



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Blood of the Covenant

Reverend Scott Johnson | March 22, 2026 | Exodus 24:1-8

Old Testament Reading

The Old Testament reading this morning is Exodus chapter 24, verses one through eight. And this is God's holy, his infallible, his inspired word. Exodus chapter 24, verses one through eight.

Then he said to Moses, come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to the Lord, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him. Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, all the words that the Lord has spoken, we will do. And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and 12 pillars, according to the 12 tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, all that the Lord has spoken, we will do and we will be obedient. And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, behold, the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.

New Testament Reading

And now turn to Hebrews chapter nine, verses 11 through 22. This is God's inspired commentary on the passage that we just read, at least part of this is. Hebrews 9, 11 through 22. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is not of this creation, He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh,

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not enforced as long as the one who made it is alive. Therefore, not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, this is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you. And in the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood. And without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

The Purpose of Redemption: Worship

Last Lord's Day, as we looked at the passage before this in Exodus, we considered how the destination that the Lord had set for the people of Israel was the promised land, the land of Canaan. That was why the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt. It was in order to give to them, to bring them into this land that he had promised their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And so the destination was one reason why the Lord brought his people out of Egypt.

But there was even a more basic, more fundamental reason why the Lord brought his people out of Egypt. And that more basic reason was that so his people would worship him, so that they would worship the Lord. When Moses told Pharaoh that he must let the people go, he said to Pharaoh, it was so that they might offer sacrifices to the Lord. That is to worship him.

And the same is true for you and me as Christians. We have a destination, we have a heavenly destination, that eternal glory that God is preparing for us, that is where the Lord is ultimately leading us to. But even heaven serves a greater goal than for us simply to be there. And that is that we are there, we will be there in order to worship the Lord, to praise Him, to magnify His name. This is why God created you. You were created to worship him. That is your purpose. That is why God has redeemed you through his son, Jesus Christ, so that you would be a true worshiper of God. And this is the reason that he is preparing for you an eternal home in heaven, your destination. This is why he is bringing you there, so that there you might worship him forever and ever.

God-Centered Faith

And that raises a question for us. How do you think about your Christian faith as a believer in Christ? Do you think mainly of all of the wonderful benefits and blessings that God gives to you, not only in this life, but far much more in the life to come? Is that how you primarily think about your faith, what you have received from the Lord? Or as a believer in Christ, do you think about your faith as a Christian in terms of what pleases God? What honors God? What may I do in order to bring the most praise, glory, and magnification to my God and my Savior?

We should all rejoice in the good gifts, the blessings of salvation that God has given to us. However, we want a faith that is fundamentally God-centered, not self-centered. We want a faith that is oriented to God, that heart that seeks what brings glory to God. We want His name to be magnified in us and through us. And there is one thing, there is one thing more than anything else that will center our thoughts, our lives, our hearts on God, and that one thing is worship, it is worship.

And what's described here in our passage is a worship service. Really, it's the first worship service described for us in the Bible. And although there are many ways in which this worship service is very different from what we do when we come here on Sundays to worship God, nevertheless, much of it is the same, especially the very elements or essentially what they are doing in this worship service, it is very much the same. And that's because the God that we know and serve and worship, the God that has made himself known to us in his son Jesus Christ, this is the very same God, the very same Lord who delivered his people out of Egypt so that they too would know and serve and worship him as their God. He is the same God, he is their God, he is our God.

And so this morning, for that reason, we can look at this worship service and we can draw some lessons from it about our own worship. And so we'll look at each part of this worship service and we'll see what each part means for us as Christians, as we too are called to engage ourselves in this most important activity in worshipping God.

The Call to Worship

So first of all, in this worship service, there is a call to worship. Look at verses one and two, I will read those verses to you. Then he said to Moses, come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to the Lord, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.

Now we'll look a little bit closer at these verses later, but for now, just notice this one thing, and that is, it is God who calls his people to worship him. It is the Lord who summons His people to Him to praise Him, to worship Him. And this is at the heart of true worship. True worship never originates in the heart of man. Idolatry, the worship of false gods, this comes from the heart of man, but not true worship. True worship is initiated, it is created by God and His call when He

calls us into His presence to praise Him. And so God summons his people to approach him, to approach him with reverence, with awe, in order to give him praise, thanksgiving, and honor. That is his due for who he is.

And we are reminded of this every Sunday when we begin the worship service here at Mount Rose. We hear the voice of God summoning us through the scripture, through his call to worship. And so he calls us into his presence to worship him. So that's the first part of this worship service.

The Centrality of the Written Word

The second part is the word of God. Verse three says this, Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And then in verse four, we read this, and Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. And then later in verse seven, it says this, then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And so Moses first, he declared verbally, from what he remembered, the words of God to his people, but then he wrote it down in a book. And from that book, he then read the words of God to his people.

And this book that Moses wrote, this was essentially the first Bible. It was a lot smaller than our Bibles today. It would have been no problem to read through it in a year. You could probably have read through it in 20 minutes. But it was kind of the first Bible. It contained four chapters of the Bible, what we have now. Chapter 20 was the Ten Commandments. And then chapters 21 through 23 are the various civil laws, judicial laws that we've been looking at. And so these four chapters were the rules of the Lord, the words of God that Moses wrote down in what he called the Book of the Covenant.

Now, the fact that God had Moses write down his words, this is extremely important. It's even a bit surprising because God could have revealed himself as he has been doing, he could have revealed himself directly to his people. He could have continued to speak directly to his people, or at least through the mouthpiece of Moses and Aaron. But instead, he chose to give his word to his people in written form, in a book, on pages. And from this point on, God's people have always been a people of the written word, of the Scriptures, of the book. Now, of course, from this point on, God would continue to speak directly to Israel, but the permanent means, the enduring way in which God has chosen to speak to his people beginning from here is through the scriptures, the written words of God.

And so for this reason, in any worship that is biblical, that is faithful to God's will, that worship will be centered upon the Word of God, the written Word of God, the scriptures, our Bible. And so this is why here, we try to make the Bible front and center in our worship. We hear the reading of God's word. We hear the preaching of God's word from the scriptures. We hear God's law declared to us from the Bible. We hear the assurance of his forgiveness to us from the scriptures. Often as we did this morning, we will read responsibly from a psalm, from the word of God.

Challenges to a Biblical Worldview

And so biblical worship will be saturated with the word of God. And that's because this is how we know the will of God, the mind of God. This is how God reveals himself to us. It is through the scriptures. This is how we know what his will for us is, what his truth is, what his promises are for us, his Grace to us, this is where we learn of his love and mercy to us in Jesus Christ. It is through the scriptures, through what God has spoken and continues to speak through the written word.

One of the glaring weaknesses, I believe, of the contemporary evangelical church is how little Christians read their Bibles, how little Christians know their Bibles. And there can be no question that part of the reason for that is because in the worship of so many churches, there is so little scripture. The Bible is not front and center. When I visited evangelical churches in the past, I'm often struck by how little the Bible is used in the worship service.

But as Christians, we should be devoted to the scriptures. We should not only hear much of God's word on Sundays when we worship, but throughout the week, we should be reading the Bible. We should be storing the word of God up in our hearts because this is how God speaks to us. Again, this is how we come to know Christ better and better.

But one major challenge for us to be a scripture-centered people, one major challenge for us to be word-oriented, to be filled with the scripture is this, that we are living in an age in which images have replaced the written word as the primary means of communication. One symptom of this major cultural shift is the fact that people don't read books anymore. People just don't do much reading, let alone reading books, let alone reading the scriptures. And if we are conformed to this world, the more that we are conformed to the spirit of this age and this aspect, the more and more difficult it will be for us to be true Bible people, to be people who are truly filled with the word of God, who are devoted to reading and learning and understanding the scriptures. We will find it harder and harder to give serious attention to the written word of God, the more that we are carried away with this cultural shift to a very image-based culture.

And this is why worship is so crucial. This is why how we worship is so extremely crucial. Because how the church worships God together in our weekly services will have a tremendous influence in the formation of the character of the day-to-day life of the believer. And so if Christians do not hear scripture in worship, why should we expect them to read scripture throughout the week? If Christians are not reminded on Sundays in worship, as we worship the Lord, that God speaks to us through his written word, if Christians are not reinforced in that conviction week after week, why should we expect them to seek to hear God's voice in the scriptures in their day-to-day lives? And so how we worship God is so important. It's not only that we might glorify Him in our worship, but it also has a tremendous influence in the way that we will live out our Christian lives from week to week. And so we need a Bible-centered worship service so that we will be Bible-centered Christians in our lives.

The Response of the People

The third part of this worship service is the people's response. And so the people respond to the words of the Lord. In verse three, this is what Moses says: And all the people answered with one voice and said, all the words that the Lord has spoken, we will do. And then later in verse seven, it says this, then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, all that the Lord has spoken, we will do and we will be obedient.

You can say one thing for the Israelites at this time, they were an optimistic bunch. They were quite confident that they would keep all the words of the Lord. Matthew Henry, the Puritan commentator, he says it quite quaintly, bravely resolved. Bravo for the people of Israel. We know that, of course, the people of Israel would do the very opposite. They definitely did not do all that the Lord commanded. They were disobedient to his commands as becomes abundantly clear as you read on in the Old Testament. But what else could they say? This was, of course, the right response. The people knew that they were bound to keep the word of God and any other declaration on their part would of course been not what the Lord desired. And so they declared that they would keep God's word.

But notice the obedience that God commanded. Notice the obedience that the people promised. It was complete, entire, perfect obedience. Look at verse three, Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules and all the people answered with one voice and said, all the words that the Lord has spoken, we will do. The bad news for you and me, from one perspective, the bad news is that God still requires the same standard for us as Christians today. What he requires of us regarding his law is nothing less than perfect conformity to all that he has commanded us. To obey his law perfectly, to be conformed perfectly to his righteousness.

It's safe to say that that's not the same standard that we set for ourselves. We hear the law of God and we, no matter what we might say, we aim to keep it more or less. We aim for above average obedience. And when we meet that goal, we are pretty satisfied that we have pleased God. But not according to the law of God. We are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves, but I haven't really truly obeyed that commandment if all I have done is to avoid doing harm to my neighbor. I've not kept that commandment unless I have devoted myself to seeking his good in every way that I possibly can. I have not really kept the first great commandment to love God with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind if I have only gone through the motions of the Christian life and Christian worship without my heart engaged in that.

A big part of our growth as Christians, a big part of our maturity as we grow in our faith and understanding of the word of God and God's will for us, a big part of that is seeing more and more clearly just how far short we fall of truly obeying what God requires of us, keeping his commandments. We fail. We fail to keep the first and the second great commandments. We fail

to keep all of God's law. And yet this is his standard for us. He has not compromised his standard.

Grace for Imperfect Obedience

But the good news is that God is gracious and merciful. He is gracious and merciful towards sinners such as us. He is gracious and merciful towards you and me, people who are flawed, who are imperfect, who keep God's law so imperfectly, who often transgress God's commandments. And this is embedded here in this worship service because as we will see, not only was God's law read, but sacrifices were commanded. And those sacrifices were given to the people of Israel in order to teach them that because of the blood of those sacrifices, that there is forgiveness, there is mercy from God towards his people because we have failed to keep his commandments.

So God is merciful. And the same is true today. He is a gracious and merciful heavenly father. He forgives the sins of his children. First John 1:9 says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He not only forgives us when we come to Him in faith, when we seek that forgiveness, He not only forgives us for breaking His commandments, but also He forgives us for failing to keep His commandments as perfectly as we are called to do. And because of the work of Jesus Christ, God accepts even our imperfect obedience. He sanctifies it so that in Christ, even our imperfect obedience is pleasing to Him. And yet the standard he sets for us is never anything less than full, perfect conformity to his law.

But there is more good news for you and me in Jesus Christ, and that is this, when we compare ourselves to the Israelites here back in Exodus. Unlike the Israelites here, you and I live after the day of Pentecost. We live after the day in which the exalted Lord Jesus Christ, at the right hand of God the Father, he has poured out his Holy Spirit upon the church, upon us, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, who indwells in you as a believer in Jesus Christ, you can begin to keep the commandments of God. Not perfectly, not perfectly, but truly, truly.

And so we should have a similar kind of response as well when we hear the commandments of God. This is how we should respond. We should say, I will endeavor with all that is in me by the grace of God to do the will of God to follow my Savior Jesus, not because I can earn God's favor and love, not because I'm trying to establish my own righteousness before God, but because I know that God has loved me. God has saved me. He has been merciful to me. He has forgiven me. The love that I have for him because of the way that he first loved me. I want to keep his word. I want to please him. I want to glorify him in my life by obedience. I want to grow to be more and more like my faithful savior, Jesus Christ. And we have the promise. This is what we can tell ourselves. We have the promise that by his spirit, we will grow to be more and more like him. So that is our response to hearing the word of God as believers in Jesus Christ.

The Blood of the Covenant

The fourth part of this worship service are the sacrifices. After Moses wrote down the words of the Lord, we read how he built an altar and 12 pillars and the 12 pillars represents the 12 tribes of Israel. And then verse five says this, and he sent young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. We won't get into the details of what is a burnt offering, what is a peace offering. As you read, go on and read in the Old Testament, Moses will explain the differences between those offerings. But what's most important to notice here is that what these offerings have in common is that blood was shed. Blood was shed, animals were slaughtered, and blood was shed.

Verse six: and Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Verse eight: and Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, behold, the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words. So what does all this? What does all this mean with the blood that is thrown against the altar, the blood that is thrown on the people of Israel, all this blood being shed, these bloody sacrifices?

Well, first of all, notice that Moses calls the blood, the blood of the covenant, not the blood of the ox and the blood of the goats, but the blood of the covenant. A covenant was a sacred bond between God and his people. And when God made a covenant with his people, this was the heart of a covenant, he says, I will be your God and you will be my people. But God also gives the terms to his people for remaining in that covenant, for keeping the covenant. And that is this, that if God's people obey him, if they walk according to his word, they would enjoy the blessings of the covenant. But if they disobeyed the Lord, if they became covenant breakers, the penalty for breaking the covenant was death. And that death was symbolized by the blood of the animals that was shed in this ceremony, in this worship. And so the blood would teach the Israelites that the penalty for breaking God's commandment was death, the death that they deserve, just as the blood was sprinkled on their bodies. So they knew that their blood would be upon them if they rejected God's covenant and broke his commandments.

However, at the same time, the blood here also represents cleansing from sin. And we know that because of what the author of Hebrews teaches us about this first worship service. We read from Hebrews chapter nine. And in that chapter, the author of Hebrews says that for a covenant or what he calls a will, for a will slash covenant to go into effect, there must be a death. And then he says in chapter nine, verse 17, for a will takes effect only at death since it is not enforced as long as the one who made it is alive. And then he says that that was also true for the first covenant. And when he talks about the first covenant, he's talking about this worship service involving the inauguration of the covenant that we've read here. And so this is the covenant that the Lord made with the Israelites through Moses on Mount Sinai. And the author of Hebrews says in verse 18, therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.

And so he's referring to the blood that was shed and sprinkled on the people. The author of Hebrews goes on to describe the worship service that takes place in this Exodus passage.

Moses read the law to the people, and then he took the blood of the sacrificial animals. And according to Hebrews, Moses sprinkled both the people and the book of the covenant with the blood. The author of Hebrews says later that when the tabernacle and all the vessels that were made with the tabernacle, that they also, when they were made, they were also sprinkled with blood. And then he says this in verse 22, in chapter nine, he says, indeed, under the law, almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

The Sacrifice of Christ

So here's another reason for all of this blood in this worship service, this beginning of the covenant with God: without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. And so the blood that Moses sprinkled here on the people, it not only inaugurated the covenant, but it signified that the sins of the people were atoned for. They were covered. They were forgiven so that they could truly come into the presence of the Lord and worship Him. In all of the blood that was shed, in all of the sacrifices, in the entire sacrificial system that's expanded upon in Leviticus, they were all for the same purpose, to show them that if the Israelites were to come before God, if they were to approach Him to worship Him, if they were to come into His presence, they could not come without blood. And they needed the blood to cover their sins, to atone for them. Leviticus 17:11: for the life of the flesh is in the blood. And I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

And so this is another reason why there was so much blood here. It was to teach the Israelites that they needed their sins to be dealt with. They needed atonement in order to come into the presence of God. The whole book of Hebrews, the point of it is to show us how the ministry of Jesus Christ, both as priest and sacrifice, is superior to the priesthood and the sacrifices under Moses. So Hebrews teaches us that all of the animal sacrifices that we read in the Old Testament, including those that we read here in Exodus 24, that they were only copies, they were only shadows of the one true sacrifice that Christ would offer. That is the sacrifice of himself. That is the one sacrifice, the shedding of blood that would truly take away sin.

As Hebrews puts it, Hebrews 10:4, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. And so when Moses sprinkled that blood, the blood of oxen, the blood of animals, when he sprinkled that on the people of Israel, that wasn't truly atoning for their sins. Not truly, because it was the blood of animals. What was needed to deal with our sin, what was needed in order to bring us to God, in order for us to be forgiven, what we needed was the blood of a man, the blood of a human being, one just like us, a perfect man, a divine man, a sinless man, one who could offer himself a sacrifice that we might be forgiven. And this is the blood that Jesus has offered in our behalf, his very own blood shed on the cross for us.

And so we needed a perfect representative, one without sin to bear our sins before God, that we might be made forever clean and holy and able to come into the presence of almighty God, to

worship him and to enjoy his presence, his blessing, his grace. And this is what Jesus has done for us at the cross. Hebrews 10:14: for by a single offering, one offering, a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

When Jesus ate that last meal with his disciples, that Passover meal on the eve of his crucifixion, he handed them the cup and he said, this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. He also called it the new covenant in my blood. And so Jesus came to make a new covenant with us. Not like this covenant, a covenant sealed not with the blood of animals that could not take away sin, but sealed with his own blood.

And if your faith is in Jesus Christ, this is why you are forgiven. If your faith and hope are in Christ, your sins are atoned for. You are forgiven because Jesus has shed his blood for you. He died the death that you and I deserve to die. Remember, another aspect of this blood that was shed in this worship service in Exodus 24, the blood was telling the Israelites that if they broke the covenant, what they deserved was death. And they were in fact covenant breakers. They did not keep the law. And in our sin, we too were covenant breakers. We also did not keep God's law. And so a death has taken place. Because we were covenant breakers, a death has taken place, but not our death, but it was the death of Jesus. And so his blood shed for you and me is that new covenant. It is eternal life. And because of Jesus Christ, you have overcome sin, You have overcome death because of what he has done for you.

Drawing Near Through the Mediator

And so the worship service involved blood. Our worship service is based on the greater blood of Jesus. You'll notice that in this worship service, not everybody was called to come near to the Lord. The people stayed below at the foot of the mountain. Aaron and his sons and the elders, they were able to go with Moses part of the way, but they had to stay back. They couldn't go all the way into the presence of God. Only Moses could draw near to God himself.

Thankfully, our worship service is not like that. Imagine if it was. All the congregants here, you would have to be standing out in the parking lot. Thankfully, it's a nice day, so it wouldn't be too bad out there. The elders, you could come into the church building, but only into the foyer, but only the minister, only the pastor could come into the sanctuary to be near God. Even though Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of those animals, there was still a distance. There was still a gap, a distance between them and the Lord.

And this distance makes perfect sense in the context of Exodus. If you remember the description that Moses gives to us when the people saw God, as he came down upon Mount Sinai, it was terrifying. There was thunder, there was lightning, a trumpet blast, the people trembled. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke. The Lord descended on it in fire. And most terrifying of all, what left them in abject fear was hearing the voice of God thundering from the mountain. He spoke to the people with a voice that was so dreadful, the people begged Moses that they would not hear the voice of God anymore.

And so the people were given a glimpse of the searing holiness, the awful majesty of Almighty God, and it left them in dread. And so here in chapter 24, the people who worship the Lord, they have to stay back. They can't come near. The elders of Israel, they can't come too near. Only Moses, the mediator could go near to God because of his holiness, his majesty that would consume them.

But praise God, this does not describe the way things are today when we worship the Lord through faith in Jesus Christ. No, God is still the same. He is still holy. He is as majestic as he ever was. But because you are covered with the blood of a better sacrifice, because the blood that has been sprinkled on you is not the blood of oxen and goats, but the blood of Jesus, you can draw near because you have a better mediator than Moses. You have Jesus. You can draw near. You can come as near to the Lord as Moses himself approached God on top of Mount Sinai.

Again, Hebrews tells us of this wonderful access that has been opened up for us to come to God by faith in Christ. Hebrews 10:21 and 22 says, since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us draw near. Let us draw near. Hebrews also says in 4:16, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

These are wonderful promises that you and I, we can come near to God without fear. It doesn't matter what your past is. It doesn't matter how sinful a life you have lived. It doesn't matter how evil and wicked the sins that you have committed. By faith in Jesus Christ, you are covered with the blood that takes away all of your sins so you can come near to God. And it doesn't matter, Christian, how you have stumbled recently and your struggle with sin. It doesn't matter how you have failed because you are covered with the blood of Jesus Christ. And so you can draw near to Him, to your Father. You can come to Him with your desires, your fears, your prayers, and know that He will hear you. For the sake of Christ, God, your Father, He will give you mercy and grace to help in time of need. Let's pray.