

Jesus is My Substitute

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[0 : 00] Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would fall with gentle power and deep conviction upon us as we look at your word. And Father, we ask that you would draw us to Jesus, that you would help us to once again understand afresh who he is and what he accomplished for us in his death upon the cross.

Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would so move and work within us, that we might once again fall in love with what he has done for us. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Please be seated. Last Sunday I talked about money. Today I'm going to talk about death. Talking about death not because I'm morbid, it's the scripture text basically invites us and tells us to talk about death. That's what the scripture text is about. Just this past week I heard from a member of the congregation that somebody that they know and I know, I don't know them super well, but I know them.

I've seen them six or seven or eight times. I know them. If I saw them in the street, I'd say hi. And I just heard the news that they'd gotten terrible news in the last week or so.

[1 : 18] And the terrible news in the last week or so was that their young son, who hadn't been developing properly, they'd finally got the test results in. In fact, they thought at first that he had a hearing problem and they were giving him lots of hearing tests.

But it turns out that he has a degenerative brain disease. And it means that in fact, the mental level that he's reached right now and he's still nonverbal is the maximum he's ever going to reach.

And the disease will eventually kill him, probably in his early teens. Very, very hard and sobering news, as you can well imagine, for a young child, parents of a young child.

They're very devout Christians. But it's still a very hard thing. I'm not going to tell you his name, but if you want to commit him to prayer, his name is Bobby. That's the name. If you're a guest here, I call guys Bob and I call girls Sue, just to not slip up and reveal somebody's name as a general rule. If you're here and your name is Bob or you're a woman, your name is Sue, I'm not talking about you. It's just a habit I've developed. You might want to pray for him and his family. I mention this because it's very easy for Christians.

[2 : 29] It can be easy for me to talk about death in an apologetic way as if I want to try to win an argument and show the superiority of the Christian worldview in light of Buddhism or secularism or atheism or Islam.

And there's not necessarily anything wrong about that. But the fact of the matter is, is that as we all know, that death is in fact not an issue just of the intellect or a philosophy or of ideology, that in fact it's a deeply personal issue.

And that I am aware, whether it's some of the people who will listen to this sermon online through a podcast later on, or whether it's some of you here, that you in fact might be struggling a little bit with some news about yourself that has health consequences or a loved one, in a sense like we now are, not struggling with it, but very conscious of the reality and the certainty of death.

It's in fact also almost definitely the case that one of the reasons our culture is reacting the way we are right now to COVID-19 is the horrific images that were shown in TV about the hospital situation in Italy at the height of the crisis in that country.

And I know for a fact that people in the congregation who are very, very worried that their fate might be to end up dying, gasping for breath without a ventilator in a hospital hallway separated from loved ones.

[3 : 50] So death is a very personal and present issue. It's also very sort of curious because it's an issue that in Canada we're not really allowed to talk about. In fact, if I was to be invited once the

lockdown is over and we can once again don't have to have social distancing and you invite me to a party, and if I was to start asking your friends from work or your neighbours who'd come to the party, by the way, if you've been thinking about death lately, you should.

But you would view that as a very rude thing to do, and I wouldn't be invited back to another party that you would throw because it's just viewed as a very un-Canadian thing, even though it's in fact something which is inevitable and deeply personal.

The scripture text that we're going to look at today talks about death in a very important and significant way. So I invite you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 1 to 11. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 1 to 11. And let's plunge into reading it and I'll draw out the significance about death and meaning and I'll try to remember to return to Bobby and his parents at the end because this text, in fact, is a profound comfort to them or can be.

Now, I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

[5 : 16] I just sort of want to pause there for a second and tell you a little bit about the person writing this letter and the profound significance of what he's just written. This letter was probably written sometime 51, 52, 53 AD.

I know it's a very long time and some of you are going to doubt that a text that was written so long ago could possibly have anything to say about death that could be relevant to us today. But I'll get to that in a moment.

But here's the significant thing about this, brothers and sisters. Because the fact of the matter is, is that the fellow who wrote this, whether it was the year 51 or 52 or 53, it's not clear where it was written, but somewhere in that time period, the person who wrote it was what we would now call an extreme religious fundamentalist fanatic.

And he wasn't just a religious fanatic. He had weaponized his fanaticism in the worst possible way. He believed in his own narrow understanding of Judaism, and he believed in his own narrow way of expressing and living that Judaism.

And anybody who did not fall into that narrow category, he would have seen as anathema. And there's, in fact, a public record. He himself confesses to it that he was, in fact, complicit in the death of at least one innocent man.

[6 : 35] And, in fact, he was off in a crusade to hurt and imprison, to beat and imprison people whom he disagreed with in another city. And that was the man, that is the man who's writing this letter.

And yet, he's writing to a place in Greece. He's in what we would now call Turkey. And he's writing to a city in Corinth, which we now would call us being in Greece. And he's writing to this city, and he's talking to mainly pagans.

And he calls them his brother and sister. So what could have gone on between this man and maybe 15, 16, 17 years earlier, he was a weaponized, religious, fundamentalist, extremist fanatic, complicit in the death of an innocent man and desiring to imprison and beat other men.

And what could possibly have led him now, 15 or so years later, to write this letter where he refers to pagans, ex-pagans, as his brothers and sisters? And the answer would be, this is what he would tell you and what he'd tell you in his writing.

And it's not a matter of debate amongst even the most skeptical scholar that we have some of his letters that are still known and read today. And what he would say is this, that what completely and utterly changed his life was that he met Jesus after Jesus had risen from the dead.

[7 : 57] He met Jesus after Jesus was risen from the dead. And that in and of itself wasn't all. But in meeting Jesus risen from the dead, he also understood why Jesus had died and why Jesus had died for him.

And this completely and utterly transforms the life of this man to the point that he went from being a man to inflict death upon others to a man who risked his own personal death for the sake of people very other than him in the hope and the prayer that he would be able to call them his brothers and sisters in Christ.

So what does he say? In fact, partly this is going to be him bearing witness to the fact that what completely and utterly transformed him was the fact that he met in history, in real time, Jesus after Jesus had died and risen from the dead.

Let's continue on, verse 3, and we'll see how he comes to this. For I delivered to you as a first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and then he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve.

And Cephas is another way of referring to the man that we now primarily know of as Peter. Now some of you might say, okay, well, George, that's sort of interesting, but how can that possibly... [9 : 33] Well, let's just look at what he says. I'm going to talk about the fact that even though this is written 1950 some odd years ago, 1970 years ago, how it's still in fact profoundly relevant to us today.

Notice what he has said, that that's what he understood, that's what he teaches, that's what he believes, that Jesus, look again at verse 3, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve.

And some of you are saying, well, no, it's George, it's all mixed up with... Listen to what he says, and we'll come back to some of your objections. I really will. He mentions that Jesus, after his death, appears to Cephas and then to the twelve.

Then in verse 6, he says, then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom were still alive, though some have fallen asleep. And that phrase here is also very, very significant brothers.

One of the things which is interesting about this list is that he's basically omitted references to the women. Now, it doesn't mean that the Bible agrees with this.

[10 : 36] In fact, one of the ways that we know that the Bible doesn't agree with this is the fact that even though in both Greek and Roman and Jewish culture, the testimony of a woman wasn't considered as valid or real, to show what God thinks about it is, in a sense, just to show what God thinks about all of that, the very, very first witness to the resurrection is a woman.

That's Mary Magdalene, right? And so that sort of shows what God thinks about it. But Paul here isn't just trying to, in a sense, shame the people into thinking a different way about women. He just wants to try to present the evidence.

So it's very interesting because you see what's missing from this list as you'll see in a moment is there's no reference to Mary Magdalene. There's no reference to Mary Magdalene and Mary, whose last name we don't know.

And there's no reference to Cleopas and his unnamed companion, which was probably either his wife or his sister. So three of the clear evidences of Jesus' resurrection are omitted from this list. And he uses the word brothers. And it's not clear whether it should be brothers or brothers and sisters. But here's the significant thing. First of all, it's very, very significant if you think about it, that Jesus, after his resurrection, appeared to 500 people at the same time.

[11 : 46] But if, in fact, all Paul says is, by the way, just in case you doubt the testimony of women, there were 500 men present. But that might mean that there were 700, 800, 1,000, 1,500 people present because the rest of them were women.

Even more remarkable. And then look what else he says. So he says that Jesus appeared after his death. He appeared to Peter. He appeared to the disciples.

He appeared to 500 people at the same time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Verse 7. Then he appeared to James. Then to all the apostles.

And just pause there. These are also very, very significant. One of the things that people will sometimes say, and I'm going to talk about it a bit more in a moment, is that all these resurrection appearances were probably just Jesus' friends and people who believe all this stuff and are easily just sort of more gullible because, as most Canadians would say, one thing we know about religious and spiritual people is they're more gullible about hard-headed Canadians who look at evidence and have evidence-based ways of understanding the world.

But the fact of the matter is that all the historical evidence shows that two, at least in the list, were profound skeptics. One of them was James, whom he just mentions, who was a profound skeptic. All of the historical records show that James, the half-brother of Jesus, didn't for a moment believe that Jesus was actually who he said he was or that he would rise from the dead.

[13 : 11] And the other, of course, is the person writing this, Paul, who was so completely and utterly opposed to this and viewed it as a myth that he tried to kill people who held to it.

The other thing in that is, notice he says apostles, all the apostles. Now, what we know from the historical records is that, I don't know, we don't know the precise number of apostles. There might have been 30, there might have been 40. They're different than the 12 apostles with capital A, but there's capital A apostles, the 11 disciples and Paul, but then there's apostles with small letter A and that's what it's being referred to here.

And there's 20, 30, 40, 50, we don't know how many of them are, but the interesting thing is it doesn't say, first of all, it would be very remarkable if there were 40 and he appeared to 40 at the same time. That's still very remarkable, but it's even more remarkable because it doesn't say that he appeared to all 40 at the same time.

It just says he appeared to all of them. It means there might be 40 more appearances. of Jesus. It's a big claim.

It's a big claim. And then continues on, look at verse 8, last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me, for I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle because I have persecuted the church of God.

[14:24] Remember what I said, he was a skeptic, he just lets it right out of the bag. He was a man who persecuted the church to the point of killing Christians. But by the grace of God, I am what I am.

In other words, by God's grace, I am a Christian. By God's grace, my sins have been dealt with. By God's grace, I am accepted as the child of my heavenly Father through grace by what Jesus has done for me in the cross.

Not weighing my merits, but pardoning my offenses. But by the grace of God, I am what I am and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preached and so you believed. Now, some of you might say, okay, George, that's a very, very interesting list, but here's at least four problems.

At least four problems, but four big problems. First of all, it's a religious text, so therefore it's worthless. It's written by gullible people who aren't hard-headed and look at evidence. It's worthless because it's a religious text.

[15:26] Secondly, it's probably worthless because it's only people who knew him that he lists. So how on earth can you count that as being of any type of significance whatsoever? Third, we know that all these things were written so long after the events they purport to talk about that why on earth would you possibly believe them?

And George, if those three things don't strike you out, the fourth thing will definitely strike you out. That it was, sorry, this is written in the year 53, so it's so long ago that you can't believe it or trust it because that's so long ago.

And the fourth thing is the text itself was probably written so long after the event and giving you information so long after the event that the event is completely and utterly worthless. So those are good points.

And by the way, a couple of weeks ago in one of my sermons, I think it was two weeks ago, I talked about how, in fact, the Bible commands you to think that, in fact, the matter is is that there are a lot of religious and spiritual people, including Christians, who just say, well, you don't have to think, just believe.

But in fact, the Bible tells Christians to think. So we should always be pleased, not maybe pleased, but we should always be very, very, actually, we should be pleased. We should be pleased when people ask honest questions or make honest objections and be prepared to try to figure out how to answer them.

[16:41] So let's look at all of them. The first one is that, yes, this is a religious text, but it didn't begin as a religious text. It began as an historical artifact.

You see, it's actually written and Paul, it's not, you know what, the Bible doesn't claim ever that what goes on in the Bible is like the Koran, right? In the Koran, you know, basically Muhammad through his messenger, I mean, Allah through his messenger communicates to Muhammad and Muhammad just basically verbally dictates what he's being communicated through an intermediary from Allah and Muslims will say that's why the Koran is perfectly preserved and that's why it's so beautiful and nobody could ever possibly write a book like that because it comes directly from Allah and therefore what you deal with when you're dealing with the Koran is in fact purely from beginning to end a religious text.

Christians don't make that claim about the Bible and I'm not making that claim as well. In fact, the matter is you don't have to take it as a religious text or a spiritual text. What you do need to take it as is what it is.

It's that it's a historical artifact. Even the most radical scholars if you go to the most radical if you go to Ottawa U the religion department you go to Carleton the religion department go to McGill or U of T go to Harvard go to Princeton go to Oxford and get the most skeptical scholar you have and no scholar will doubt that we have original letters from Paul and that this is one of them.

That's the actual evidence. So don't take it as a religious text just take it as what it is that even the most skeptical scholars accept that a man by the name of Paul wrote this probably in the years roughly that I gave you.

[18 : 25] So here you have a man writing in the year 52 or 53 making these particular claims. How about the second thing? Well the second thing is it says well how George you can't really believe anything on this list because it's all people who know them but here's the problem you go against everything that they would take as important in a court of law here in Canada in the United States in any western democracy because the fact of the matter is is that if we were looking at witnesses to a crime and I've tried to be a witness to a crime and I've never actually seen the person before and I don't know anything at all about him and I there's always a bit of a possibility that I didn't quite see him properly or her properly and I might be a bit confused about it but the fact of the matter is is if it was you know God forbid it was Andrew committing the crime and I've known Andrew for 25 years Lord have mercy that's what he says about that as I do as well the fact of the matter is is that if I say that it was Andrew committing the crime and the police say how long have you known Andrew I said 25 years they'd say wow it probably was Andrew like it's pretty unlikely that I'm going to mistake how Andrew walks how he moves how he moves his head

I'm sure later on you can ask all of his boys to do a little bit of an imitation about their dad about how he moves and the other types of things and it would be very embarrassing to Andrew and hilarious for the rest of us my son or kids could do the same thing about me but the fact of the matter is is that after somebody's been murdered how do they make sure the body is the right person they get a family or somebody who knows them to identify the body so the fact of the matter is the fact that people who saw Jesus knew him is evidence that it was Jesus the fact of the matter is is if all of the evidence was people had never seen Jesus before in their entire life you'd say well how on earth they know it was Jesus so the fact that it was people who knew him is actually good evidence not bad evidence and then you might say okay George but here's the problem the problem is that it happened too long ago to trust anything that it said but here and here here here's the problem to my Muslim friends I don't normally say this to their face but sometimes

I think I've only had one time where I've been able to actually say something like this to them Muslims act at the end of the day when it comes to talking about Christianity they have to choose between faith and history why is that?

because the Quran says that Jesus didn't die on the cross but the fact of the matter is is once again you go to Ottawa I point the wrong way you go to Ottawa you go to Carleton you go to you go to McGill you go to U of T you find the most skeptical scholars you can have you go to Bart Ehrman and basically no skeptical scholar believes that every skeptical scholar believes that Jesus died upon the cross because the weight of historical evidence is that he died on the cross so for our Muslim friends they have to choose ultimately between history or they have to choose that or their faith ironically secular Canadians have to choose between their faith and secularism or history why do I say that?

Jewish Israeli archaeologists when they're doing archaeological work in and around Jerusalem or somewhere else and they're they're finding things that went on around the time of the second temple they regularly go to the New Testament to get corroboration as to what in fact they're probably looking at the fact of the matter is is that archaeologists and treasure hunters regularly use old documents to actually figure out what's actually what they've discovered and what they can then know for certain about the past a few years ago Blackbird's Boat the Queen Anne's Revenge was found how was the Blackbird's Boat the Queen Anne's Revenge found?

[22 : 10] well it was by some very clever people who went through all of the letters and all the other historical documents of people at the time and by reading everything together and putting it together and thinking it all through they figured out the rough area that the wreck had probably happened and then they went with their sonar and their you know other stuff like that their scientific stuff and

they were able to find Blackbird's Boat where it had run aground and where it had shipwrecked why?

because they used archaeological evidence it didn't matter that it was old it was eyewitness so they were able to use it to locate something so in a sense what I'm just saying to you is here we have a document that even the most skeptical scholars believe was written in the year 53 we have a whole range of other documents all written from that particular time all making this particular claim archaeologists don't dismiss it because it's old neither do treasure hunters so why would you other than by faith?

but then the final objection is well George here the big problem is that we all know that this was written many many years after and it was probably just written many many years after and so he added that there were these eyewitnesses that still were alive well the fact of the matter is that once again as I said even the most skeptical scholars acknowledge that this was a letter by Paul and we know from historical evidence that Jesus that Paul died probably 67 or 68 A.D.

interestingly enough he died for a fact he died maintaining the fact that Jesus had actually died on a cross and been buried and rose from the dead on the third day and if he denied that fact he could have gone on and lived a longer and happier life but he maintained that fact right to the death but the fact the matter is is that this is written in 53 skeptical scholars acknowledge it and there's some dynamite in this text which is even more significant it's not obvious in English look again at verses 1, 2 and 3 it says this now I would remind you brothers and sisters of the gospel I preached to you which you received and that word received in the original language is actually a very significant word in which you stand and by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preached to you unless you believed in vain and then I delivered and that word delivered in the original language is a very significant word I delivered to you as of first important what I also received and that word received once again is that significant word and the significance of the word is this that Paul is telling them something that he was told that is authoritative has authority and weight behind it that's the significance of the word in the original language but notice what's just been said here which is very very significant you're now seeing a piece of evidence in other words what you're seeing here is that the early Christians to help Christians just keep everything straight and to give them a bit of a way to understand and to have conversations with people and make the story real to themselves and be able to defend it they gave them these four points all beginning with the word that in English that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures that he was buried that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures that he appeared to Cephas and then the twelve and then the others but the significance is this scholars once again

I've said scholars don't deny that Jesus died on the cross and because of connections with what Jewish and pagan historians talk about in the time period they're able to figure out that Jesus either died by crucifixion in the spring of the year 30 or the spring of the year 33 they can't tell which one it is but they know he died in one of those two years by the same fact that there's so many historical references in the New Testament to things talked about by Jewish and pagan historians they know that Stephen was stoned somewhere between the year in the year 33 or the year 34 and therefore they know that Paul became a saw the resurrected Jesus and became a Christian in either the year 33 or the year 34 and what's so significant?

[26 : 07] Paul says that when he becomes a Christian not only does he see Jesus when he becomes a Christian what he's told in either the year 33 or the year 34 is what we read right here in other words you're not reading something here which is written 40, 50 years later Paul is giving you evidence of what he was told potentially months after the death and resurrection of Jesus and no more than a couple of years in other words what you're looking at right here is very, very, very, very ancient testimony the exact type of testimony that if this was talking about a pirate ship that went to ground treasure hunters would be ecstatic if they found it because it gives them evidence going so far back that they can use to find treasure and this treasure is that there's good news and the good news is that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures that he was buried that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures and that he appeared to Cyphus and then the twelve and then the rest of the list the good news is that the true cause of death has been dealt with the barrier to eternal life has been dealt with because God has provided through Christ a substitute which means that through that substitution you can now enter into eternal life because he died for you and some of you might say okay George you're saying this is all about a substitute

I have a whole pile of problems with that George and you probably can't answer them I mean first of all I don't need a substitute why on earth do I need a substitute that's a really good point here's why you need a substitute you're going to die you're going to die and the fact of the matter is as I think just about every Canadian if they're sober and are honest recognize that there's something about death that's just wrong in fact the matter is is that I've talked to many people you've probably talked to many people maybe you are one of those people who've used death as an example of why God doesn't exist because it feels as if it's a judgment on you why did God let my mom die why did God let my child die why did God let my wife die as if that's a judgment somehow upon you and how dare God make that type of judgment is the next thing that often goes the fact of the matter is is that in the face of death we have a sense that there's something unnatural about it that there's something judgmental about it and at the same time we all know that we cannot defeat death that death will overwhelm us that judgment that wrongness that unnaturalness will undo you inevitably and so I would suggest to you that that actually shows that if you're to have any hope in the face of death you need a substitute you need a substitute so do I not just you

I need a substitute but we have some problems because in fact the matter is is that in our world when we hear the word substitute it's a bad thing right you have a choice of going to get freshly squeezed orange juice or some drink that's the orange color that's called orange and what happens is they take all the good orange stuff as much as they possibly can the good delicious oranges they take as much of the oranges out as they possibly can add some orange dye and some sugar and the orange dye and the sugar is the substitute for the delicious stuff in an orange and that's generally what happens you need a recipe and it needs whipped cream in it and you don't have any whipped cream so you call up your friend and you ask him or her what can you substitute for whipped cream and you might actually have a bit of a substitute for whipped cream but the fact of the matter is it will never taste as good as using real whipped cream because real whipped cream is insanely delicious

I tell my friends we're going to be able to eat as much whipped cream as we want in heaven it will never clog our arteries and it will never add a pound and that's one of the things you can look forward to endless whipped cream anyway now you know a little bit about me so but the point is in our world substitute is usually a bad thing but look what Paul says here which is so significant about substitute it's so beautiful look again verse 3 for I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received that Christ died for that word for is the substitute word that Christ dies as our substitute to deal with our sins in accordance with the scriptures and why is that so significant because the word Christ is the word that summarizes all of the promises of God in the scriptures about how God will deal with the sins when Abraham goes to kill Isaac and God tells Abraham that I will provide a substitute all of the lessons that God will somehow deliver his people all of the promises of the law all of the promises of the kingship all of the promises of the priesthood all of the promises of Daniel and the son of man that God himself will deliver us that is captured in Christ so what it's saying is God George how did you die just give me some grace here I'm just talking about Canadians values okay I'm not making a value judgment in terms of the Bible in terms of the Bible every human being is made in the image of God and has more worth than the nation of Canada or of Apple or of CBC the worst most decrepit street person is of more value than Canada because that street person is made in the image of God but here's for the analogy just this what God is saying here is God doesn't say I think I'm going to save George from his sins so I'm going to find the worst street person I can and kill the street person for George no God himself in the person of his son is the one who dies for me it's as if you take the you take this foul orange drink with dye and sugar and God gives the best oranges to substitute for that and that is our substitute but some of you might say

[33 : 20] George the problem with substitution is that it's unjust and I can completely and utterly understand that I am a firstborn and my sister and I have me then my sister and my brother and my sister and I called my mom used to refer to my youngest my brother as baby doll so we called him baby doll expert menace because the fact of the matter is he was profoundly skillful this is a bit of a warning here for all you younger children he was profoundly successful at doing a naughty thing and then looking completely and utterly beatifically innocent so I got the punishment rather than him by the way my sister was really good at this as well so I was regularly the substitute for the punishment that I didn't deserve my brother would do it my sister would do it and I would get the punishment from my dad that was how I grew up so I understand you thinking it's not very fair but the fact of the matter is is that's not what's being talked about here it's talked about something

which even fiction understands and sees as a great example of love

I love reading mystery novels and one of the things in mystery novels is that not all the time but occasionally one of the plot twists is that the detectives get the murderer and they finally go and confront the murderer and then the murderer confesses and the wheels of often what sometimes what will happen in these novels is the lead detective or a minor detective has a bit of a qualm about some little tiny detail and then they go and find out that what really happened is that the father to atone for his life and to benefit his son pleads guilty to the crime that the son has committed so the son can go free and the father takes the blame or the son does it for the father or the mother does it for the daughter or the daughter for the father or whatever it's a regular thing and what do we always feel in those particular cases not that it's unjust but what love what love that the mother would die so the daughter would go on to live her life what love and that's what we see here in the substitution of

Jesus for you and me in the death what love God made him who knew no sin to be sin for you and me that we by him might be righteous and forgiven and some of you might say George there's no way that substitution can work I mean that's very very beautiful you caught me by surprise with that I have to confess I was thinking more like you with the kids and your brother and sister and I didn't dawn on me that that's very beautiful but how can it possibly work how can the death of one person matter for everybody and the fact of the matter is is the death of one person can't matter for everybody unless there's a particular author that I've read every single one of his novels and those of you who like mystery novels know that sometimes mystery novel novelists create worlds if you read Michael Connelly there's all the Harry Bosch stories and over time you get to see his different his wife his ex-wife his girlfriends his kid the different police he works for if you read the Lee Child novels you get to learn all about Jack

Reacher if you get to hear about his mom and his dad and the different people he worked with and I could go on and on and on writers create worlds and there's this one particular writer who created a world I've read every single one of his novels and at one point in time there starts to become a change in how all of his right all of the characters in his book behave and talk and why is that change happening is because of something that happened to the author in the real world you see what happened to the author in the real world is that his son came out as gay in fact then his second son came out as gay and because of what happened to the author in the real world all of the characters in his books were changed the Christian claim is that Christ is the substitute for your sins Christ fulfills the promises if you go back and look throughout the Old Testament how many times does God say that he will deliver his people from their sins and it never dawned on him that he literally meant he will deliver them from their sins he will actually be the one who dies and what we see here in the gospel is this profound mystery of the beauty of substitution that yes George could not die so that everybody could have their lives changed but what if the author of all of the story of the human race what if he enters his story and dies so it's not just something happening to Jesus in history but something happening to God in all eternity and if something happens in God for all eternity then all of the characters in his story their life can be changed which is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that far more important than the fact that you will die is the fact that Jesus has died far more important than you understanding the significance of your story is understanding the significance of the story of Jesus that in fact in a great act of love the fact that there is any evil in all of the world is all because of substitution gone wrong that Adam and Eve our ancestors try to substitute themselves for God and take God out and put themselves in as his substitute and all of human reality is completely and utterly changed and fallen because of it and how does God save

[39 : 20] God the son of God substitutes himself for you and for me and bears the punishment and the penalty that you and I could not bear ourselves in his death upon the cross I told you you've been very well behaved told you at the beginning I would try to return as I draw to a close with what happened to Bobby the parents that I told you about their four year old son it's now been diagnosed that he doesn't have a hearing problem but a degenerative brain disease very very very very rare which means that he'll never learn to talk he'll die at the latest in his early teens and they're profound Christians what does this story tell us and why what could be their hope in the face of such tragedy it doesn't mean it's going to be easy for them it's going to be very very very hard but first of all it helps them to understand and it should help us to all understand how profoundly of great value any human being is that God the son of God would die for them that's why you share the

gospel with the most broken street person because they have a value that Christ died for them it's why you share the gospel with

Justin Trudeau or the owner of Amazon or Windows they have a value and you see that and it can be it will be a very comfort for them as they deal with their handicapped son to remember that this is something this child of theirs is someone of great value the second thing is because in fact the resurrection validates the fact we can believe that it's true that Jesus' death was a substitute because the resurrection validates it and validates the scriptures and the resurrection is a mighty miracle so they and you can pray for a miracle there's nothing wrong with praying for a miracle but at the end of the day even if God does not grant the miracle he Bobby in the new heaven and the new earth will be completely whole with a well functioning brain the final word of him through the resurrection of Jesus the death of Jesus upon the cross and his resurrection the final word about him is not a child that can't even speak with an incurable disease the final word about him is resurrection because of what Jesus has done for him on the cross and that can be your final word too because the fact that you died is not nearly as important as the fact that

Christ died for you and the story of your life is not nearly as significant as the story of Jesus which is why when we gather on a Sunday morning the significance of reminding us once again and once again the old story of Jesus and his love for you and his death upon the cross in your place as your substitute the means by which you were made right and to know that story is to begin to enter into his story and have his story give your story meaning and the end of the story in him is resurrection please stand if you're here if you're listening to this and you've never given your life to Jesus there's no time better than now to just say Jesus I need a substitute I now know that and I my life is a mess and my story is a mess and I don't know I have any value but now I understand that I have so much value that you would die on the cross in my place for me and so

Jesus be my savior and my lord be my savior and my lord come into my life and never let me go and father Christ Jesus help me now to so understand your story that the story of my life is changed both in the present and the past and the future there's no better time than that than now to pray that prayer and for each of us we can be reminded once again Jesus help me to remember that your death is more important for me to remember than the fact that I will die I want to remember I will die but help me know that you died and may your story be the story by which I start to understand the meaning of my story and the direction for the rest of my story there's no better time than now to call out to God for that let's pray Jesus we thank you that you died for us we ask that you help us to remember that we will die but help us to remember even more important that's vastly more important to remember that you died for us and father we want to understand the meaning of our lives and we know that you want us to understand the meaning of our lives so father help us to understand the meaning of our lives in light of the story of Jesus and so re-understand our past and our present and re-plot our future in light of the story of Jesus his death upon the cross for me and for my loved ones for the world and we ask this in the name of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit and all God's people said Amen