

The Greatest Substitution Ever

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 5:21
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Our text this morning will be found in 2 Corinthians 5:21 and it reads this way,

21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, how glorious thou art. We ask, O Lord, now in this hour that you would come with power and strength and that, Lord, thy strength would be made perfect in the weakness that I have this day, Lord, that you would shine forth the glory of thee. O Lord, may you come in the frailty that we have before thee this day, Lord, that you would lift us up in thee, bear us upon thy wings, give us ears to hear. Lord, make me a mouthpiece for thy great grace and may you be glorified. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

I've been thinking a lot this week about, of course, the time and season that we're coming up on, Thanksgiving, and as I spoke to you last time from up here, the thing on my mind the most is how great a salvation it is that the Lord has wrought and has given freely to his people. When I come to a verse like this this morning, a text like this, I could stand here the rest of my life and not be able to exhaust to you the depth that's in this or an understanding. It blows my mind. It is the greatest transfer that's ever been made and the greatest exchange that's ever been made and the greatest substitution that's ever been made and it was made for such an unworthy sinner as myself. And if you be part of that fallen man also that the Lord has redeemed before the foundation of the world, this great transfer was made for you.

I think about sometimes I get a little depressed, I guess is the best term to use, this time of year because of the hypocrisy that I see in it. Man goes wrong in his life just as bold and ugly as he may be and then he takes time out to be thankful. I truly believe it's the grace of God that makes his children think.

I come to a text like this and it speaks first of my Triune Lord. It is the Father who made him to be sin, the Son, and we'll talk about that, but it's the Holy Spirit who comes and applies and makes us know this righteousness, the righteousness of God. Have you ever stopped to take this verse apart? To sit and ponder about what a great exchange this is?

Here I am a debtor, I owe everything to the Lord. I have sinned. I continue to sin. The sins of the past, sins of the present, sins of the future. And I accumulate all this debt and this great Creditor comes down, comes down here to earth, the Creditor, the one that I owe all things to, he takes all of this debt that I have and it's laid upon him and he then as the Creditor, puts himself in the prison on my behalf. And he looks at me, rightfully so, and says, "You can't pay this debt." And it doesn't matter how much I try or how many works I try to accumulate or the nice things I try to do, you can't obey your way to heaven. Your works don't commend you to God. If you aren't found in his righteousness, clothed in his righteousness, you will be found wanting. You will be found naked and destitute and worthy of the wrath of God.

But this one who put himself in a prison of sin and he did it on behalf of all of the church, that's hard for me to imagine because I look at how fallen and how sinful I am and just that feat to die for me and my sins would be amazing to me. Amazing grace. But to put all of my brothers and sisters in that same place that I am in and all this debt that we've accumulated all our life and will accumulate more today and more next week because of our sinful fallen nature and he came and all of this, the Father laid the iniquity on him and he said, "I'm going to stand in your place, church. I'm going to stand there because I'm the only one who has ever obeyed perfectly. I'm the only sacrifice that is without spot."

I've been thinking very deeply about especially in light of our Bible studies we've been having Wednesday nights about what it would be like to live back in that time. What it would be like to sacrifice animals over and over again and just when you slay that animal or you see the priest do it and he puts it on there and you see your sins taken away at that time, but what happens when you turn around and you leave that place? That animal is already consumed. And let's not even start to entertain the thought that that's just an animal. The depth of grace. How sweet the sound.

I want to start this morning over in Romans 5 as Paul lays this out for us a little earlier when he wrote this epistle to the Romans in chapter 5 and he said this beginning in verse 6, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." You see, that's the beauty of grace. He died for the ungodly. I sat there Wednesday night and I heard the pastor say something about grace and how true it was, it really spoke to my soul, we do love to talk about grace being the unmerited favor of God and it's true. But this grace that goes to the party that's receiving of that grace is angry with God. He hates God. This reconciliation, reconciliation is bringing two parties that are at variance together. God is angry because of sin. We are angry because we won't have this man to reign over us. And we are joined by the perfect sacrifice, the perfect high priest, the perfect mediator, the perfect intercessor, who looked at all of our deficiencies and he stood in our place.

Paul said that when he died, he died for the ungodly and how dare use today to tell God that we have godliness; that we have something to commend ourselves to what he's done perfectly; that we can muster some kind of obedience to bring to him a holy and just God in our wretched fallen man and say, "Here, God, accept this because of our holiness."

Perish that thought. May that thought die today in every one of us, be crucified and put to death.

I love verse 7, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." We've seen that. We've heard of war stories, men throwing themselves on grenades and dying for the group to spare them. Once in a while you'll get somebody like that but all that group was fighting for one purpose. He found a brotherhood there. But what have we done to deserve grace? What have we fought for for our Lord? What have we done to commend ourselves to him?

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." While we were yet sinners. We were debtors. We are debtors to grace. Not only do we not have anything to commend ourselves to the Lord to say, "Here, take this," but when he died for us, we stunk. I mean, we're odious in his sight. We're sin. And the Lord Jesus Christ said and the Father said, "The only way to save this church is to lay all of their sin upon you and you voluntarily go to the cross and stand in their place and I will bring down all of my wrath upon you and you will stay there in their place and you will absorb all of that wrath." And do you know what we get in the end for that? A robe of righteousness. A perfect robe of righteousness where the Father looks at us and says, "There is my Son's righteousness. There is his finished work. There is his perfect obedience."

You and I would not call that fair if we had to be the one who stood in the place. It is the most one-sided transaction ever done. That's what the depth of grace is. He absorbed the wrath of his Father and if you don't know what that entailed, read Psalm 22 where he talks about his tongue being, how dry, when the heat and the power of God being poured out for that sin, that hatred for sin. Do you have that hatred today for the sins that you commit? Because that's what Christ in you brings. He brings holy hatred for sin. He reveals that he stood in your place. He reveals that it's his righteousness that is the only garment that is acceptable to the Father and it must be wrought out by the Son and it must be only wrought out by the Son. Not by works that we have done for by grace are ye saved through faith and it's not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. And, oh, what a gift it is.

"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath." That's what we've been talking about. We're saved from wrath. Why? How? "Through him" who stood in our place.

"For if, when we were enemies," you see, Paul doesn't get away from that. He doesn't commend the creature at all. He doesn't say, "Boy, you guys, the church is so wonderful. Oh, look at all the works we've done for God."

"When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Because, you see, in his life, in the fact that he rose, he did away, he put away all those sins and he dealt with them and they've been dealt with and that's a hard thing for you and I to reconcile because when we see the

sin and when we do abhor sin, sometimes it takes over us and we'll live in that pity, self-pity, "Woe is me! Look what I've done!" and the only remedy to that is the righteousness of Christ to be put upon, to be clothed upon, to be imputed, to be imparted, to be gifted, to be wrapped around.

Our text says, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." It's all of grace. Isaiah said it this way in Isaiah 26:13, he said, "O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us." Can you say that? "But by thee only will we make mention of thy name." By thee only, Lord. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. His finished work.

What are you thankful for today in this season? We can reel off a lot of carnal things just as the whole world can, but what has the Lord Jesus Christ done for your soul? "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." That is the depth of holiness that our Lord has and has always had. Sinless before he came here. Sinless while he was here. And sinless now reigning in heaven. I can't underscore to you or pronounce to you how holy and just and unspotted this sacrifice truly is.

I think we struggle with that so much. We struggle with what is it like to be sinless and we try to entertain those thoughts. We try to even...you know, I'm not a bright person but I'll tell you, as I see man struggle with resurrection in the body, I think that's the biggest problem is that man wants so bad for this body to be resurrected that he doesn't understand what this body would look like without sin. I can't tell you what I'd look like without sin. I was formed in iniquity. I've always had iniquity. And man always wants to look at physical, physical, physical. I get it. That's all we can see because it's only by faith that we can see what the Lord has done. It's only by faith that we understand what truly resurrection life is. And it's only by faith that we see what he's done and we're removed out of that.

He must holy, harmless, undefiled. That's what Hebrews 7:26 tells us, "For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." When I read this passage, our text, "who knew no sin," I have to stop. "Lord, stop me there. Stop me and make me to have a *selah*, to think about what it would be like to be sin. I can't get there. I can't get there to where Christ had no sin. I believe it because faith tells me it's true, the word of God tells me it's true. And you know, it's an amazing thing that while Jesus was here, while Jesus was here on this earth, all of religious man tried to catch him in sin. All of religious man would try to catch him or put a sin to his charge.

Jesus said in John 8:46, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" and he was speaking to the Pharisees. "Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" The devil tried to impute sin, to give sin, to bring the Lord to have sin. He brought him up in all of those temptations, he brought him up to the highest pinnacle and he said, "Here, do this. Do this." In all of those temptations, "If you do this, you can have this." Forty days yet without sin. Do you know how quick we sin? Forty seconds. It's a really deep thought. John said in John 14:30, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for

the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." That's what Jesus said about the devil. "He's got nothing in me. He can charge me with nothing." And that's the power that the child of God has, Christ in him; that when the greatest temptation comes, if Christ is in you, that temptation can and will be put down by him. That's how we're kept. It's got nothing to do with you and me and how much we study and how much we hide ourselves and how much we prepare things in this life or what we hide in our heart and what we do. We're kept by the sovereign power of the word. He is so holy.

I want to go to that favorite passage of ours we use a lot during the holidays and that's Isaiah 53 for just two verses of it to accentuate this point that he was made sin who knew no sin. That's Isaiah 53:5-6, "But he was wounded for our transgressions." That's what we're talking about today. He substituted himself. He was wounded for our transgressions. Not his. "He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace," this is for us to have peace and reconciliation with the Father. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him." He must do it. He did do it. "And with his stripes," what he did on the cross, with the stripes that he took, "we are healed." No other way. You tell me where the creature has any right to boast right there? "I did this for you, Lord." You've done nothing but sin. He is a worthy substitute. You and I, not so much. "With his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him," this is what we've been talking about today, he has laid on him, "the iniquity of us all."

Some of the old divines and I use that term loosely, like to go a step further and call Jesus a sinner. I'm not going to do that. My Bible clearly said right there that they were laid upon him. He became sin for us. He must deal with those sins. You and I couldn't do that. Have you ever tried to deal with sin? I try every day. It might be anger, it might be unbelief. I try to deal with it. Do you know what I mean? You sit there and you have these thoughts about, "How am I going to get out of this? Or how am I gonna...? Okay, I've done this wrong, now how can I make this right? Or I've wronged this person, I've said this, now how am I going to do this and how am I going to do that?" We try to deal with our sin every day but here's the grand great Gospel truth: he has dealt with every one of them perfectly. He's put them away as far as from the east is to the west. He stood in my place and absorbed the wrath, the payment for that sin, and in exchange he gave me a robe.

Let's go over to 1 Peter. We like this passage too. 1 Peter 2, let's look at 21, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." Dear ones, only in the day of his power. Only in the day of his power. You read a verse like that, I don't know what it does to you but it makes me so dependent. I read that and I say, "Wow, leaving us an example. Christ suffered for us and left an example that I should follow his steps. Lord, I'm so inadequate."

"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." You see, that's the whole thing: he and the Father are one in this. When we hear that terminology, he was made sin, it wasn't the Father telling the Son,

"You're going to go and do this against your will." It was a voluntary act. John 10:15 says, "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep." I lay down my life for the sheep. He didn't go kicking and screaming to stand in our place. He did it as this great great plan of salvation that was so perfect and so intricate in detail that it was the only way that could save the church from her sins.

There was no other way and that's why I get so upset when I hear a mixture. I get so disgusted when I hear what the creature can do and how he's helping Christ along because there is nothing you and I can do or could ever have done to work out a salvation that he has done for us.

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness," that's what our text says today, that we might be made the righteousness of God. That's how pure it is. That's how far above. It's above any of our righteousness, the righteousness of God. "That we should live unto righteousness by whose stripes ye were healed." That's what we just read. Peter 2 is pointing to what Christ has done for his people. "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

As I think deeply at this season and the time, yes, when the Lord makes me thankful because, you know, in the misery of sickness and the misery of life, sometimes you get caught up with the things going on in this world and things and we're not thankful and it doesn't really matter that the world says, "Here, take this day off and be thankful." That's what I was talking about at the beginning, that's the hypocrisy of it. But grace. Grace. Grace humbles the child of God and makes him thankful. Thankful for everything his Lord has done in standing in his place. As every day of our life we're going to fight against sin, every day, we need the Lord to come and to show us that he paid the price for it, that he stood in our place that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Of course, you know every time I see "in him" it throws me back to the eternal vital union. It seems like everywhere you go in the word of God we see how vital this union is. I will not have the righteousness of God without being in him therefore being the righteousness of Christ. I need it imputed. I need it put on. There's no creature righteousness, there is no man's doings here, it's all of what he's done. Paul said it this way in one of our favorite verses again in Philippians 3:9, "And be found him not having mine own righteousness." You see, do you understand that we all have a righteousness? We all have a righteousness. Paul said, "I don't want to be found in my righteousness." I hope you don't want to be found in yours. Mine stinks. "I don't want to be found in my own righteousness which is of the law." When I hear that term "of the law," I think about how obedient, how works oriented, how self-serving that is. "Oh, I have to do this. I have to do that. I have to commend myself to this. I have to..." That's what my righteousness is. Paul said, "I don't want to be found in that righteousness which is of the law but that which is through the faith of Christ." We talked about that today, the dire need of his faith to see the preciousness of what he's done in our place. "The faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Yes, it's only our Lord that must clear the guilty. You and I are never going to be able to be washed in anything of ourselves to clear our conscience, to clear our mind, to clear our soul, to wipe the slate clean. John said it this way in John 1:29, he said, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Do you see the Lord coming that way? The Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice to take away your sin? And is that something that the Lord impresses upon you this morning to be thankful for?

In Isaiah 43:25 the Lord said, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." I think about that in light of myself with how if someone sins against me, how long I remember it. I can remember it a long time if it's a bad one. Then I think about how wicked I've been against my Lord and he doesn't remember sin. It's been dealt with in a way that you and I, the depth we'll never know until we see him perfectly, we understand what it's like to live without sin.

May the Lord impress that upon us today and this verse in this season that he reveals this great substitution, this great reconciliation, the greatest transfer ever made and it was made on the behalf of the church. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Dear heavenly Father, may you add thy power and thy clarity for thy glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.