voice from heaven cried, "This is my beloved Son." When He most needed reassurance, no one said, "I am well pleased." No dove descended from heaven to symbolize peace; no angel was sent to strengthen Him; no "well done, thou good and faithful servant" resounded in His ears. He was in a far country, hanging alone in the naked flame of His Father's wrath.

The women who supported Jesus throughout His ministry were silent. The terrified disciples were a long way off. Jesus walked the way of suffering alone in darkness. Not a ray of light came to Him; only the Father's displeasure. Instead of love, there was wrath. Instead of affection, there was coldness. Instead of support, there was opposition. The Son's cries did not bring the Father back. God the Father so distanced Himself from the Son that eventually the Father disappeared. The Son cried out, "My God—why?" He kept pursuing the Father, yet the Father chose to retreat. No amount of pursuit would catch up with the Father. Jesus was alone. Deserted. Forsaken.

Every detail of this abandonment shouts to us, "This is what God thinks of our sin!" Every detail declares the

irrationality, heinousness, and dread nature of sin. Jesus' suffering at Golgotha is the essence of what God thinks of sin. It is the price the God-man has to pay for sin. Oh, what a costly price is the shedding of His precious blood!

Consider also the value of Christ's precious blood. It does what no one else's blood can do—not the blood of believers, or of animals, or of angels. Christ's blood alone could offer satisfaction for sin. His precious blood is *intrinsically* valuable. The divine Son suffered as perfect man, shedding His blood, which is of infinite value. Christ is the tabernacle of the Deity; in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. He is the perfect image of the Father. His blood is precious to the Father for He is Jehovah's favorite, His only begotten Son. His blood is precious in the Father's eternal plan, not only because of God's parental affection for His Son, but because the Father views the salvation of His elect as fully and forever secured by that blood. That blood is precious to the Father, precious to every pardoned sinner on earth, and precious to every glorified soul before the throne. There is nothing more precious in this world than Christ's blood.

The Capability of Christ's Blood

Jesus' blood is precious also because of what it accomplishes. Christ's blood, dear believers, procures inexpressibly great and precious blessings for us. Consider the following:

1. Christ's blood accomplishes *full-orbed redemption* for us. Peter says Christ's blood is precious because it redeems us. It buys us back from the way of sin. It is our ransom price. You have been redeemed, dear believer, not with silver or gold or mere tradition, but with the precious blood of Christ.

- You are redeemed to be set free from the slavery of sin. By Christ’s blood, the chains of sin have been broken and have fallen from you. You are set free in the Lord to serve God, free from the meaningless life of the unredeemed, and free from spiritual bondage. You have the spirit of adoption whereby you cry, “Abba, Father!” (Rom. 8:14–16). By Christ’s blood, you may kill sin and enter into the very family of God as Christ’s brother or sister.

- You are redeemed to be set free from the curse of the law. By His precious blood, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us,” says Galatians 3:13. By blood, we are freed from the penalty and dreadful thundering of the law. We can now read the law with gratitude.

- You are redeemed to be set free from the enslaving power of Satan. By His blood and death, Christ destroyed “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14b).

- You are redeemed to be set free from the bondage of everlasting death. By Christ’s blood, we who are believers are set free from the chains that bind us to future doom. Death loses its sting and becomes a passageway to life eternal (Rev. 21:1–9).

Christ’s blood was given to buy us back from sin, the law, Satan, and death. Redemption is a magnificent exhibition of divine glory. By means of Christ’s blood, God glorifies His holy attributes in saving the lost; sin is pardoned, not bypassed. Justice is magnified and iniquity is punished. Mercy and love triumph in harmony with righteousness. God proves He is inexorably just and One who lavishes love upon sinners. Truly, “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7).

2. Christ's blood accomplishes *complete atonement* for us. By Christ's blood, we become one with God again. Christ gave His blood as our atonement price.

- That atonement covers all kinds of sin. Atoning sacrifices under the law made no provision for willful, reckless, presumptuous sins. But Christ's blood atones for all sins and blasphemies, Scripture says.
- That atonement covers all kinds of sinners. Even chief sinners are covered, says 1 Timothy 1:15. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many (cf. Heb. 10:11–14). Christ is the propitiation for our sins. "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5b).

*Now freed from sin, I walk at large;
The Savior's blood's my full discharge,
At His dear feet my soul I'll lay
A sinner saved, and homage pay.*

The blood of Christ is precious to us because it is the blood of our great High Priest, Shepherd, Friend, Elder Brother, Kinsman, and Redeemer, in whom all salvation is to be found (Acts 4:12).

3. Christ's blood *justifies and cleanses* us. Paul said to the Romans: "Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:9). God makes the unjust just through Jesus' blood.

Christ literally died in our place, dear believers. We are justified through His active obedience to the law and His passive obedience in paying for our sin. When we receive this gospel by faith, as the Heidelberg Catechism says, God regards us as never having committed sin (Q. 60).

Christ's blood is precious because unspeakable peace flows out of our justification in Christ (Rom. 5:1). We

experience peace with God, peace with Christ, peace with the Holy Spirit, peace with those around us, and even peace with nature. Heaven and earth seem to meet and kiss each other.

John says, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). That may seem strange to us, since blood stains clothing. But instead of staining us with filth, the blood of Christ washes out the stain of sin. Instead of defiling our souls, it washes them white as snow. You who have felt this cleansing power know what I mean. You once felt as black as the outer darkness of hell, but in the moment when Christ’s blood was applied to you, your soul felt washed white as heaven. Your soiled life was made clean, for sin disappears as soon as Christ’s blood falls on the conscience. Divine pardon purges us of all the stains of accumulated years. You know the truth of the promise: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa. 1:18b).

*There is a fountain filled with blood,
 Drawn from Emmanuel’s veins;
 And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
 Lose all their guilty stains.*

4. Christ’s blood *sanctifies* us. Through the process of sanctification, we are made holy to serve God. Blood separated the Israelites from the Egyptians. Likewise, Christ’s blood calls us to separate from the world’s sin, the world’s religion, the world’s sense of goodness, and the world’s vileness. The more we rely on Christ’s blood, the more we will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Let us pray with Charles Spurgeon, “Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, burn up the love of the world! Let Thy death be the death of my sin. Let Thy life be the life of everything that is gracious, heavenly, eternal!”

- Precious blood provides a *melting power*. Nothing can melt the soul like the blood of Christ. Nothing is so humbling as that He “loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). When our souls melt by the Spirit’s powerful application of Christ’s blood, we can understand Zechariah 12:10, “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son.” Often we complain that our hearts are hard, but seldom do we realize that nothing can melt them like the blood of Jesus.

*Law and terrors do but harden,
All the while they work alone,
But a sense of blood-bought pardon,
Soon dissolves a heart of stone.*

- Precious blood provides *pacifying power*. In *Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan says the law is like a maid sweeping dust in the chamber of the soul until the dust of sin clouds the soul and threatens to choke its spiritual life. Only the precious blood of Christ can remove the dust, clean the room, and quiet the soul. Christ’s blood is soothing balm for a sin-distressed conscience.

- Precious blood provides *invigorating power*. Just as the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper provide us with spiritual nourishment, so the blood of Jesus nourishes our faith, offers us hope, gives us joy, and makes us sing. There is no cordial for the heart like the blood of Jesus. “Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved,” God says (Song of Sol. 5:1b). No wine makes glad the heart so much as that which flows from the sacred cup of Christ’s substitution. To meditate on Christ’s atoning sacrifice is the surest path to comfort.

5. Christ's blood *preserves and assures us*, and *makes us victorious*.

- Christ's blood provides *confirming power*. Jesus' blood is the blood of the new covenant. The blood of Jesus is like His last will and testament. It is the great seal of His testament. His covenant blood confirms and assures us of our salvation.
- Christ's blood provides *intercessory power*. Christ sprinkles His precious blood within the Holy of Holies in the heaven of heavens.

*The wounds of Christ for us
Incessantly do plead.*

Christ pleads, by His precious blood, with continual, personal intercession. He lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25).

- Christ's blood provides *victorious power*. As Revelation 12:11 says, "They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb." Those who cling to the blood of Jesus have a weapon that makes hell tremble, heaven subservient, and earth obedient. Sin dies at the presence of Christ's blood; doubts and fears flee. Heaven opens its gates by that blood. Hell would lose its grip if that blood could operate there. Truly, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us by giving His own blood.

There is no victory without conflict, but there is true victory through faith in the blood of the Lamb. Oh, what glorious victory we have now and forever through the blood of the Lamb!

6. Christ's blood *opens heaven* for us. By Christ's blood:

- *We are made fit for heaven*. By Christ's blood, we are brought into agreement with His will. We learn to delight

in His fellowship, and, through Him, to delight also in fellowship with the saints. Christ's blood binds us together. Speaking of Jew and Gentile, Paul said: "He hath made both one through the blood of Christ." What eternal, worldwide union is possible when we meet at the foot of the cross!

When we look away from Christ's precious blood, however, we quickly find ourselves in darkness. An elderly minister, Hugh McPhail, was on his deathbed. Unable to look to Christ's blood, he feared that he would die as a castaway. Friends attempted to comfort him in vain. Finally, one night, he had a dream. He heard music and saw the Old Testament saints walking to heaven waving palm branches of victory and singing God's praises. As the gates of heaven opened, McPhail was asked, "Can you go in with Abraham, Jacob, and David—all of whom fell into serious sins?" "No, Lord," McPhail responded, "I am a far greater sinner than they are."

Next, the New Testament saints passed by. McPhail could not follow Peter, who had denied Christ, and Thomas, who had doubted Christ. The Church Fathers came next, then the Reformers, the Puritans, and the Covenanters. McPhail could not go with any of them. Suddenly, he saw believers from his own congregation approaching. Though he well knew their faults and sins, he couldn't go in with them, either, saying, "I am a greater sinner than them all."

Finally, he saw a figure walking alone to the celestial gates. "Who is he, Lord?" McPhail cried out. He was told, "This is Manasseh, who filled the streets of Jerusalem with the blood of the saints from one end to the other, but he too is going in by the blood of Jesus. Can't you go in with him?"

McPhail then awoke from his dream. He realized that he had been looking to himself for fitness rather than to

the blood of Christ. He called for his wife and asked her to invite his friends to visit him again so he could tell them, “There is room and fitness in the blood of Jesus also for me to go in to the heavenly gates of glory.”

We too must learn that no sinner is too old, too hard, or too sinful to find entrance into heaven by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God teach us to sing:

*And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

- *We enter heaven.* Christ is our only altar, our only sacrifice, and our only entrance into heaven. When He comes again, the trumpet will sound, the dead will rise, and everyone will surround the great white throne. There, where God sees Christ's blood, He will pass by in avenging justice. Sheltered under Christ's blood, believers will be washed from every stain of sin. Not a drop of divine wrath will fall upon them. They will be part of the heavenly choir that sings, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever” (Rev. 1:5–6). Oh, the joy of that moment when we find Christ to be all in all!

- *We enjoy the benefits of heaven.* Christ's blood is our passport to worship, service, and fellowship in the celestial city, where there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more night, no more death, no more curse, and, best of all, no more sin.

Recently, I was preaching in Northern Ireland about how God's people will one day enter into glory with un-

stained souls and perfect bodies. I said death will be like a wheelchair that will roll us into the presence of our Savior where wheelchairs will no longer be needed. Afterwards, an elderly lady, walking with two canes, approached me. Slowly raising one cane she said, “I won’t need this up there.” She smiled as she lifted the other cane. “I won’t need this one, either,” she said. Redeemed from every infirmity by the blood of Christ, we will rejoice in singing the Lamb’s praises. Oh, happy day, when our mortality puts on immortality, our corruption incorruption, and we are forever with the Lord!

- *We find subject matter for heaven.* Christ’s blood provides the subject matter of praise and song in heaven, even by great sinners, such as Adam, Manasseh, and Saul of Tarsus. As Revelation 5:9–10 says, “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Let us finish with three points of application:

First, let us remember that *Christ’s precious blood is all-powerful*. It does not fail to release all whom Christ intends to release. Christ paid the ransom for many slaves. His blood was not a mere deposit or part of the ransom, leaving the sinner to pay the balance. No, He paid it in full, and He always gets what He paid for. Yet, He did not pay for every slave, for if He had, then everyone would be saved. Though He offers His blood to all, He sovereignly and justly passes some by, leaving them in their hell-deserving state.

Second, let us remember that *Christ’s precious blood is motivated by love*. Christ’s blood is precious not only

because it is worth much, but also because He loves much. When you say to a dear one, “my dear, precious daughter,” or “my dear, precious spouse,” you are reflecting not on the person’s *value*, but on *love*. Value Christ’s blood for love’s sake.

Oh, dear believers, let us stop living below our privileges in Christ’s blood. Let us stop hugging the chains of sin. The Lord of glory toiled, bled, and died to tear those chains asunder so that we could know the powerful freedom of being sons and daughters in Christ.

Third, let us remember that *no sin is worse than despising Christ’s precious blood*. If you do not know Jesus, you are despising His sacrificial blood. You are missing what life is all about. Oh, stop rejecting this blood, which is still being offered to you today! Hear these words of God: “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb. 10:29).

I read recently about a shepherd boy who brought his sheep to a cave one evening because of a ferocious storm. The next morning, he saw that the central viaduct of a bridge was washed away by the storm. Knowing that a train was coming, the boy tore his way through the bushes. Bruised and breathless, he reached the track just in time to wave down the train. The conductor, however, waved the boy away and kept the train going. The boy fell onto the tracks. The conductor hit the brakes just in time to keep the train from falling into the abyss. The people on the train were later dismayed to see the mangled body of the shepherd boy.

One passenger finally broke the silence and said, “That boy died for us. He saved our lives.”

Likewise, Jesus Christ throws Himself across the tracks

of sinners' lives to save them from sin. Why do you wave away His loving warnings? Why do you reject the only gospel that can save you? Will you rush over a crucified Jesus and once more deny His precious blood?

I do not know the enormity of your sin, but I know you may still be saved by the precious blood of Jesus. Ask for grace to repent of your wretched unbelief. Cast all your sins upon Jesus, believe in Him, and surrender to Him as Lord. Believe that our precious Savior gave His precious blood for even the greatest of sinners that they might be saved.

Let us, by the Spirit's grace, be like the conies and flee to the Rock of Ages. Let us also exhort others to flee to the Rock. Let us rely on Christ's blood and rejoice in it, saying with Joseph Irons:

*What sacred fountain yonder spring
Up from the throne of God,
And all new covenant blessings brings?
'Tis Jesus' precious blood.*

*What mighty sum paid all my debt,
When I a bondman stood,
And has my soul at freedom set?
'Tis Jesus' precious blood.*

*What stream is that which sweeps away
My sins just like a flood,
Nor lets one guilty blemish stay?
'Tis Jesus' precious blood.*

*What voice is that which speaks for me
In heaven's high court for good,
And from the curse has set me free?
'Tis Jesus' precious blood.*

*What theme, my soul, shall best employ
Thy harp before thy God,
And make all heaven to ring with joy?
'Tis Jesus' precious blood.*