

Gateway Fellowship Church

Marathon Faith

Part Two

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So, there I was, 13 years old. I looked like the catcher from the movie *The Sandlot*. Honesty is the first step towards God, so I will be honest with you. You might regret laughing so much. And I had a bb gun. A red rider, lever action. You've seen *A Christmas Story*, you've seen *The Sandlot*—let's put those together. I was in my backyard. My dad gave me a bb gun. It was lever action. It shot—it held 200 stainless steel bb's; it was a red rider. It was pretty good. I could shoot the cans off the fence. I was the king of my domain. I was protecting—suburban backyards need to be protected, so there I was with my bb gun. My dad gave me one rule. Son, don't shoot my purple martins. Don't shoot my birds. Just one rule. See, my dad had put up a beautiful handmade purple martin house. 15 feet, up on a pole along the fence. Every year these birds would migrate. These beautiful black and purple birds would come and sing morning songs, melodies of melodies. They were beautiful little birds. They eat mosquitos. When you live on the backside of a retention bayou drainage ditch, that is a big deal. There I was in the back of the yard. Protecting it from I don't know what. And I began to every once in a while, just follow one of those purple martins. Just follow them. Practicing my aim. Then one day in particular, a day I will never forget, a day echoed into the etchings of eternity, I followed a purple martin and my selfish heart pulled the trigger. The bird clipped mid-wing—good shot Fell into the fort that my dad had made me. You see, my dad had taken one of his weekends off from being a banker to make me and my brother a fort. Dad, if you're watching this, that was a good fort. I don't know if I ever said thank you, so thanks! Two story fort with a slide. It was amazing. But there's this bird, fluttering around. You have never seen a 13-year-old run faster, or be more guilty trying to grab this struggling, hurt, wounded bird. When I got it in my hands finally, I realized there was now blood all over my shirt; and all over the deck of the fort. So, I hid the bird. I hid it from where my father would find it. As fast as I could I took a brick and in my shame, I began to scrub the floor of the fort to hide the evidence; to hide the blood. And I had just gotten most of the blood covered and scraped off, when I looked down at my hands and saw that they were still bloody—when I heard my Father's voice "Kyle" and I hung my head. You see, there is something about blood that speaks. My prayer for you this afternoon is that the blood of Jesus would speak to your conscience.

Prayer:

Lord as we pray, I pray that one more time your spirit would come and minister. God, I pray that I would step out of the way. Lord I just take all the accolades and the good jobs that I receive today, and I just put them at your feet. Lord, that your sacrifice and your blood would be honored and uplifted and that your spirit would come and speak to our consciences one more time. Amen.

Well if you're new here, my name is Kyle. Some people call me the break for the acceleration, because things are exciting. Things are really exciting around here. Who was here last Sunday? We can't even count how many baptisms there were. When you lose track of baptisms, that is a good thing. And so, people were getting baptized and I was in the front and I was celebrating, and it was good. I will be the first one to hand you a towel. I will be the first one to celebrate. That's incredible! But my little prophetic heart began to wonder. I am going to talk to you today about what it means to follow Jesus. Because baptism is an expression of our repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. I think we have to be really careful in America—we can celebrate, and we can celebrate and rightfully so—and I will be the first to hand you a towel. But hear me! Hear me this afternoon. There is a cost to following Jesus. There is a great cost to following Jesus. Sometimes we can mistake success for sacrifice. Jesus, this was not a new situation for him. Great multitudes would flock onto Him. Thousands and thousands. There was this one time in Jesus' ministry where they literally break the roof to get to Jesus—the original "Raise the Roof!" They were breaking it down to get to Him. And then all these multitudes press in and what does He say? "Unless you deny yourself and pick up your cross daily and follow me, you cannot be my disciple." Can you see Jesus' PR person have a heart attack? This pattern of gather and filter, gather and filter was continued in the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus feeds over 5000-6000 people. He gives them as much bread and fish as they can eat. It was the original "Happy Meal" to everyone. I guess that would be a McFish-is that what it is called? I don't know. I wouldn't eat fish at McDonald's. That's one piece of wisdom. That's wisdom. If you didn't learn anything else today, that's wisdom. Jesus is feeding the multitudes. They are coming in the thousands. And Jesus with a loud voice says, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you." Can you see Thaddeus having a heart attack? Even Peter comes up to the Rabbi and says "This is a hard teaching. People are leaving". "You can go too, Peter". It's like He is God or something.

You see these multitudes—Peter had the wisdom. Where will I go Lord? Who else has the words of life? Discipleship is the heartbeat of our church. We have it on the wall in giant font letters. Our mission is "Helping friends become devoted followers of Jesus." Discipleship is what we do. It started on the shores of Galilee and has continued through the ages and generations, right on to Gateway Fellowship Church in San Antonio. It's who we are.

Recently our church has begun to focus on Proclamation. Preaching the gospel to all the nations and all the ethnolinguistic groups that is found in the end of Mark in the 16th chapter. Matthew is discipleship.

Mark is proclamation and now let's look at the gospel of Luke. Turn with me to Luke in the 24th chapter. And here are the last words of our Savior as He gives us the great subject of the Christian faith. Verse 47-let's start in verse 46. "Thus, it is written, thus it is necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day and that *repentance and remission* of sins should be preached to all nations beginning in Jerusalem. What are the two great themes? Repentance and remission of sins. This should be the subject of the Christian church. When is the last time you heard a sermon on repentance? Seems like, not to pick on the church specifically, I will pick on all churches equally. Seems repentance is now a nasty word; a forgotten word. It's too harsh. Don't mention repentance. Yes, we love forgiveness, and that is what remission means is forgiveness of sins. But notice, what does Jesus do? He couples repentance and forgiveness together. Oh, the wisdom of the Rabbi. You see you cannot have remission apart from repentance. You cannot truly understand repentance without the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus.

Let's define some terms. Repentance means to turn. It means to come home. It means to stop it. I remember exactly where I was, it was in 2003, and I took that shoebox full of drugs and I threw it into the dumpster. And as I threw it into the dumpster, I felt the supernatural power of God fill my heart. All I could mutter, all I could say was Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, God. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, God. You see repentance is turning from your old life. Turning from your old habits, your old ways. The old selfishness. The old man. The old nature. The old Kyle. And we express it in water baptism. That's why Paul says in Romans in the sixth chapter that we are buried with Him in baptism. We go down. Our old life is hid with Christ and God. That we are buried with Him in baptism. See baptism is a funeral to your old ways. Now you walk from there in the newness of life. You should be a new man with new habits, new natures and new desires. And anytime that old man begins to raise its head you say I am buried with Christ. My life is hidden with Christ and God.

I remember where I was when I understood this. And it was very important to me because at that time in my life, I had surrendered and then I began to understand the importance of repentance, but also remission. You see at the time, it was so funny—there was this guy literally crying and holding a dumpster. And the reason I was crying, and I was weeping is because for the first time, I was clean on the inside. Before, I had been a walking dumpster. But now through the blood of Jesus I had been made new. I had been made clean. Jesus I will give you an Amen for what you did. Amen.

How do we get there? How do we get a clean conscience? Just to be honest, the other day a man was in the study and he is a wealthy, affluent man. He has a good job. He is a Vice President of such and such and CEOs and Fortune 500's. And he was sitting there weeping saying what he would give, what he would pay for a clean conscience. Is there a price that you would pay for a clean conscience?

1John in the fifth chapter tells us "And there are three that bear witness on the earth; the spirit, the water, and the blood. And these three agree as one." You see the spirit will be ministering to your conscience and the water of your baptism and the blood of Jesus begin to be this confirmation, this

agreement in your life. That you know that you have passed from death unto life. But do not be deceived. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.

Briefly I am going to go through the history of the scriptures and the testimony of the saints. We go from the Garden in Eden. We have Adam and Eve and their selfish choice, and the innocent God who is broken hearted over their decision. He brings forth a sacrifice. An innocent animal whose blood was shed so that God could be in the presence of Adam and Eve again. We move on to Abel and Cain. We have two brothers. One selfish and one prideful and seeking his own way and stacking the stones of his own worship trying to do his own things by the works of his own hands. He thinks he will be right with God. And through jealousy and covetousness, one brother kills the other brother—and the blood speaks on the ground. And God hears the blood. We move on the Abraham on the mountain. Who is about to offer his son in sacrifice. And he is about to drop the knife in obedience when the voice says, “Now I know that you fear God” and behold there is a ram in the thicket. And on God’s mountain, God provided a sacrifice. So, there is blood once again on the mountain of Moriah. We move to Moses and the slaves in Passover. They are in bondage under Pharaoh. They are surrounded with pain and suffering. God says, “I have heard the cries and afflictions of my people.” But it was through the blood of a shed lamb that the Israelites escaped Egypt. There is blood at the Passover. We move into Leviticus and it says in Leviticus that all things are purified by blood. That it is through the blood that one makes atonement for our souls. We move into the tabernacle and the wilderness and the blood would be applied to the mercy seat. When you go to the temple, and Solomon’s glory, the blood was shed on the Arc of the Covenant before the Glory of God descended. And that leads us finally to the camel haired, grasshopper eating, Wildman in the wilderness who is screaming “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Takes away. That’s remission.

Forgiveness is when the slate is wiped clean. You see that’s the power of remission. It’s a medical term. Maybe you have heard it. It’s a biblical term that medicine has adopted. When your cancer is in remission, your cancer is gone. Defeated. The power and root of it has been removed. Is your sin in remission? Has the blood of Jesus had its effect in your heart and in your life and in your conscience? Have you seen anything of the sacrifice of Jesus? The sacrifice and Cross are priced its effect in your life is a life surrendered and yielded. Abel who was the first prophet in the bible understood what it meant to live a surrendered life. On page 15 of Marathon Faith Pastor John says this: “In the example of Abel we see the starting line of the race. The moment the mind is awakened to the reality of our hopeless condition and the soul makes a sweet surrender to God. We must pass through death to truly live.” We must pass through death to truly live.

Jesus reminds us of this “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Daily? Daily? Isn’t it just a one and done thing? I raised my hand at summer camp. Are you kidding me? Are you going to treat the blood of Jesus like that? No friends. The whole point of the sacrifice was so that we would have intimacy with God. That He through the blood of the new covenant has provided a living way. A way of access to God. You see we can have intimacy with God through the blood of Jesus. This was the purpose of the Cross of Christ.

Adrian Rodgers, great pastor says this, "He gave Himself *for* us, that He might give himself *to* us, that He might live through us." Hebrews in the 12th chapter in the 24th verse says this: to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." Did you realize that the blood of Jesus speaks? It speaks to your conscience. It goes through the corridors of your mind and your subconscious always showing and testifying the areas. It's the echo of eternity. The blood speaks. So much so, that when The Passion of The Christ—just a movie, friends—but when this movie was viewed for the first time in the Middle East people who had no access to the gospel sat spellbound in a stupor and uncontrollable weeping. And they would say, "My sins". They somehow made the connection. I know how. Because the spirit always follows the blood. This has been the testimony of scripture that the spirit follows the blood. You have Abel. You have Cain. There's Abel working his own sacrifices. He's doing it his way, his own methods. He is stacking his own stones of worship, bringing forth his own best crops. This is the craziest thing I learned in this passage: Studying Abel It says in the third chapter of 1 John that the sacrifice that Abel gave was evil. But it also says it was the best of his crops. That means that you can give your best and it still be evil. Because God had provided a way. That it would be by faith and not by the works of our hands that we would be justified. For in Hebrews it tells us in the 11th chapter "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain through which he obtained witness that he was righteous. God testifying to his gifts, through it, he being dead still speaks." You see the sacrifice that God was wanting was a sacrifice of faith. By faith. By faith. It is impossible to please God except through faith. And we must trust, and we must live out these teachings of who He is and what He has done.

To be honest, I felt like someone shot an arrow into my side the other day when I was walking. I don't know him, but he obviously knew who I was. And he looks at me and he goes, "Do you got a million-dollar sermon to go with your new million-dollar building?" And I began in all honesty to stack the stones of Cain. Well I could do this, and I can do this.....(stammering). I, I, I. You see in Christianity the I must die. And I have to always understand and be reminded constantly that it is through the sacrifice of another that we access to God.

It is through the shed blood of Jesus that you can have intimacy with God. And the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and reminded me of the blood. You have a million-dollar sermon. You have a billion-dollar sermon. You have a trillion-dollar sermon. Just tell simply about the blood of Jesus. The bible calls the blood of Jesus precious. Incalculable value. Think of something that can wipe away and forgive every wicked and evil deed. Every child molestation. Every word of anger and pain and torment. Every betrayal. Every adultery. Every act of fornication. Every word of malice. All slander. Is there anything more powerful? Is there anything more valuable than the blood of Jesus? Romans in the fifth chapter tells us "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled we shall be saved by His life."

It's the cleansing power through the blood of Jesus. There is also a conquering power to the blood. You may be wondering Why are you talking about blood so much? They asked the same question to Billy Graham. Not that I am Billy Graham, even though my name is William. Just a joke. They asked him, this

Cornell University professor—a man of high standing—says, “Billy, if you will knock off that barbaric blood stuff they will invite you into every single auditorium and arena in the world.” And Billy sat down and put his hands in lap and made a dedication to put the blood of Jesus into every single message. Because there is a conquering power to the blood of Jesus. The scripture tells us in Revelation that the overcame the enemy, the devil, by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. For they loved not their life unto death. There is overcoming power. And that through the blood of Jesus, He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness to the knowledge of Him who called us by His glory and grace.

There was this one time I was climbing up a ladder to do construction repairs and I had a skill saw and an electrical cord. And I was climbing up the ladder to the house of this person I didn't know very well. And I get up into the attic and it was July. And I felt like everything I had ever done wrong was now on display. I felt cold. I felt a palpable sense of evil. So much so, that I could see my breath. And all I could do was hug that ladder, set my tools down and sing a simple song about the blood of Jesus. You see friends, we are at a great, great war for the souls of mankind. And it is through the blood that we have Victory and Freedom and intimacy.

I am terrified that we can be so successful outwardly and forget how we got here. Through the simple message of repentance and remission of sins through the blood of Jesus. He never wanted us to forget this. He always wanted us to remember this friends. He tells us, “Remember, this is the cup of the new covenant which is shed for the remission of sins. He never wanted us to forget this. That it won't be through our success, but that it will be through our sacrifice. Oh, the cleansing power; the conquering power of Jesus.

In my time and intimacy with Christ throughout the years there's been times where I have failed, and I have had to go back there and return there and abide there. And the Lord would always minister to me very simply through a song that He dropped in my spirit many years ago. I was going to sing it for you—be merciful.

Singing:

There is a fountain held in glory where the crimson tide never ceases

There is a fountain held in glory and there is pardon for you and for me

Won't you yield your heart to His crimson flood there is power, great power in the blood

KDD

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