

"If his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering to the LORD is an animal from the flock, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. ⁷ If he offers a lamb for his offering, then he shall offer it before the LORD, ⁸ lay his hand on the head of his offering, and slay it in front of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar.

(Lev. 3:6-8 ESV)

At the front door of the tabernacle, where God dwelt with His people, there was blood everywhere. They literally flung the blood on the altar. Don't pass by the horror of this real event, simply because you are uncomfortable with blood. Most of you have never killed an animal. Our meat comes shrink-wrapped and bloodless. Even at the sight of a little blood, a bit of bile rises in our throats. But, somebody is dealing with the blood and the mud. Our history is covered in blood and dirt, a story of clods and clots. Humanity's story does not consist primarily of beautiful moments of frolicking fawns, although it surely does have moments of beauty, but of violence, threat, danger, filth, and death. Nature is red in tooth and in claw. We have simply forgotten this in the affluence of our one-percenter lives. It wasn't always this way, of course.

The first chapter of our Story was beautiful and humanity was beautiful. We didn't know blood outside of its appointed place inside our bodies. But the beautiful Paradise has been lost, and our lot cursed when our first parents thought that they could gain more beauty than God by determining their own way. They couldn't even take responsibility for their actions, cowering in the trees and blaming someone else. And the consequences for their mutiny of worship were dire – we all go the same. “For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return.” The earth would now fight man, suffering a certainty until eventually the dirt wins. Our blood will be swallowed up by dirt. Yet God was merciful. The first daughter may have forgotten God, but her God had not forgotten her. Though, His first act of mercy was appalling: he went

hunting to clothe them. An innocent animal was bled out onto the ground and its flesh flayed to cover their shame. Consider how horrific putting those clothes on was for Adam, who had named and dwelled with those animals in peace. He had never seen blood. He had never seen death, and now he donned it daily. Yet, God had not abandoned his cursed people. He promised to send a Curse-breaker to be bruised for their rescue.

Our history has been full of fear and anxiety and longing, the clods of hostile dirt and the clots of sticky blood which cling as if they knew they don't belong in open air, reminders of sin's horror and that things aren't the way they are supposed to be. Adam's expulsion from the Beautiful Land lanced the souls of all creation to bleed. Even Eve's curse on childbearing was a curse with bloody reminder. Life through blood.

Our souls long for Eden's beauty again, when God walked in the cool of the day with man fully glorified in our presence and man fully safe in His, when the earth worked with us instead of raging against us, and when there was no shame lurking in the forests of the heart, and when blood was never spilled into the grains of the earth to harden black. Man had become a murderer. God had become merciful. The only beautiful one in our story is God. The only attractiveness is the curse-speaking Majesty whose curse was wrapped mercy, another day to behold and the promise of a hero to pull us out of the blood and the mud.

See, our story isn't pretty, and it is not as if it has gotten better. From Adam's murderous family we haven't prevailed over clod and clot. There was never a time when history asserted humanity to be good. The patriarchs in the Bible are not spoken of as great men and women of beauty, but of depravity, weakness, violence, deception, and fear. Yes, there is faith there, and glory, but it is the faith of sinners, not champions. In the generations following Adam's fall, every father hoped that his son would be the curse-breaker, the seed of Eve to crush the Serpent's head. Day after day, there was the fight against dirt and blood. Lamech's violence bred hope in Noah as the curse-breaker in a time of such wanton violence that God lamented

to flush mankind and cleanse the earth of its wickedness. He saved eight. Could humanity be called beautiful? Yet, the promise of mercy in that mosaic of watery color brought hope of a future deliverance, but it did not bring relief from the sticky reality of blood swallowing dirt. Sin, death, and misery sailed its mutinous voyage stowed away in the heart of that “blameless” man who lived over year inside of that filthy ark. The first words of God outside that floating sin-incubator, back on the cursed soil, is about blood. “The life is in the blood.” The clinging clods of earth and stone were covered in blood, the provision of mercy again requiring the crimson reminder of the high cost of thinking oneself autonomous. Through this bloody earth God bent the colorful promise of redemption towards the sky, like a loaded bow ready to fire the violent arrow against its Maker. This is our story. Noah, the typified hope of Mankind, stumbling in drunken stupor and passing out in the shame of nakedness. A new Eden? Nope! With his nakedness came another curse upon His Son, Canaan – a crushing déjà vu of despair. Yet, God redeemed Noah through that blood-stained soil. God, while cursing the earth, at the same time and in the same event brought the dove through the waters to live. God is the only good one here.

If Noah did not do it, then maybe the patriarchs would bring about peace and stem the flow. But Abraham’s cowardice bred the jealousy of siblings rivaling to power, the father’s failures passed down to Joseph’s brothers throwing blood on his famous coat and enclosing him in a dirt pit. Blood blossoming into slavery in the brick-making mud of the delta. The abortive violence of the Pharaoh’s fears crushing the heads of the infant sons of Jacob. This is man’s history. Our story. Our history is mud and blood, toil and terror. It didn’t end in Palestine, and Abram broke no curse. The seeds of Adam’s weeds grew thick over the whole hearts of men. And the cry of the patriarchs wobbles and clings to their throats as they long for the garden of God in a future hope.

But God...God is the good. His is the only white hat in this cosmic story of humanity. God flew down to rescue His chosen ones, to pluck them from the mud and the blood through the gash in the sea. Grasping them in talons of mercy and with the heart of a Father, he set them down in the wilderness to show them His glory by sending Moses, a man of dirt and desert, whose shoes were too high a pedestal in the fiery presence of God, whose feet needed to be on the dusty reminder of sin's curse. The God of goodness hemmed them in cloud and fire, the smoldering fog of holy terror both protecting and petrifying them while they feared and faltered, frowning at the flashing power on the holy mountain. He revealed Himself as holy, approachable only by blood. Yet, God dwelled with them in it. The sons of Eden's soil would only be brought near through the terrible gore of the spilling life-blood, thrown upon the sides of the altar. Israel was a bloody mess. Daily sacrifices, the expense of sin and reconciliation always and ever filling their ears with hoarse rasps of final breaths and filling their noses with acrid reminder of their wicked deeds parlayed...for that day. Every sunrise the whetted blade opened the boundary between life and death, traversing from ear to ear because of that damned and damning curse of their sin. The constant blood flowing in pulsing streams down the altar to pool in the dirt as the endless deluge of humanity's perversity and a desperate shriek for somebody to save me. When would the blood stop? Where was the promised Curse-breaker?

We know Him. We remember Him at this table. We speak of blood, sacrifice, of broken body and the terror of the holy. We retell the true story, always and often, of the horror of our sin, its bloody result, and the One whose divine majesty fully transcended our curse, who is clean and pure and untouched by the hideous hate of our hearts, and who came to dwell with us.

We tell His story at this table, for He is the hero of a hideous people. He is the only good in our story. He alone is our hope in world run amok in filth and frivolity. God who sent His Son to bear up the bloody justice for my wanton violence, to bear the shame of my hidden delights in

the smut, to take it upon Himself to submit His holy blood to our cursed ground. This cup reminds us of blood. The cross of Christ is bloody. It is terrible. It is horrific. If blood disturbs us, then how disturbing is the sin which it covers and cleanses? Peter tells us:

If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

(1 Pet. 1:17-21 ESV)

The bloody Cross of Christ isn't pretty, but it is beautiful. It is beautiful because by His blood He tears the curse in two – nothing to owe, nothing to pay, nothing to add, solely the reuniting work of the Almighty begotten Son of God. You were ransomed by His blood. God did it! God submitted to bleed! To die! To be swallowed up by the soil that He spoke into existence. Pain and fear and shame, the Son languished under the fiery wrath of the Father whose eyes had never expressed animosity towards Him before, who was fore-loved before the world was ever made and before my sin ever flung the world to ruin. The innocent Man was bled out onto the ground and His flesh flayed to cover our shame. So, our faith and our hope is in God.

And *why* did He bleed? He was manifest in the last times, says Peter, for *your* sake, who through Him are believers in God. For us! For our mutinous violence against His throne! For our sake!

It is not our attractiveness which beckoned the Son to save us, it was the repulsiveness of our sin that drew Him. The horror, the death, the blood. He did not step into our clods and clots because we were beautiful, but because we are beloved. He loved us. He sets His love upon sinners, deceivers, deviants, to redeem us from the curse of clods and clots, raising us up from the ground victorious never to bleed again, never to be swallowed up by the earth, never to sin or deceive or cheat or kill again. It is the story of the gospel: God creates. Man corrupts. Christ redeems. Life to Death to Life through the curse-bearing curse-breaking blood of Jesus alone. This is what we recall. We recall the glory of the Hero, the only Good one in this story of humanity and God, who was raised from the dead and given glory by God, so that God receives the glory in all human history...through shedding the blood of our curse and the restoration of human life to fullness without clot and clod. "This is my body, broken for you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the many for the forgiveness of their sins. Do this in remembrance of me."