

The Water and the Blood

I John 5:6

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

- I. **Introduction:** The title of today's message is "The Water and the Blood." My interest in this subject was triggered by an old familiar hymn (and one of my favorites) that was written by Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages." And that interest was piqued specifically by the 1st verse which reads, *"Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee; Let the water and the blood, From thy wounded side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure, Save from wrath and make me pure."* With those lyrics in mind, an alternate title to "The Water and the Blood" could be "The Double Cure" which may remind some of you of what God told the prophet in Isaiah 40 beginning verse 1 saying, *"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. ²Speak 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."* From this hymn, it would seem that Toplady had in mind a "double cure" of sorts being signified by the water and the blood which flowed from Christ's side at the time of His death on the cross. And so this prompted me to study this subject; i.e. – to what the Apostle John may have been referring when, after having been with Jesus during the 3 years of His earthly ministry and including having been an eye witness to what took place at the time of Christ's death on the cross, He was inspired to write later about Christ coming by water and blood in I John 5..
- II. **Text:** I John 5:1-13: So let's consider "The Water and the Blood" within the context of the passage that was read, I John 5:1-13. And we see there that John is emphasizing this "you-can-take-it-to-the-bank" credible witness of the triune Godhead – the witness to us that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God – the God-man and that salvation for any who are saved is to be found exclusively in this Person and based upon His finished work of obedience unto the death of the cross (I John 5:11). Now while I certainly hope to remain consistent with the overall context of I John 5, I'm not going to do a verse by verse exposition of this chapter which deals with the sure witness from heaven and in the earth by the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Rather, my focus will be on what is witnessed – i.e. – who Christ is and what He accomplished; and that specifically in connection with the description of Christ as He who came by water and blood. If you'd like to hear a good exposition of these verses, there are a couple of good expository messages that Bill has preached from this chapter that are available on-line and which I used in my study. But for today, let's consider that within the context of I John 5, John wrote this in verse 6, *"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; <and then so as to emphasize both, he added...> **not by water only, but by water and blood.**"*

A. Possible Interpretations: In my study, I came across several views of what may be intended here. And, while I can't be dogmatic that any one of these specific views is precisely what God the Holy Spirit intended, I will only share with you those interpretations which I believe to be consistent with (rather than deny) the basic Gospel message of salvation as set forth in God's Gospel. And regardless of the difference in these interpretations (to the extent (and only to the extent) they are consistent with God's Gospel) I'm confident that true believers can rejoice with me in the certain assurance of salvation by the Person and work of Christ that results from our consideration of this description the Holy Spirit gives us through the Apostle John. I know this: That regardless of what exactly is signified here by the water and the blood, that each of the credible viewpoints I've come across (and will share with you today) – all point to the same Person and work that results in this double comfort or double cure (if you would) for all those who are given faith to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for all their salvation.

Now, in my study of the writings of other Gospel commentators in whom I have confidence, there is broad consensus that Christ having come "by blood" refers to the shedding of His blood in His sacrificial death on the cross. That much seems to be beyond debate. But there are variations among Gospel commentators as to what His coming by "water" might be referring to. And as I studied this, I tried to keep 2 things in mind: 1) First, the context wherein we have the witness that Christ is the very Son of God and 2) secondly, that this description involving water and blood is set forth by John with the words, "***...he that came by water and blood...***"

1. The incarnation and birth of Christ: First, some think the water refers to the incarnation and birth of Christ. And that certainly fits with the language that this is how He came. Recall in Matthew 1 we're told that the angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph and told Him that the child Mary was carrying in her womb had been conceived by the Holy Ghost and that He shall "***...call His name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.***" That's what the name Jesus means – Jehovah God who saves. And then beginning in Matthew 1:22, we read, "***now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, <and then Matthew quotes the Prophet Isaiah> saying, ²³Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.***" So here at the time of His birth, God is bearing witness to Joseph through the angel that this one who would be born is indeed Deity – the very Son of God, at this point in history taking into union with His Deity a sinless humanity in the One Joseph was to name Jesus. This was truly both God and man in one Person.

We also see this witness, that He was the very Son of God in this, His incarnation (His birth) from Luke's account when the angel appeared unto Mary and told her in the latter part of Luke 1:35b, "***...therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.***"

And in support of this view, some liken the water by which Christ came, to the rain that descends down from heaven, just as God the Son condescended down to earth at His birth to take into union with His Deity, a sinless humanity whereby He could (and did) fulfill His covenant obligations as the Substitute and Surety of all those whom God the Father had chosen and given to Christ from eternity past, to come in time to pay the debt due unto all their sins.

Water in scripture is sometimes used as a symbol for the Word of God. Christ, as the very Word of God Himself proves His Deity – that He did indeed descend from heaven. So John’s language here of Christ coming by water and blood can be compared to what John wrote in the Gospel of John, chapter 1. Remember he began that chapter, referring to Christ as “the Word,” saying, ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*** Then down in verse 14a we read, ***“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, ...”*** And with water used as a symbol for the Word, we can see where this would coincide with those who lean toward seeing His coming by water as a reference to His incarnation or His birth.

2. The baptism of Christ: A second view (and one that I think is also consistent with the language that says Christ came by water and the blood) is that the water refers to the baptism of Christ. Christ’s baptism by John the Baptist at around the age of 30 marked the beginning of Christ’s public ministry – how He came on the scene. Let’s look at that in Matthew 3:13-17. It reads, ***“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. ¹⁴But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? ¹⁵And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.*** <Now consistent with this being how Jesus came by water – keep in mind what Christ said here about fulfilling all righteousness at His baptism – for that is what He came to do, to bring in an everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24).

Water baptism represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ which were all necessary to establish and confirm the righteousness whereby God justifies those He came to save. Picking back up in verse 16...> ***And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: ¹⁷And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*** And so we see here, this interpretation of His coming by water being a reference to His baptism is also consistent with the context of I John 5, that Christ is indeed the Son of God as God the Father proclaimed Him to be in an audible voice at His baptism.

3. At His crucifixion: So, as I’ve described so far, (1) some believe that the description of Christ having come by water and the blood refer to His birth and death, others believe that it is more likely to be a reference to His baptism and death.

Now I hope in presenting these different possible interpretations that I'm not confusing things, but I do want to share a 3rd view with you. Some believe that the "water and the blood" by which Christ came refers to the water and blood that poured from the body of Christ as the spear was thrust into His side on the cross. And so the suggestion is that this would signify sanctification (as by water) and justification (as by blood). And I suspect this is what the hymn writer had in mind in describing the double cure – save from wrath and make me pure. And it's a truth, God doesn't do one without the other – He came not by water only but by water and blood. Those whom He justifies, He sanctifies.

Now some of the Gospel writers that I've studied, while all agreeing with the Gospel truth that the work of Christ on the cross is indeed the sanctification and justification of all His people, some think this would not be the correct interpretation of the I John 5:6 language because there it states that Christ came by water and the blood. But there is the possibility that what is meant by His coming is not necessarily how He came into the world, or how He came on the scene at His Baptism; but rather what He came to do or accomplish. As the angel indicated to Joseph, Christ came to save His people from their sins, to justify them and to give them both spiritual and eternal life. Again, I believe a case can be made for either of these three interpretations.

As I dug into this some more, a couple of passages kept popping up that suggested to me that the water and the blood which flowed from Christ's side on the cross, signifying the sure blessings of justification AND sanctification by the Spirit in the new birth, could be an appropriate description of how Christ came – for without a doubt that is what He accomplished by His coming – by His obedience unto death on the cross. And no matter how you may interpret the meaning of His coming by water in I John 5:6, of one thing I'm sure (and find all Gospel commentators in agreement on): That is what was accomplished by this blessed Savior who came by water and blood – who came not by water only, but by water and blood.

- III. John 19:33-37: The Apostle John was clearly impressed by the significance of all that He saw and recorded at the death of Christ on the cross and John's account is the only one we have of the water and blood flowing down from His pierced side. If you recall the story, as Jesus suffered on the cross, He said that He thirst that the scripture might be fulfilled. And it was fulfilled by their filling a sponge with vinegar and using hyssop to put it into His mouth. And at that, we read that when Jesus had received the vinegar, he said "It is finished," bowed His head and gave up the ghost. Well, the Jews, being religious as they were and not wanting the 3 bodies hanging on the crosses to remain on the Sabbath day (and this was what they called a "high" day – It was the Passover), they asked Pilate to have all of their legs broken to hasten their death, even if it meant further agony so they could be removed.

And so, they proceeded to break the legs of the two thieves and as John records, picking up in John 19:33-37: ***“But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: ³⁴But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. ³⁵And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. ³⁶For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. ³⁷And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.”***

So you can see how John here is bearing record that all of this is true. God, through the Prophets, testified that this was the promised Messiah as all these prophecies were being fulfilled in the way that He died. The scripture tells us that at His crucifixion, the sky was darkened, the earth quaked, numerous resurrections took place and the veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. My point is that whether His coming by water refers to His birth, His baptism, or the water which poured with the blood from His side at the death of Christ – in all of these events, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit intervened in miraculous ways to bear testimony that Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God as John set forth in I John 5.

We also see that in Mark’s account of the crucifixion in Mark 15:37-39 where we read, ***“And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. ³⁸And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. ³⁹And when the centurion, <this Roman soldier> which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.”***

IV. What did Christ, who came by water and blood, accomplish: So what did Christ, who came by water and blood actually accomplish. I mentioned how a couple of other scriptures had come to mind in my study of this – scriptures that give some credence to believing John’s description may well have been a reference to the water and the blood which poured from Christ’s side when pierced by the sword on the cross – and that in connection with the wondrous double blessings upon God’s elect of justification by his blood, and sanctification by Christ and His Spirit in the new birth. We know that elsewhere John used “water” in connection with sanctification (the setting apart) of believers by the Holy Spirit in the new birth – the giving of spiritual life and the accompanying gift of faith.

A. John 3:3-5: Look with me at John 3. There a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus saying, ***“...Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”*** And then in verse 3 we read, ***“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.***

⁴Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? ⁵Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

In studying what our Lord may have meant here of being born of water and of the Spirit, one old writer that I often rely on said that surely Jesus would not have placed common water (such as we drink) at a level with the work of God the Holy Spirit. So how can a man be said to be born of water? Well, if we think back to John's record as he witnessed the death of Christ at the foot of the cross, he clearly told us he saw blood and water streaming from the body of Christ. And if we combine that witness with our text that says Christ came by water and blood, this old writer suggested that the water here in John 3 is referring to Christ Himself.

In other words, a man is born of Christ and of the Spirit which He sends. As Romans 8:10 tells us, **"And if Christ be in you, <i.e. –by His Spirit> the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness."** In other words the very righteousness that Christ rendered in perfect satisfaction to the Father's law and justice, is the source of our being made alive spiritually in Him. When He died, all He represented died in the eyes of God's law and justice – the just payment had been rendered. And when He arose as the firstfruits (to use the scriptural language), all for whom He lived and died, all for whom He worked out a perfect righteousness arose with Him in union with Christ, their Substitute and Representative, and they will all, without fail, in their respective lifetimes be raised to walk in the newness of spiritual life, and, on that same basis, ultimately raised to heaven's eternal glory.

When water is used in scripture to allude to the Holy Spirit, it is as a spring, not outside us (as would be true of our justification by His blood – a work done completely outside of us), but water signifying the work of the Holy Spirit is as a spring within us. Remember when Christ was speaking to the woman at the well and in reference to the water she was drawing he said this, as recorded by John in John 4:13-14: **"...Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: ¹⁴But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."** This is clearly speaking of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit as we're set apart, made separate, by the new birth and God-given faith – which is represented here by the water that is given by Jesus Christ through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit as each believer comes to faith and repentance at some point in their lives.

B. **Titus 3:4-7:** And then one more passage that came to mind in my study is found in the book of Titus. Look with me at Titus 3, beginning in verse 4. ***“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, ⁵Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; ⁶Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; ⁷That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”***

And just as John spoke of Him who came by water and blood, notice that at the new birth – this “washing of regeneration” is presented as ***“...after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared...”*** In that sense, Christ does come by the blood and by the water, not by water only, but by water and blood. Just as by His blood He redeemed his church, so by His Spirit He regenerates her – the Holy Spirit bearing witness to us as the Spirit of truth, (as the last part of I John 5:6 reads). By His blood we are justified before God – declared not guilty, blameless in the sight of God – having His very righteousness – the merit of what Christ accomplished, imputed to us, long before we existed, and long before He had come to us during our lifetimes with the gift of faith.

V. **Closing:** So consider with me the blessings we have in Christ – the double comfort, the double cure (if you will). In quoting from Isaiah 40 about how God’s people receive “double” for all their sins, I’m reminded of Romans 5:20b where we’re told ***“...But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”*** And that all owing to the Person and finished work of this One who came by water and blood. The water administered by the various washings under the Old Covenant Law, the blood that was shed in the numerous animal sacrifices – all were summed up and fulfilled in this One who came by water and blood – not by water only but by water and blood.

When I think of the emphasis here that He came “not by water only, but by water and blood,” I can’t help but think of the masses in false religion (and particularly in false Christianity) who imagine their salvation to be conditioned (at least in part) on what they think is the work of the Spirit in them, in their exercise of what they call faith. Now here is a tell-tale sign that someone may be worshipping a “Christ” who came by water only, but not the true and living Christ of the Bible who came, not by water only, but by water and blood. Because a “faith” that doesn’t see God’s justice satisfied by His blood, that doesn’t see the sin debt completely paid for by the death of Christ (by His shed blood) – and that for each and every one that He came to save and for whom He lived and died – that faith is a counterfeit. That’s not faith in Christ. Rather, often it’s merely faith in their faith, because it they imagine their decision to believe something is the real difference maker between being saved or lost – not the justifying blood of Christ.

Genuine God-given faith sees His justice perfectly satisfied by their Savior. Otherwise, God's chief design to glorify Himself in their salvation as both a just God and a Savior would not be realized. It was His obedience unto death, His righteousness, His blood that gives us the water of true spiritual life – that results in the “washing of regeneration.” Obviously, if His blood is presumed to have been shed for any who ultimately perish, then that wouldn't be the One of whom John wrote, the One who came by water and blood. Your faith can't wash away your sins. Only the precious blood of Christ can do that. – “...not by water only, but by water and blood.”

Well, what about this double cure which Toplady wrote about in that grand old hymn? I'll close with an illustration that came to mind once again as I contemplated the blessings we have in our Savior, Jesus Christ, from whose side the blood and water flowed.

Consider that the words of a truly sovereign king (as with the kings of olden days) were not subject to debate. If the king said it, it was the law of the land. That's the definition of a sovereign. And as such, a king could pardon a guilty criminal so as to set him free from the penalty that would otherwise be extracted under the laws of the kingdom – in some cases perhaps unjustly but nonetheless, that would have been the prerogative of a sovereign.

Oh, but in our Sovereign Savior, we have far more than that. True believers have been pardoned (but that in keeping with God's perfect, unerring justice having been satisfied). Thereby they are pardoned from all their sins – forgiven of their sin debt by the redeeming blood of Christ to whom their sins were imputed (or charged). But not only that, they're not just set free, but they have been adopted into the King of King's family who will supply them with all the riches of eternal life. We're not only forgiven (our sin debt having been remitted), but we're made heirs of the King – of an incorruptible inheritance.

I'm speaking of those who have an everlasting righteousness which Christ worked out for them, the very righteousness of God – freely imputed (or accounted) unto them by God's grace. So much so, that they are washed in His blood, cleansed of their sins, unblameable, unprovable in God's sight as sinners saved by His grace and set apart by the sanctifying work of God – the Father, Son, and Spirit.

If that describes you, then rejoice with me in Him whom to know is life eternal.
For our closing song, let's sing that grand old hymn, “Rock of Ages.”

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.

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