

“For Us”

Text: 2 Corinthians 5.12–21; 1 Peter 3.18

Theme: Jesus died on the cross as the perfect substitute for us and our sins

Introduction — Oh, the power of little words

- in Scripture, we see this repeatedly; just two examples
- **Ephesians 2.4—“But God...”**
- Paul is contrasting each of us who are dead in our trespasses and sins
- it is a hopeless situation...but God
- “But” is a contrasting word, and what a contrast that little three-letter word makes
- **now, 1 Peter 3.18 “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteousness, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit”**
- again, I hope you catch the power of the little three-letter word “for” here
- once “for” sins, the righteous “for” the unrighteous
- the word “for” here points to a substitute, someone who takes the place of another
- Peter goes on in chapter 2, v. 21: **“...Christ also suffered for you...”**
- just a few verses on in v. 24 we read: **“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”**

Concept of substitution is not unusual nor difficult to grasp

- used in sports all the time, when a starter comes out for a break and a substitute comes in
- when the regular teacher cannot be there, a substitute is called to take their place
- perhaps you cannot eat a type of food or seasoning, but a substitute is available

Another benefit and blessing of the cross of Christ is His substitution

- on the cross Christ paid the penalty of sin—our sin
- He died as the substitute for all those sinners whom God had given to Him
- another word that is often used to describe Christ’s atoning work is vicarious
- it means “an act or work done for another”
- and this is what we have in Jesus’ death on the cross: His death for ours
- our grand Substitute

How was Jesus our Substitute?

- could be an entire day’s worth of preaching
- but wish to consider just two facets of this
- first, in the humanity of Jesus Christ
- then, see it in the divinity of Jesus

So, let’s see Jesus as our Perfect Substitute...

I. IN HIS PERFECT OBEDIENCE AS TRULY MAN

- that Jesus came in the flesh is really beyond debate except by heretics
- this is a necessary part of true saving faith
- **1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,**
- **2 John 1:7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.**

1. His coming was to be a vicarious experience

- He would do a work that you and I could not do
- consider the purity and innocence of the Lord Jesus
- He was filled with absolute integrity
- God was always pleased with Him, never a moment when not
- God never had to overlook His Son's bad behavior
- Jesus never had to find or offer an excuse for anything He did
- He had absolute perfection in body, mind, affections, and more
- tempted by sin, but never once licked his lips and savor taste of single sin

2. He came "for us"

- seen in His baptism, right as He prepares for His public ministry
- Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.

1) imagine John's experience: knew who Jesus was

- **John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"**
- John knew Jesus was the Divine Substitute, come to deal with our sins
- as the Lamb, He would fulfill all the symbols of that entire OT system
- just as Lamb was substitute, so, too, would Jesus be the substitute Lamb of God

2) this is why it shocked John to hear Jesus' request

- John wanted to refuse to do so for he knew his own sinful state
- John knew a sinless sacrifice had to be offered for those with sins to be forgiven
- it's why he baptized people to prepare way for Jesus
- his calling to baptism depicted a cleansing from sin that Jesus would fulfill

3) Jesus: This is why I came

- **Matthew 3:15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."**
- in essence: John, I know you don't understand, but trust Me, this must be done
- so John baptizes Jesus, but why was it necessary
- not because of any sins needing to be washed away
- God's new covenant would have a command: Be baptized
- therefore, in order to fulfill, to complete, to perfectly obey Law of God: baptized
- He had to represent us before God's bar of justice
- if He was to be the sinless sacrifice in the flesh, He had to be baptized
- in this, He was the absolutely necessary Substitute

3. To obey perfectly

- Jesus had come to be the substitute, the vicarious sacrifice offered up to God
- and Jesus embraced this mission, from start of His ministry to His death & resurrection
- He had to do what His sheep could not do, He had to take their place
- we are commanded to "Do this and live"—to obey every command of God
- not just in action, as if we could anyway
- but we are to obey in spirit as well
- remember Jesus said it wasn't enough to just not murder, but not to be sinfully angry
- not enough to not commit adultery, but to not even lust in your heart & mind

- not enough to not steal, but must not even covet another's possessions

4. **This He did...personally, perfectly, and yes, even perpetually**

- Jesus' life was amazingly public: people saw Him, heard Him, impacted by Him
- under constant pressure, massive demands every waking hour, it seems
- smallest details scrutinized by enemies, hoping He would slip up
- but nothing could stick: He truly was above reproach
- even Pilate said, **"I find no fault in this Man"** (Luke 23.4)
- Jesus would challenge His accusers: **"Which of you convicts Me of sin?"** (John 8.46)
- one of thieves on cross next to Him declared "This Man has done nothing wrong"

5. **Perfect obedience is necessary**

- and we could not, would not do it
- no amount of your so-called "free will" could ever bring this about
- so Jesus had to come in flesh and take our place in His obedience
- but that obedience extended to His death as well
- **Philippians 2:8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**
- this final great act of substitutionary obedience was needful
- death was the penalty from God against man and his sin
- so Jesus, became truly man, and died, in our place
- **2 Corinthians 5:14-15 "...we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."**
- the great exchange, in His humility as our Substitute
- without this, we are still lost, dead in our sins, under the wrath of God

But not just in His incarnation was He our substitute, but also...

II. **IN HIS PERFECT SACRIFICE AS TRULY GOD**

- in His crucifixion, we see the ugliness of human wickedness
- but there is divine beauty there as well
- for not only was Jesus truly man, He was also, in the One Man, truly God
- this is Jesus, the Prince of Glory, nailed to a tree, God not sparing Him
- the One who made us & everything, infinite, eternal, unchangeable
- there He is, the Son of God hanging on that cross in our place

1. **"How can it be?" asks the hymn writer**

- not the first; recall two disciples on road to Emmaus in Luke 24
- Cleopas couldn't stop talking about what had happened in death of Jesus
- "I thought He would be the One, the Christ, to deliver us & redeem Israel"
- "I was wrong, for now He is dead, buried in a tomb outside Jerusalem"
- so many wondered how they could be so wrong
- surely God would never have permitted such a monstrosity

2. **Cleopas, like so many others, missed a powerful little word**

- the word is "for"
- **Galatians 3:13 "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us..."**

- **1 Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,**
- **Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

3. Substitute had to be perfect, no blemish, no sin

- and this was indeed Jesus, as we have just seen
- but death required, bearing sin for another required
- so, there is this little word “for” — “on behalf of” another
- God is just: He punishes for the sins committed, paying out penalty of the guilty
- God is also Justifier: righteousness of another is credited to those who believe
- our guilt & death imputed to Him, who humbly bore wrath of God for this
- but His glorious righteousness—perfect obedience—then imputed to all who believe
- Christ came for His sheep and not a one will get missed
- why? How? Because of this little word “for” “The righteous for the unrighteous”

4. Invitation in this little phrase “for us”

- in Jesus’ parable, servants of King went to highways & hedgerows with invitation
- heralds proclaimed: this invitation is for you, Come! You must come!
- all who herald the gospel this day do the same thing, even among you
- This sacrifice is for you to take
- this blood is for you to be washed in
- this atonement has been achieved to cover you
- so you who hear this today: Come! This is for you because He was for you!
- all Jesus did was for those whom Father had given Him to redeem
- in place of condemned sinners He bore the curse
- He absorbed wrath of God, received it in His own body & soul
- He did this as the One and Only acceptable Substitute
- for all in Christ, you shall never have to bear it, for He drank the cup to dregs for you
- nothing left to deal with; all is done, it is finished
- just receive it, believe it, rejoice in it
- receive this invitation and rejoice

*From heav’n He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.*

Conclusion – such a blessing, as well as benefit to you

- how so? You may ask
- when you experience days of darkness, recall this
- Jesus says, “I was on cross for you; I made atonement for your sins”
- “Now, there is no condemnation for you; God is satisfied.”
- “Hear His loving voice and cry out to Him, your loving, caring Father”

When down in dumps, for whatever reason, remember to still give thanks

- thank Him for what you are not any longer: sinner, condemned, unclean
- thank Him for where you are not: under wrath of God
- Jesus was made sin that you might be made righteousness in Him

“For us”—this is glorious substitution

- Christ in our place, and now, forever for us, beside us, before us
- embrace Him today and always
- He works for you, know it and trust His Word

- **Isaiah 64:4**

**From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.**