

Christ, Our Substitute

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Isaiah 53:4-5

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I have a very familiar text today. I am going to be preaching to you from the book of Isaiah. Most of you have read this Scripture many times and it is a very familiar passage. It is a very familiar subject. I am going to preach on, "Christ, Our Substitute. Christ' the Sinner's Substitute." And my text will be found in Isaiah 53.

Now you have read it many times, but let me read it again. It says, "Surely, surely, truly he, that is Christ our Lord, hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement, or here is a better translation, the correction, the correction necessary for our peace, in order for us to have peace with God there was a chastisement or a correction that needed to be made. Well, it was upon and with his stripes we are healed." Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

Now the text is familiar and the topic is familiar, but I am going to bring out some things today that perhaps you have not thought about. Perhaps you have not seen them in the Scriptures.

When we say that Christ suffered for our sins as our substitute, that he was stricken, smitten of God and afflicted in our place, in our room in our stead, what do we mean?

Well, some people say, "Well, he died on the cross for our sins."

Well, when we talk about the sufferings of Christ, Christ our substitute who suffered in our place and in our stead, we mean and the Scriptures mean all of the time that he was on this earth from the cradle to the cross the crown, all of the time that he was on this earth from the day he was born until the day that he ascended back to heaven he was our representative. He was numbered with us. He stood in our room and in our stead not just on the cross, but from the very hour that he was born in Bethlehem's manger, not only on the cross, but from the very time he was made of a woman, born of a woman all his life, all of his life body and soul, life and death as a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He was our substitute in his life and in his death.

Now this needs to be emphasized. It needs to be studied. It needs to be considered.

You know, Paul said in the book of Hebrews, “Consider. Consider Christ Jesus the apostle and high priest of our profession.”

And I plan to show you today from the Scriptures that everything, everything...not just his death on the cross, not just the shedding of his blood, but everything, everything that Jesus Christ our Lord did on this earth from the time he was born, placed in the manger, to the death of the cross, to the burial, the resurrection and ascension. All of it was on behalf of his people to redeem them as their substitute, to bring them to God.

Now you who have read some of the old writers and some of the old theologians and ministers of the past know there are two words that these men used in reference to Christ’s obedience. They talked about his passive obedience on our behalf, his passive obedience and his active obedience. And we need to think about this now.

What is his passive obedience? Well, it means just what it says, passive. Not active, but passive. He submitted to the will of God. He submitted to his enemies. He submitted to their charges. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter. As a lamb before her shearers he was dumb. He opened not his mouth. He was passive. He was silent. He surrendered. He submitted to judgment. That is all through his life. He submitted to the temptation of Satan.

You know, he told one of his disciples one day, he said, “I could call on my father and he would send legions of angels to deliver me.” But he passively obeyed and submitted.

Now here is the other word, active obedience on our behalf, passive obedience and active obedience. What is active obedience? Well, he lived, he loved. He loved actively. He forgave actively. He showed mercy. He met the law and obeyed it in ever jot and tittle. He met Satan and defeated him. He met the forces of evil and dealt with them. He met the religious Pharisees and conquered them. He was actively obedient, actively.

He went to the cross. He set his face like a flint to go to the cross. He went there on purpose. He said, “No man takes my life from me. I lay it down.”

So that is what these old men back there in the past when theology was taught and the Scriptures were taught and the work of Christ dealt with in depth. They talked about our Lord’s obedience.

Though he were a son yet he learned obedience by the things he suffered passively and actively. All of which he did as Christ our substitute to bring us to God.

Now let me show you this. We are going to start right back there in Bethlehem’s manger. And I want you to take your Bible and look at Luke chapter two verse seven. Another familiar Scripture, but maybe we have overlooked the meaning of it. Maybe we have overlooked the message. Listen to this again, Luke 2:7. “And she brought forth her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger,” comma “be-

cause there was no room for him in the inn.”

No room for him? This is Israel’s king. This is Bethlehem’s promised Messiah. This is the Son of God and the Son of David. This is his city. No room for him? No room for him? Yes. That is true, no room for him. Scripture says he came into the world and the world was made by him, but the world didn’t know him. He came unto his own and his own people Israel, his own prophets, his own tabernacle, his own city Bethlehem and they received him not.

He began his earthly ministry unwanted, unknown, unrecognized, an outcast. Why? He was identifying with us because that is what we are, unknown, unwanted, unrecognized outcasts. In Adam we died. We are in this world with out hope, without help, without Christ and without God. And our Lord Jesus Christ stooped, condescended to be identified with us. And he began his life on this earth as an outcast which we are by nature.

So his suffering, his humiliation...think of the humiliation. No room for him. Put him in a manger. That is a cow stable. That’s a trough where the cows and the horses eat, full of hay. Laid him in a manger, his vicarious sufferings and substitutionary work began at his birth. He was not allowed to be born in his own city or to die in Jerusalem. He died outside the walls. They didn’t want him born there or die there. And that is when he began his suffering.

Now here is another Scripture, Matthew 1:21. Listen. Eight days later they called his name Jesus. That’s right. They called his name Jesus.

You know, the disciples...I mean the...his father...his foster father Joseph when the angel came to him the angel said, “Call his name Jesus. Call his name Jesus.” The Lord God said in Isaiah nine verse six, “His name is wonderful. Unto us a child is born. Unto a son is given. His name is Wonderful, Counselor.” What is his name? The mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

When Jacob wrestled with him back there years before Jacob said, “What is your name?”

He said, “Why do you ask my name? My name is Wonderful.”

Manoah and his wife said, “What is your name?”

He said, “My name is secret. It is Wonderful.”

But when he came to the earth he was called Jesus. They called his name Jesus. That name is the name of his humanity. That name is the name of his humiliation. His name is Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. His name is I am. I am. But for a while, for a while his name is called Jesus. You don’t call him that now. He is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Lord. As Jesus he came from the womb. As Jesus he lay in a manger. As Jesus he walked this earth in humiliation as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as Jesus he died on the cross.

But Peter said on Pentecost, “God hath made this same Jesus whom you crucified Lord and Christ.” Lord. Every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess that he is Lord.

So here you see his suffering and humiliation began at birth, born in a manger, no room for him, called Jesus, Jesus, just Jesus.

And then, thirdly, in Luke 2:21 it says, “And when the eight days were accomplished for the circumcision of the child his name was called Jesus.” The Son of God circumcised? The holy one of God circumcised? They took a sharp knife and circumcised and shed his blood? Circumcision refers to guilt. He had no guilt. Circumcision refers to cleansing, the circumcising of the heart, the cleansing of the flesh. He had no sin. Circumcision refers to the sons of Adam and the sons of Abraham. He is the Son of God. Circumcision is the token of mercy. He doesn’t need any mercy. What in the world are they doing taking that precious Son of God, Immanuel, God with us and circumcising him? Circumcision is for us.

But no sooner was he born then he shed his blood. This is the beginning, I told you, of his humiliation, of his identification, of his substitutionary work for. As a man he has got to submit to everything to which we submit.

And it is required of us...Though he were a Son yet he learned obedience by the things he suffered. And no sooner did he come to this world than he started that trail of blood. He shed his blood.

See him? Our substitute born in poverty, unknown, unwanted. See our substitute named with a common name, Jesus, Jesus. See our substitute circumcised as a man of flesh with guilt in need of cleansing and covenant mercies. H

But look at Matthew 3:13. Here is another familiar Scripture. Here is the path of obedience, the walk of faith, our substitute.

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee, this Jesus, this man, the God man. We call him Lord. We know who he is. He came from Galilee to the River Jordan unto John to be baptized of him? What is this? What are you saying, preacher? The Son of God in human form? The Son of God in human flesh? The Christ of God standing in a river about to be baptized by a sinner? John?

Yes, that’s right.

But, preacher, only sinners are baptized. Baptism is a confession of sin. Baptism is the baptism of repentance. Baptism says, “I deserve to die. I deserve to be buried. I must be put out of sight and risen with a new life to walk before God in obedience.” Baptism says I repent. He has no sin, nothing of which to repent. He doesn’t deserve to die. We do.

Baptism is to justify God in his charges against us. Read that over in the book of Luke.

What has all of this got to do with that perfect one? Not a thing except as he stood in my place and your place. That is why he is there. That is why he is in that manger. God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, made in the flesh to redeem them that were in the flesh. That is why he is called Jesus, to save his people from their sins. That is why he was circumcised, to fulfill righteousness, to do what was required of us and every Son of Abraham. That is why he is standing here in the baptismal waters.

John said, "I have need to be baptized of thee. Comest thou to me?"

What did the Lord reply? He said, "John, suffer it to be so now, now, now, to fulfill all righteousness."

There is the key word. That is what he is doing. That is what he is doing in all of this walk as a man, obedience to his parents. He grew up in a home as a child, obedient to the orders and commandments of his parents. All of this is on our behalf. Christ is fulfilling all righteousness, all righteousness.

Our Noah is building his wondrous ark to save his people, his house.

Look at Matthew 26 verse 36. "Then cometh Jesus, this man, this God man, this Lord Jesus, the Christ. Then cometh Jesus to a place called Gethsemane." And he told his disciples to wait with him and he went yonder to pray and he said, "My Father, my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."

Now listen carefully to me. He is not on the cross now. He is in this garden. He is praying. And he says, "Oh, my Father, my soul..." I told you suffered body and soul. My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou will."

Now this is such holy ground that I am going to tell you what he is saying here. Our Lord Jesus is in prayer before the Father and he is in such agony of soul, soul agony. He is about to die. Now here is what is taking place. All the sins of all the people of God of all believers of all ages of all generations have met on him. Our sins were laid on him, the guilt of them, the filth of them the weight of them, the burden of them. And he is about to die. This human nature, though it is strengthened by God and enabled by God to do more than any human being could possibly do without the strength and grace and Spirit of God, it is about to die.

Luke said blood came from the pores of his body.

Have you ever been in great depression and great agony? Some of you have. And you just think, "I am going to die. I can't stand this trial. I cannot bear this burden. I cannot live through this night. Think of our Lord who didn't have just your sins, he had all the sins and wretchedness and burden and sorrows and grief of God's people of all ages on him. And he says, "I am going to die. My soul is so sorrowful even unto death."

He is the Son of God, but he is the Son of man. He is God, but he is in human flesh. He has the nature of deity, but he has the nature of man. And our sins were laid on him and his soul is so crushed even to die in this garden. And that is why he is saying, "My Father, this cup, right now..." He didn't pray to avoid the cross. He said, "I came into this world to get to the cross."

The apostles tried to get him not to go to the cross. He said, "For this cause came I to this hour." He wasn't praying to escape the cross. That's the way God intended. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He was praying about this time right here when his soul was so sorrowful even unto death. And Luke said, "An angel of the Lord appeared and strengthened him...and strengthened him."

Oh, I tell you this. If you and I knew the guilt and filth and wretchedness of our sin we would die, too. That's right. We would die right now under the filth and guilt of it if we looked on it like God does.

Christ is our suffering substitute from the cradle to the name, the circumcision, to the baptism, to the man of sorrows acquainted with grief, to the prayers of Gethsemane, to the wrestlings of his soul with our sins.

And then look at John 19. "And he bearing his cross, he bearing his cross went forth to a place called Golgotha where they crucified him." That is my [?]. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we did see him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquity. The correction of our peace was laid on him and by his stripes we are healed. And there on that cross all the wrath of God, the judgment of God fell on him bearing our sins. Here the sword of God's justice pierced his heart, drove him through. Here he poured out his soul unto death.

You and I don't understand the death of Christ, the sufferings of Christ until we can somehow understand it wasn't just physical punishment. He made his soul an offering for sin. When he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

Here he was cut off out of the land of the living. "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

I tell you why God the Father hath forsaken him. Our sin separated him and his God. Our sins were laid on him. Here he paid it all, all the debt we owed. Sin left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow. Here his work was finished and he cried, "It is finished." The suffering is finished. The redemption is finished. The pictures and types of the Old Testament are finished. Redemption is finished. The suffering is over. He bowed his head and he gave up the ghost.

I will tell you when one considers the sufferings of our Lord, remember, body and soul, body and soul because he had to redeem us body and soul. And sin is not just an act of the flesh. It is an act of the heart and the will and the soul and the spirit in inward rebellion against God.

So from the cradle to the cross he is a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief standing in our room and our stead suffering all that was required of us.

Now last. And he was buried. That is humiliation. Buried in a hole in the ground. Our Lord was buried. Why was he buried? I'll tell you one of the chief reasons. Number one is this. He was buried to truly reveal to all men that he did die. He did die. They buried him in a tomb in which no man had ever lain so that when he came forth no one could say, "Well, maybe it was the other fellow."

No, sir, he died. And what do you do with dead people? You bury them. You wrap them in burial garments as they did back then and buried the dead out of sight. He was buried to reveal that he did, indeed, die. And, secondly, he was buried to be identified with us. Some day we will die like our Lord and we will be buried.

But I will tell you this. His footprint is not only into that grave, but comfort of comforts we see him coming out. He was raised to reveal this, that he did indeed accomplish all that God gave him to do. He did, indeed, accomplish and was victorious over even the last enemy, death, death. And God is pleased. For the Scripture says, "God raised him from the dead to give evidence to all men that one day he will judge this world by that man Christ Jesus. And now he is exalted. He is ascended and the Father said, "Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

He is our representative, born an outcast, named a human name, circumcised, baptized, agonized, man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, crucified, buried, risen and now exalted. And everything...in him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily. And you and I, believers are complete in him.

Do you see that? Salvation is Christ, all that he is, all that he did and all that he is doing.