

# Sin for Us

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Last week we approached the cross of Christ and we heard the account from John's Gospel of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

We took a little time at least to survey the wondrous cross. We saw that it was planned, that it had been prophesied about long ago, and that rather than being a tragic end to some kind of unsuccessful ministry, it was in fact the successful accomplishment of what God had sent Jesus to be.

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. A Passover sacrifice whose blood saves us from the judgment.

And why was it so? Why did God do this? And there is a wonderful one word answer. Love. Love.

[ 1 : 2 2 ]     As John's Gospel tells us, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. And that gave includes his being lifted up on the cross to take away our sins.

It was love that led to the cross. Love for us. Love for people who desperately need a saviour.

And we also noted that all four Gospels, each one, builds up to the crucifixion. And that time seems to slow down as Jesus' death approaches.

And so that focus of all of the Gospels on the cross should show us that it's very important, that it's crucial to the Christian message.

And we also noted that the Church is to preach Christ crucified. The Son of God's self-sacrifice for sinners at Golgotha or Calvary is the ground of the Gospel and the centre of the Church's life and witness on earth.

[ 2 : 3 5 ]     Why do we always go on about the cross and Christ's death? Because it's a saving death. That death saves people. It's what brings them their salvation.

Jesus Christ came to save sinners. And his death was crucial to accomplishing that salvation. Again, to quote what we were drawing from earlier from John's Gospel, to continue John 3.16, saying that whosoever believes in him will not perish, but will have everlasting life.

That's what the cross accomplishes. His death brings life. And so now we're going to consider some of the ways in which the death of Christ saves sinners.

We're holding up a brilliant diamond to the light and we're turning it slowly in our hand, seeking something new and wonderful in each facet as we turn it of what God has done for us in Christ and in Christ crucified.

And in the coming weeks, our prayer is that our appreciation of the cross will be deepened. And that this in turn will enrich both our walk with the Lord and our witness to the world as individuals, each one of us, but also as a congregation as a whole.

[ 4 : 04 ] And that opening hymn that we sang, Man of Sorrows, What a Name, speaks of the first aspect that we're going to consider specifically. The words, in my place, condemned he stood, gets to the heart of the idea of substitution that we see in the cross of Christ.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was called the Prince of Preachers in the 19th century. He preached at a church called the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Elephant and Castle in London, which is still going strong.

And he had a very long and fruitful ministry there. And he said this, The whole pith and marrow of Christianity lies in the doctrine of substitution.

The way of salvation is by Christ becoming a substitute for guilty man. And that's what Spurgeon said. So what is a substitute?

Well, we know the term, don't we? It's familiar to us in some areas of life, but a substitute is essentially one who stands in place of another.

[ 5 : 17 ] Or in the case of the cross, it's one standing in the place of many. So often when we see a substitution, it's one for one, isn't it? Like in football, one player would come off and another would come on instead of him.

That's a substitution. But it can also be one on behalf of many people. And as we'll see, this is multitudes of people that the one stands in place of.

Jesus declared that he had come to give his life as a ransom for many. That's why he came. And that's in Matthew chapter 20 and verse 28.

And also in Mark's gospel, chapter 10 and verse 45. But why is it necessary for one to stand in our place in order for us to be saved from our sins?

Why can't God just say, forget about it? Yes, you've sinned, but that's all water under the bridge. Let's just move on with our lives and pretend nothing ever happened.

[ 6 : 24 ] Well, that's a very good question. It's a good question to ask, isn't it? We might be wondering that. When we look at the cross in particular and we see Jesus in agony, we might think, why did it have to be this way, Lord?

So it's good for us to think as to why it all lies in God's amazing, God's glorious, God's perfect character. And one of the most striking revelations of God's character is in the book of Exodus in chapter 34 and verses 6 and 7.

If you really want to see, well, who is God? What is God like? What's his character like? This is where he reveals himself to Moses in a special way.

Moses, he'd seen so much of God by this point. He'd met with God in the burning bush. He'd been on the top of Mount Sinai, but you know he wanted more.

He said, show me your glory. That's amazing, isn't it? He'd seen a lot of God, but he wanted more. That should fuel us too, shouldn't it?

[ 7 : 35 ] We might have seen a lot of God's work in our lives, in this community and in our church, but we want to see more, don't we? We want to dare with Moses to say, show me your glory. And he said that.

And what happened was that God hid him in the cleft of a rock because to see God's glory, as it were, full on, it would be too much for him to take. And God was so kind, so he hid him in the cleft of a rock and, as it were, held his hand over him and passed by.

But God's glory is seen not just in whatever was revealed visually there. God revealed his glory by declaring his name and then telling Moses about himself.

So we read this in Exodus chapter 34 and verses 6 and 7. And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.

He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. That's a very important insight into God's character.

- [ 9 : 10 ]     God will forgive sin. That's what he's saying there. Compassionate, gracious, abounding in love, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. But what comes immediately after that, in the same breath, if you like, he will not leave the guilty unpunished.
- So God is merciful and God is just. These aren't opposites or tensions in God. They're both wonderful, glorious, good things.
- He's merciful and he is just. So how then will God forgive sinners? Well, it can't be then in just saying forget about it.
- It's all water under the bridge because wickedness is bad. And God's justice says, well, that has to be punished. So how will God forgive sinners?
- The answer is in a substitute. The answer is through substitution. Someone else must willingly have our guilt reckoned to them.
- [ 10 : 20 ]     And as the guilty party, be punished that we might be forgiven and go free. The punishment must be death.
- In the garden, the first humans were told that if they sinned against God, they would surely die. Sin brings death. Sin brought death into the world and it's sin that keeps death in the world.
- The soul that sins shall die, God says in Ezekiel chapter 18 and verse 4. The wages of sin is death, says Paul in Romans chapter 6 and verse 23.
- And so if the substitute is to pay the penalty for sin and satisfy that justice that will not leave the guilty unpunished, he must die.
- The idea of sin and guilt being transferred onto a substitute. Because we might think, well, how can one other pay the price for someone else's sin?
- [ 11 : 33 ]     This idea, though, is brought out fully in the scriptures. And we see it very vividly portrayed in the Old Testament sacrifices.
- Yes, all the sacrifices in the tabernacle and the sacrifices at the temple. The priest confessed the sins of the whole people over the animal.
- And he put his hands on its head before it was slain. Or as well, in the case of the Day of Atonement, that happened.
- But in the Day of Atonement, what also happened was the sins of the people were symbolically transferred onto an animal, a goat, a scapegoat. Which was not slain, but it would go outside the camp and far away, it would be led far away out into the wilderness.
- Bearing away the sins of the people to outside the camp to say sin has been removed. We can now live God and his people together in harmony.
- [ 12 : 46 ]     All of these rituals were a powerful picture of what Christ, the real substitute, would come to do.
- Because the writer to the Hebrews tells us that these sacrifices in themselves were not really effectual. They allowed God to, in his forbearance, overlook the sin and point forward to how this sin was actually going to be removed.
- Because the writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 9 and verse 22, Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. Yet, in chapter 10 and verse 4, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.
- So we see these were pictures then, weren't they? Very vivid pictures. Imagine the scene, or the scenes, year after year, day after day.

Day of atonement after day of atonement, as animal after animal. The sins are confessed, they're laid symbolically on the head of that animal, and the animal is slain, and the blood is sprinkled on the altar, but also on the day of atonement, over that gold covering, the mercy seat over the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone.

[ 14 : 14 ] Very vivid. But it's in Isaiah, and I invite you to turn there now, Isaiah chapter 53, that we really vividly see the one whose blood will, will take away sins.

So if the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins, they're clearly pointing towards a sacrifice which will take away sin, and which won't be repeated over and over and over again, but will be once and for all, it will be final.

And so when we come to especially this section, verse 4 to 6, it goes on though, but this will give us at least something of the clear picture of a substitute taking sins that aren't his upon himself and incurring the death penalty for them.

Verse 4. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

[ 15 : 45 ] We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

One of the most moving depictions of Calvary then, it was written some 700 years before the event itself took place.

Again, we see this was God's plan. We see then so clearly in the he and us, yes, we see that so many times, the he and us and the him and ours, he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. How a loving, forgiving, and just God sent his own beloved son, who himself went willingly and lovingly to the cross, to be the one who bears the death penalty for us.

For sinners, for those who, like sheep, have all gone astray because of the substitute sacrifice once and for all.

[ 17 : 05 ] We have a full and a free pardon. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

That is very good news. And you see in that the wisdom of God, how because of his mercy and his justice, this was the way that he decreed that sin would be dealt with.

And it was at a personal cost to Christ, not to us. He didn't ask for one of us, you know, to come forward as a sacrifice.

One reason being, of course, that that wouldn't have worked. It wouldn't have been acceptable. We see in the sacrifices in the Old Testament scriptures, having to be without blemish, that that's pointing to the fact that the sacrifice, the substitute, has to be himself, sinless.

And therefore, be able to take sin upon himself. And none of us could do that. But even if it were just one man, that even in itself wouldn't be enough.

[ 18 : 16 ] How can, we were talking before, how can one stand in the place of the many? Not just one for one, but one for the many. That's because this is no ordinary man.

This is one who is true man and true God. He is God's own beloved son. And so his death is of infinite worth.

It can cover the sins of multitudes, but beyond numbering. And that therein lies the perfection and the divine wisdom of this way of salvation.

Which we reminded ourselves as well on Sunday, that it forbids us from boasting in ourselves. And instead we boast only in the Lord and glory in the Lord and we boast in the cross.

Because it's all been done for us. And Paul really gets to the heart of this. God willing, we'll come to this when we're continuing in Romans. But in Romans chapter 5 and verse 8 says this, how this substitution opens up something to us.

[ 19 : 28 ] Because it's amazing in and of itself, isn't it? That another would willingly take all our guilt upon himself and be punished for it so that we could be free.

And the guilt is no longer on us. It's reckoned to him. But believe it or not, that's just the beginning. Paul says this, it's amazing what he says in Romans chapter 5.

God demonstrates, again, the reason was love. God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

[ 20 : 32 ] Isn't that glorious? God loved us so much while we were yet sinners that Jesus took this substitutionary role. Therefore, now that we have been reconciled, now that the sin has been dealt with, as far as east is from the west, our sins have been borne away.

They're dealt with. No condemnation for those who are now in Christ Jesus. This opens up to us now, life in Christ. Now that we have been reconciled, there are all these blessings and mercies and joys which flow from now being accepted of God and being adopted into his own family.

Just countless joys every day from now being able to walk in close fellowship with the Lord day by day. And again, that's something that I hope we'll be able to draw out and touch on in coming weeks, is the blessings that come to us through the cross, through that substitutionary death.

As Peter, the apostle Peter, who, remember at one time, just couldn't listen, wouldn't hear of it that his master was going to go and die on a cross. Well, of course, like many of us, it took a while for it all to register and for it all to sink in.

There's a lot to the gospel, isn't there? But he got it and he wrote in his first letter in chapter 3 and verse 18, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

[ 22 : 12 ] But it's not just so that all our sins are cancelled and then that's it. We just turn over a new leaf maybe and go and blot our copybook all over again or it doesn't really change our lives.

The purpose was to bring us to God and now we know God. We're in a real relationship with God through that blood shed on the cross. That's amazing.

And that's what we were made for. We were made to have a relationship with God. He made us in his image so that we would have the greatest blessing of anything in all creation, which was to actually know him in a special way that none of the rest of his creatures can.

And that's what this substitution does. It gets us back into relationship with God so that we can know him. And knowing God, when we really get a sense of what that brings us, the blessings that brings us, the joy that brings us, is what we were made for and therefore it's what gives us our greatest joy.

I'll just close again with Spurgeon where he says this in his autobiography. Spurgeon says this, I've always considered that the sum and substance of the gospel lies in the word substitution.

[ 23 : 35 ] Christ standing in the stead of man. If I understand the gospel, it is this, I deserve to be lost forever. The only reason why I should not be damned is that Christ was punished in my stead and there is no need to execute a sentence twice for sin.

On the other hand, I know I cannot enter heaven unless I have a perfect righteousness. I am absolutely certain that I shall never have one of my own for I find I sin every day.

But then Christ had a perfect righteousness and he said, There, poor sinner, take my garment, put it on and you shall stand before God as if you were Christ and I will stand before God as if I had been the sinner.

I will suffer in the sinner's stead and you shall be rewarded for works which you did not do but which I did for you. I find it, he says, very convenient every day to come to Christ as a sinner as I came at the first.

Our sins on him, his righteousness on us, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood. that is the substitutionary aspect of the cross and you can see how crucial it is and how glorious it is.

[ 25 : 08 ] Truly we can say, Hallelujah, what a saviour.