

Substitution

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[0 : 00] All right, so as I said at the start of the service or just during the notices, we're starting a new series tonight, The Crux, The Cross, looking at what Jesus' death on the cross achieved, what difference did it make and what does it mean for us today.

And so tonight, we're going to talk about really what is probably the most important consequence of Jesus' death on the cross, and that is that he was a substitute for us, that he died in our place, that he took our punishment on himself.

So that's what we're going to do tonight, looking at the substitution of Jesus on the cross. Before we look at this passage in Romans, let's bow our heads, we're going to pray for us, and then we'll get to work on the passage, right?

Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for giving us your word in the Bible.

Thank you that it tells us of the greatest act in human history, your son's death on the cross. Now, as we come to this amazing passage from Romans, please help us to hear your word clearly, help us to understand it, and Lord, please use it to change our hearts, to love you more, to understand Jesus' sacrifice for us better, and to live for you each day as a result.

[1 : 45] Amen. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So to understand the concept of substitution, the concept of Jesus substituting himself in our place for our sin, you really need to go back.

You need to go back to the Old Testament. We just heard a reading there from Leviticus, which is really important, we'll get to in just a second. But you really need to go a little bit beyond that to the book of Exodus.

Exodus, as you know, is the story of how God rescues his people Israel out of slavery in Egypt. He takes them out of that nation from being under the yoke of the Egyptians.

He brings them into the wilderness on their way to the promised land that he has promised them. This will be their land. He will be with them. He will be their God. He will dwell with them.

But in the meantime, there's this period of 40 years where they're wandering around in the wilderness, living out their sinful nature. And the whole question of Exodus by the end of the book is, how on earth is this going to work?

[2 : 59] This is a great plan by God to save his people out of Egypt and to dwell with them and to be their God. But how is it going to work when God is holy and perfect and righteous and his people are sinful and disobedient and stiff-necked?

That's the question. You might think to yourself, what's the big deal? Why is it so bad that a righteous God, you know, why can't it work that he can live with a sinful people?

Well, the truth is that God cannot and will not live with a sinful people. And the reason is that he is perfect.

He is holy. That is, he is separate from us. He is righteous. He's right in every way. And a perfect, holy, righteous God cannot, literally cannot live with a sinful, disobedient, stiff-necked people.

You know what happens when God comes into contact with people like this? People die. Lots and lots and lots of people die. That's what the Old Testament teaches us.

[4 : 15] You get a disobedient, sinful, stiff-necked people that really disregard the commandments of God and disregard him in every way. And they die as a result.

Or plagues break out. Or God threatens to wipe them off the face of the earth. So how can a holy God live with a sinful people?

There's a praying mantis on the stage. And I didn't plant it there, but it just gave me an illustration. Thank you.

All creatures great and small. I could kill it. I could kill it. And here's the illustration. So many, so many people I speak to, people who haven't grown up in church particularly, and then perhaps people who have, but have walked away from the faith.

When I get to that point where I want to talk to them about sin and the consequences of sin, which is what we're talking about tonight, when we talk about punishment and hell, the biggest objection to that is this.

[5 : 35] If God is loving, then how could he punish me for eternity consciously? What have I done to deserve that?

That's the question. What have I done to deserve that? Even if I was a murderer, right? We give them 25 years, a bit less maybe if they're really well behaved.

How can God give me eternity in punishment? And the answer is this. Because the punishment that we deserve is directly correlated to the dignity of the person that we have offended.

And here's where the praying mantis comes in. Let me see if I can get it. It's a partially squashed praying mantis.

Hang on. And you're just, you're really just proving my point by laughing, alright? So, I love animals.

[6 : 49] But here's the thing. If you saw, let's not make it personal, if you saw just a kid, little boy, Johnny, right? If you saw him picking up a praying mantis and pulling the legs off it, you'd probably think to yourself, yeah, I've done that a few times before.

I've killed that many ants, spiders, moths, right? It's not such a big deal. If you saw him pulling the legs off a bird, you'd think, that's pretty disturbing.

Those kind of kids grew up to be serial killers, right? But what if you saw him pulling the legs off a puppy?

You'd definitely be calling that kid's parents and getting some serious counseling for that kid, right? Now, what if Johnny was to pull the legs off a baby?

Like my little 11-week-old India. What if I saw him trying to pull the legs off her? Johnny wouldn't be around much longer, right?

[8 : 10] See, because the punishment that someone deserves is directly correlated to the dignity of the person they have offended.

So, when you get a perfect, holy, righteous God who is the most glorious, the most beautiful, the most wonderful, the most benevolent being in all creation and outside of creation, when you get that God and a people who are disobedient and disregard him and willfully sin against him and reject him and give him the finger and go on rejecting him throughout their life, then the punishment fits the crime when they are punished for eternity.

The punishment fits the crime when God breaks out in anger and wipes out 20,000 of them. when God breaks out in anger and afflicts them with plagues because God is not a praying mantis God.

God isn't even a baby God. So, the question is at the end of the book of Exodus, how is this ultimately valuable, precious, holy, righteous God going to live and dwell among this sinful, stiff-necked, disobedient people?

And the answer comes from God himself. The answer comes in the book of Leviticus. It comes partially, at least, in the book of Leviticus. And that's the reading we had tonight, Leviticus 16.

[10 : 14] Indeed, the whole book of Leviticus is about God's answer to that problem. What God does is provide the people of Israel with a sacrificial system whereby they can have their sin transferred to another being so that they can have their sins forgiven.

Their sin isn't completely just disappear, it's put on to another creature. In our reading it was the goats. They die and the people are spared.

That's the system. See, the penalty for sin is death. And so when your sin is transferred to another creature, that creature must die.

That's what we saw in Leviticus 16. That was the Day of Atonement. This was the greatest day of the year, the most important day of the year for the people of Israel. It's when the priest would sanctify himself through many rituals and he would take two goats.

One of them, whichever the lot fell to, the two goats by the way were absolutely pure, spotless. They represented sinlessness. One of them would be slaughtered, his blood would be shed for the sins of Israel and to sanctify the holy place.

[11 : 36] The other goat would have the priest's hands placed on his head as a symbolic gesture that he was transferring the sins of the people onto that goat's head and then he would be sent out to Azazel or to the wilderness.

The implication is that that goat's dying too. It's off to the desert, the sins of Israel on it and only death awaits it.

So that's what God came up with. That was the sacrificial system. Hebrews will tell us, the book of Hebrews in the New Testament will tell us that really it wasn't the blood and the sacrifice that did anything, but really that was just a foreshadowing of Jesus' death and sacrifice.

But in the meantime, the way that the people of Israel could deal with their sin was through this sacrificial system, this system of ritual, whereby God would allow their sin to be transferred onto another being.

That creature would die and their sins would be forgiven. Fast forward, fast forward to the New Testament.

[12 : 54] The question is, has this idea made any difference? This sinful, rebellious, stiff-necked people who are worthy of death, who are worthy of God's anger and wrath?

Have they gotten any better? Have they become more godly? Have they become less disobedient? Let's go to Romans chapter 3, let's get some context on our passage.

If you turn back one page, you go to Romans 3, the question is, has Israel, are they any better off? They've been given the sacrificial system, God has been dwelling with them, they've been given the law later on to live by, Romans 3.

Paul just smashes them and us in one gulp. Listen to it, he says, what then? Are we ever any better off? No, not at all.

We have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written, and listen to this, just let this check your self-esteem, he says, there is no one who is righteous, not even one, there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God, all have turned aside, together they have become worthless, there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one, their throats are open graves, they use their tongues to deceive, the venom of vipers is under their lips, their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness, their feet are swift to shed blood, ruin and misery are in their paths and the way of peace they have not known, there is no fear of God before their eyes, it's Paul's summary of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike, no one seeks God, not even one, there is no one righteous, no one who fears

[14 : 55] God, so what does God do about it? It's God again who takes the initiative, wasn't some guy's great idea, there wasn't a great prophet who came up with some kind of way to enlighten humanity, to make them less sinful, to make them more godly, it was God who took the initiative and that's where we come to our passage, Romans chapter 3 verse 21, two words that are probably the sweetest two words in the Bible, but now, but now, Paul's been telling us about the dreadful state of humanity, that no one seeks God, that everyone deserves hell, that everyone will be condemned apart from God, the picture is as black as it's ever going to get and then he says, but now, there's a great preacher a couple of centuries ago,

Martin Lloyd-Jones and he said, these two words are the two most beautiful words in the Bible, but now, but now apart from the law, apart from religion, apart from rules, apart from sacrifices, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, another way of saying that is, the righteousness of God has been made available to us, to us, but now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed or made available and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, for there is no distinction since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

That's the good news, is it? But now, that's the good news, but now, Jesus has died, Jesus has risen, Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father, and but, now, everything's changed.

The righteousness of God, remember what was the problem? What was the problem with the people of God? God was righteous, they were not, they couldn't cohabitate, in fact, God's wrath poured out on those people, killed them, because of their unrighteousness.

But now, the righteousness of God has been made available, has been disclosed, has been made available to us. We can have the righteousness of God, and if we have the righteousness of God, then there is no wrath, there is no anger, there is no condemnation, there is no punishment.

[18 : 10] But now, righteousness of God has been made available to us through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

So what happened? What happened to all that wrath? What happened to all that anger? You can't just say, that was how it was, but now it's a new game, we're not going to have wrath and anger anymore.

My dad just walked in tonight, reminded me of another illustration. This is great, I'm just getting prompts here. When I was a kid, my younger brother, Andrew, he was the real bruiser of the family, and he used to get angry a lot, and what his punishment was, was he had to go to his room.

If he got too angry and punched me, he had to go to his room, and what would happen invariably, and it's a joke to this day, is he would walk out of the living room, through the door which led to the stairs to his room, and he would shut the door, and then he would open it again one second later and walk back in and say, I'm happy now.

I'm happy now. So that became a joke after a while, and he still gets teased about it. I'm happy now. Is that what happened to God? He was really angry at sin, because he's the God of the Old Testament, who got angry a lot, and he was really, really upset all the time, and then something happened with Jesus, and now he's happy now.

[19 : 44] The wrath's not there anymore. It's ridiculous, isn't it? That's not what happened. The wrath didn't disappear.

He didn't get over it. He didn't go to an anger management course. God's just, righteous wrath, and anger against sin still burned hot.

The thing that happened to the wrath of God is in the next part of the passage. Let's have a look at it, verse 25. Back it up a little bit.

He says, they're now justified, that is, we are now justified, we're made right with God, by His grace as a gift. So it's all by God, not by our own effort.

And they are now justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by His blood, effective through faith.

[20 : 56] whom God put forward. This is one of those times where I have to say that I don't think our Bible gets the word really that right.

There's a lot of contention about what this should be translated as, this verse here. Some Bibles say, whom God put forward as an expiation by His blood.

Expiation means that our sins are sort of washed clean. We get a new slate, and that's true. This Bible goes with a sacrifice of atonement, which is a little bit better, but both of them miss out on the force of the actual word here.

And the actual word, if you've got an ESV Bible, you'll read, it's propitiation. Write that word down, get it tattooed, do what you need to do to remember that old school word, propitiation.

Propitiation. Propitiation means this, and this is the reason why a lot of Bible versions won't use it.

[22 : 03] Propitiation means that to say that Jesus was a propitiation by His blood means that when He died on the cross, the wrath, the righteous anger of God was poured out on Him.

and He absorbed it for us. It's really unpopular in a lot of circles today to say that God gets angry about anything.

It's really, really unpopular to say that God the Father would inflict and afflict His Son with that anger. There's one author, I think his name's Steve Chalk, wrote a book called The Lost Message of Jesus, and in that book he said that that idea of the atonement is cosmic child abuse and should be rejected outright.

To think that the loving Father, our loving Father in Heaven, would pour out His wrath on His own Son. For some people it's just too much.

But I've got to say that's exactly what this passage is all about. That as a propitiation for our sins, Jesus was afflicted by His own Father with all of His righteous wrath against sin and Jesus as our substitute took it for us and faced the consequences of that.

[23 : 48] Remember in the reading from Leviticus when the priest placed his hand on the beast, on the goat and proclaimed that the sins of Israel were on that beast?

It was then put to death or it was then sent away to die and that's exactly what happened to Jesus. When He died on the cross, the Father symbolically put His hand on Him and transferred the sin and guilt of the world onto Him and so He died.

He took the punishment. Jesus is our propitiation. The righteous anger of God was poured out on Him not me.

Let's read it again. They, that means us, anyone who trusts in Jesus, they're now justified, made right with God.

By His grace, it was His initiative, as a gift, comes for free through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God, the Father, put forward.

[25 : 11] He put Him forward as a sacrifice of atonement, kind of, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, effective through faith.

God Good Friday is the darkest day on our calendar. It's good because we reap the benefits of Jesus' death, but it's the darkest day because it was the day on which God the Father poured out His wrath and anger on God the Son.

I don't think you can worship God as you should until you come to terms with that. As we take the Lord's Supper tonight, and we remember the body and the blood of Jesus broken and shed for us on the cross, you ought to be thinking about the righteous wrath of God that was poured out on his son as a result it's a dreadful thing it's a terrifying thing it's a tragic thing and it's ultimately a beautiful thing let's finish this passage we're going to talk about God's justice here to finish it off what was the motivation of God in sending his son to the cross why did he do it there's two answers one of which is in this passage let's read it he did this he put his own son on the cross he afflicted his own son with his wrath to show his righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus why did God do it?

to prove that he's righteous to prove that he's just I think there's two major reasons in the Bible why God put Jesus on the cross his own son on the cross and I think it comes down to love and justice justice and love see the justice of God is perfect he is the perfect judge he cannot let any sin go unpunished he can't because then he wouldn't be just then he wouldn't be perfect we have imperfect judges today who let people off for doing dreadfully heinous things our father isn't like that he's the perfect judge and nothing no sin no wrong can go unpunished that's his justice the thing about God is though that he is perfect love we saw this particularly didn't we in the last series two ago in 1st John God is love and so

I believe his love wouldn't let him condemn all of humanity even though they deserved it so love put Jesus on the cross John 3.16 God so loved the world that he gave his only son here we see Paul telling us the reason that God put Jesus on the cross was for his justice so he says he did this to show his justice or his righteousness same word there because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed he says all throughout the Old Testament you remember David man after God's own heart King David slipped up a few times saw some chick naked in a bath had her husband killed slept with that guy do you remember what happens to him prophet Nathan comes to him and says listen you've sinned against the Lord but he's going to let you go like he should have been killed five times slowly for what he did and yet

[30 : 02] God spares him his sins have been passed over now his child dies but he escapes so God according to this verse put Jesus on the cross to show that in fact he is just even though he passed over the sins previously committed like David's he is just because he punished his own son even for the sins of David all of those sins that were committed by his people over the years were forgiven when Jesus died on the cross all of our sins past present and future were dealt with when Jesus died on the cross he is our substitute what we deserved was death hell condemnation and what we get is eternal life heaven peace with God he's our substitute there are a lot of um a lot of popular authors speakers churches writing a lot of books today that try and try and dilute or dull down or even completely do away with this message but this message is at the heart of what we believe

Jesus death didn't just rescue you from a bad self esteem or from bad relationships from bad finances or even from a bad relationship with God it saved you from hell condemnation and God's wrath think about it God's wrath not a bad father not a bully at school God himself God's wrath it saved you from that that's why we worship Jesus that's why we gather together that's why we want to tell our friends about Jesus if our friends if our friends don't put their faith in Jesus then that anger that wrath is awaiting them it hasn't been done away with altogether it hasn't been done away with forever it's made effective through faith in Jesus finish with this check it out back it up a little bit he says there is no distinction since all have sinned even your good friends even your family members all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God they are now justified they're made right with

God by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood effective through faith effective through faith Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the whole whole whole world but God's pardon God's forgiveness God's righteousness is effective through faith you've got to have faith you've got to have faith in Jesus if you're going to escape that wrath you've got to have faith in Jesus if you're going to enjoy fellowship with God forever without faith in Jesus there is only condemnation this is the truth this is the hard truth if you're here tonight and you're not a

Christian you don't have faith in Jesus you're not forgiven you're not at peace with God and his anger is burning just the other side of death and it's all you experience forever and so really the whole when you boil it down the whole reason that we do this week by week is so that you will hear this news that Jesus has done it all for you that he's died as your substitute for your sin now he invites you to put your trust in him you need to hear this message and respond and do that a couple of ways you could go and pray with someone after the service you could come up to someone who you've seen up the front here we'll sit down and pray with you alternatively you could join a community group each week in our community groups we talk about the sermon that's just been so this coming week they're going to be talking about all this stuff that

I've been talking about you can hear more about it you can take some time you can talk with people about it who believe what I've been talking about you can ask them what it's like to be forgiven by Jesus encourage you to do that you can join any group you'd be welcomed any of them some people it takes a little bit longer for them to come to terms with what I've been saying so keep coming along to church make friends hang out with people join a community group at the end of the day our greatest fear and you can see why it's our greatest fear if what I've been saying is true is that you will hear this and still choose to reject God you'll hear this and still turn away from Jesus your substitute and saviour I'm going to pray for us now

[37 : 26] God we need prayer we need prayer we need prayer if we're going to be saved we need prayer if we're going to live as Christ's followers in the wake of his awesome act of love for us so let me pray father it is a humbling thing to remember again what you did for us on the cross it was our sin our disobedience grace it was our fault we put in there and it was your initiative your cross your blood your grace your forgiveness so Lord we want to worship you as our great God and saviour who because of his justice and love sent his own son to the cross in our place we respond with faith we respond with prayer we respond with singing praises to you and we respond by coming forward tonight and taking communion remembering the body and blood of Jesus broken and shed for us and I pray for those people who are here tonight who we love very much who don't know you and I pray that they would respond in faith put their trust in

Jesus have their sins forgiven and start on a journey that will never end that will last for eternity I pray these things in Jesus name Amen Amen Thank you.