

Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet

I am a classical music lover. But, up until quite recently, I did not have too much use for “modern contemporary classical” music. Much 20th Century classical music by composers such as Bartok, Prokofiev, Stockhausen and Stravinsky is not something that most Christians would want to listen to on a quiet Sabbath afternoon, or as background music for a formal dinner. I have found that much of it is discordant and unpleasant, lacking melody.

However, a few years ago, an acquaintance introduced me to the music of the contemporary English composer, Gavin Bryars (who, by the way, spends part of every year right here on Vancouver Island, one his favourite parts of the world).

Bryars’ music is very unique, but is never unpleasant to listen to.

The piece I would like to use as an introduction to this article has the attention-grabbing title: “Jesus’ Blood Never Failed Me Yet.”

Apart from its title, the piece is unique, because:

1. It is based on a scratchy, amateurish recording, complete with background noise, of part of a haunting song by an old cockney tramp, hobo or – I think the politically correct term these days is – street person. Bryars had been asked to submit some music for a documentary film about the street people who live in the area of London’s Smithfield fruit and vegetable market. And this is what he came up with.
2. It is built around a continuous tape loop that has the song repeated over and over again. Bryars adds various orchestrations, solo singers and choirs to add colour, contrast and variety to what would otherwise be a very monotonous repetition. Many listeners still find the piece monotonous, even after all of this effort!
3. Since the first introduction of the piece in 1971, Briars has produced various versions of it. My CD has six versions, totalling almost 75 Minutes. One must be in the right mood to listen to the whole thing from beginning to end!

One day back in 1975, when Briars was re-working the piece at the Leicester University Arts department in England, he left the tape loop playing on a tape recorder while he went out for a coffee. Upon his return, he found the usually exuberant art students in a neighbouring classroom to which the connecting door had been left open, very subdued and thoughtful. Some were even silently weeping!

It is not everyone's cup of tea, I know, but it is not at all unpleasant and is certainly more melodious than much modern music – both classical and otherwise. I think it is one of those tunes that, once you have heard it once, you find it difficult to get out of your mind. There is a good chance that you will end up humming it all day!

In this article, I would like to take some pre-Passover lessons from its words:

**Jesus' blood never failed me yet.
There's one thing I know,
For He loves me so.**

The words are very few and very simple. But, even though the composer, Gavin Bryars, does not claim to be a Christian, the words potentially contain a great deal of meaning for us; especially as we, the people of God's church, draw close to another Passover.

So let us go through the words of the song... line by line... and let us see what truth and what error we can find in its intriguing words.

Jesus' Blood

God has given the Passover wine to His children as a symbol of Jesus' blood. Both liquids – wine and blood – are very relevant to our studies at this time of year.

Some time ago, when CBC classical music DJ, Tom Allen played this piece on his "Music and Company" program, he mentioned that "Jesus' Blood" in the song is thought to be Cockney slang for cheap red wine, which is so much depended upon by many London East-end winos and tramps. Allen also mentioned, however, that the old singer on Bryars' tape was – surprisingly – not a wino or an alcoholic. In fact, he did not drink at all.

There is so very, very much written on the subject of the blood of our Saviour in the New Testament, it would take a lengthy Bible Study to go through them all.

John, Paul and Peter all wrote about Jesus' blood. But perhaps the most mentions of it are in the letter to the Hebrews. Let us take a quick look at those relevant verses:

Hebrews 9:14:

How much more shall *the blood of Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

God tells us here that one of the purposes of the shed blood of Jesus Christ is to cleanse our consciences from our old dead works.

The author's word-play is interesting. He mentions that Jesus offered Himself to God as a sacrificial Lamb without any spot or blemish, in accordance with His own instructions for sacrifices (I Peter 1:19; Exodus 12:5, etc.).

Usually, blood does not clean. On the contrary, it stains very badly! It makes unsightly spots and blemishes that are very difficult to remove. It is probably one of the most dreaded stains that a mother has to deal with when she washes her little boy's clothes.

But Jesus' blood *does* clean! It does not just cover up our sins – those “dead works” that we find so difficult to erase from our consciences. Yes, it does cover them initially; but then it soaks them up, and dissolves them into nothingness!

Hebrews 10:19-20:

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by *the blood of Jesus*, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

The author tells us here that we can have boldness even to approach and to go through the veil into “the Holiest” – the Holy of Holies! Not into the old, physical rooms of the Israelites' portable tabernacle or the Jerusalem temples. They no longer exist. But the *real* Holy of Holies in Heaven, which the physical versions were mere physical symbols of.

In spirit and in prayer, God's children can approach God's throne room – and can even enter it – without fear of being vapourized. How? What makes this impossible act possible? The flesh and the blood of Jesus Christ! The fact that, when His flesh was torn open and His precious blood was shed, the veil of the temple – that thick curtain which separated the unapproachable Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple and which symbolized Jesus' flesh – was ripped from top to bottom as a striking symbol that, from that time on, God was making His throne room accessible to His children.

Hebrews 12:24:

To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to *the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.*

Blood – especially shed blood – appears to be somewhat important to God. He seems to learn things from it. Genesis 4:10 tells us that Abel's blood had a "voice" of some sort – a voice that was capable of communicating to God the heinous crime of his murderous brother, Cain. This "voice" of the blood of righteous Abel somehow cried out to God from the ground into which it was spilled. Because Abel had been righteous, his blood was precious to God. In some ways Abel was symbolic of Jesus, because they were both murdered by their jealous brethren – by their resentful, covetous fellow human beings.

But the author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus' blood – the blood of sprinkling – being one anti-type of the blood that was taken into the veil of the temple every year on the Day of Atonement to be sprinkled on and before the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:15) – also has some kind of "voice." He writes that this "voice" of the blood of Jesus Christ is better – superior – to that of the blood of Abel. It speaks better things. It has so much more to say. It has so many more meaningful things to teach us. Please take the time to study the subject of the blood of Christ, and see how very much you will learn from it.

Hebrews 13:11-12:

For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without [outside] the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with *His own blood*, suffered outside the gate.

The symbolic blood of the millions of sacrificial animals, the dead carcasses, all of which foreshadowed the body of Jesus Christ, were to be burnt outside of the "camp" in which the tabernacle stood and, later, outside of the city of Jerusalem where the temple stood.

It was necessary for Jesus to fulfil all the things written in the Law concerning Him (Luke 24:44), including every detail of the symbolism of the sacrifices that He Himself had originally set up.

So when He was sacrificed, it was necessary that His execution did not take place inside Jerusalem's city walls. It took place on the hill of Golgotha or Calvary – the Place of the Skull – which is located outside the old wall that existed in 31AD, and well outside of and away from the temple location. This was necessary so that His blood could properly and legally sanctify His people.

If His crucifixion had taken place within the city walls, the sacrificial law would have been broken, His sacrifice would have been invalid, His blood would not have neutralized the sins of the world, we would not have been sanctified, our sins would still be on our own heads, and our bleak future would be one of eternal death.

Hebrews 13:20-21:

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through *the blood of the everlasting covenant*, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Jesus, of course, is “that great Shepherd of the sheep.” We, the people of God’s true church, are those sheep and lambs. But Jesus is also a lamb. He is our Elder Brother, so He is a fellow-lamb to us. He is the Lamb of God. And His was the sacrificial blood of the everlasting covenant that is mentioned here.

These verses give two possible “uses” for Jesus’ blood, depending on how we perceive the grammar. The first implies that God the Father (the God of peace) somehow used it to resurrect Jesus from the dead. But as Jesus was resurrected to eternal life, no longer being dependant on blood flowing through His veins, this possibility requires quite a stretch of our imaginations.

The second possibility, which is more likely, is that Jesus’ blood will make God’s people perfect in the works that we perform to do our part in God’s will.

Never failed me yet

When we use this phrase, “never failed me yet,” in everyday life, we are usually referring to some trusty, vintage piece of mechanical or electronic equipment, such as a good old car, sewing machine, or computer:

“Look at my old Mercury truck. I’ve owned ‘er for thirty-five years, never even changed the oil in all that time, and she’s never failed me yet!”

To substitute Jesus’ precious blood into a phrase that usually refers to some mere physical machine or gadget may initially sound irreverent... even blasphemous. In addition, the grammar of the phrase causes it to sound somewhat casual and even vain... in the sense that the accent is on “me,” and not on Jesus Christ, or His blood. But let us give Bryars and his hobo friend the benefit of the doubt, and let us take the words simply for what they are, rather than trying to read something negative into them.

Let us ask the question: Is it true what the man sings? Is it true that Jesus and His blood have never failed us to this point? And, by extension, can we be sure that they will never fail us in the future?

Joshua 1:5:

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

God made this solemn promise that He would not fail His people. And He kept that solemn promise:

Joshua 21:45:

There *failed not ought* of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; *all* came to pass.

And just before Joshua's death, He reminded them:

Joshua 23:14:

And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that *not one thing hath failed* of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and *not one thing hath failed* thereof.

Hundreds of years later, the fact that God did not fail in His promises to Israel was remembered by the Prophet Samuel:

I Kings 8:56:

Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: *there hath not failed one word* of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.

He kept that promise to His Old Testament "church in the wilderness." And He repeats that very same promise to His New Testament church – the Israel of God:

Hebrews 13:5:

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Yes, God has put His people through some severe trials, but He has never failed us yet.

That is His one hundred percent perfect past track record. So if that is His past record, what is the probability in the future? Right! He will keep His promises. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He will never fail us.

There's one thing I know

Is that *all* we know? Just one thing? Surely not! Surely we know much more than just one thing?

We must beware of Protestant ideas... such as the idea that we just need one thing... that all we have to do is believe in Jesus... Or, as in this case, all we have to do is to know that Jesus loves us.

Yes. These things *are* important. Very much so. But there is much more to it than that.

These ideas give the impression that all you have to do is to know that Jesus loves you, and that somehow faith will take care of the rest.... so you can just go and carry on doing whatever you were doing before – carry on living the way you were living before!

But we know that faith without works is dead. We know that repentance is required; that huge changes are required; big, 180 degree changes of direction from the way we were living before. We know that we must live a whole lifetime of continuous repenting, overcoming and striving. We know that our new life in God's church must be one of emulating the life of Jesus Christ... and of getting our priorities right.

What are those priorities? If there is, in fact, “one thing” that is of primary importance, what is that “one thing”?

Jesus tells us:

Luke10:38-42:

38: Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

39: And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

40: But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.

41: And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

42: But *one thing* is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

The “one thing” is “the good part” that Mary had chosen. And that is spelled out clearly in verse 39. The one thing, the number one priority, the good part is for us all to sit at Jesus’ feet and to hear His Word.

Yes, like Martha, we need to do the necessary physical things, we need to do our jobs, we need to maintain our homes, we need to house, clothe and feed our families. But not at the expense of “the one thing.” Not at the expense of “that good part.” Not at the expense of the priority clearly laid down by Jesus Christ.

Now Jesus is not here physically in person. We cannot physically sit at His feet right now in the same way as Mary did. But Jesus is the personal Word of God, and the Bible is the written Word of God. Mr. Armstrong used to say that owning a Bible is like having Jesus Christ in print. So we must be studying God’s Word as often as we can and as much as we can. And even though we cannot at this time sit at Jesus’ feet as Mary was able to do, we can sit at the feet of His ministers at Sabbath services every week.

David agrees with this priority. He knew what “the one thing” was, and is. Like us, David did not have Jesus with Him in person either. But he knew where he could find Him and he made the effort to seek Him out:

Psalms 27:4:

***One thing* have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple.**

David may or may not have had his own copy of the scriptures that were available at that time. He probably did (Deuteronomy 17:18), but he also had access to the temple, the priests, and God’s written Word there.

Like Mary, the “one thing” David desired and sought after was to spend as much time as possible in God’s house – which was, at that time, the portable tabernacle – where he was better able to enquire into and to study God’s Word. In this way David sat at the feet of the Logos – the Word of God who would later be born as Jesus Christ.

For He loves me so

A few years ago, before the Feast of Tabernacles, my wife did not want me to buy a cute little plush toy lion and lamb for our granddaughter, because it played the tune of old children's hymn "Jesus loves me." Such phrases sound so trite to us:

- He loves me!
- Jesus loves me!
- Jesus loves you!
- Jesus loves us!

We have heard them so often from the pushers of Protestantism that they have come to sound saccharin sweet and insincere. They turn off the people of God's true church.

And that is a shame. Because they are basically true! Jesus certainly *does* love us. This is certainly not something for us to be ashamed of because we are "real men"! Or because we are of the old school! We are tough Christians!

Jesus *does* love us. Jesus loves us because His Father called and chose us, and because we are His brothers and sisters.

The scriptures teach that He loved His spiritual brothers and sisters:

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, His disciples, Paul, and the people of the early church. And all of them welcomed His love.

Do you not love your brothers and sisters? I hope you do!

Revelation 1:5-6:

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. 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. Amen.

These verses take us full circle, back to the subject of Jesus' blood. It is almost as though the old London hobo's song was taken from these verses of the book of Revelation. It seems to contain all the elements: The blood of Jesus Christ who loves us.

Does Jesus *really* love us? We who, like the rest of this world, have sinned... even during this past year? Yes, He does!

Has Jesus or His blood ever failed us? No! His blood was shed so that our repented-of sins might be forgiven and totally blotted out... totally neutralized.

He loves us so much that He has made us the kings and priests of Himself and of God the Father!

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Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada
April 2005*