

Our Sin for His Righteousness

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. This morning is a little bit different. We just finished our summer series in the Psalms. Next week, Lord willing, we plan to pick up right where we left off in the book of Daniel.

Next week with Daniel chapter 7. And so here in the middle, I have the rare opportunity to just pick a passage, pick a verse, and preach on whatever I feel like preaching on, which is not normally how we do things. I want you to know if you're visiting with us, our typical pattern is to preach through books of the Bible. And this is actually harder for me to open this book and select a passage to preach. But what I picked this morning was a verse that is beautiful to me. It's a verse that I would encourage each of you to commit to memory.

Hopefully you know it already. If you have children, grandchildren, I would encourage you to teach it to your children. Teach it to your grandchildren. Teach it to yourself and to your own heart. Repeat it to yourself often. And that verse is 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21. And so if you would, please take your Bibles and open them up. I know it's just one verse, but I encourage you to have your Bibles open this morning to 2 Corinthians 5 21. If you don't have your own Bible with you this morning, that's okay. There's Bibles there in the seat backs in front of you for you to use.

If you don't have a Bible at all, you're welcome and encouraged to take that Bible home with you as our gift to you on one condition. You let me know you took it so that we can help you, connect you with somebody who can help you to read it and understand it.

So 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21. And when you found that, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's word this morning. Amen. For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Let's pray. Lord, it's a glorious verse, a glorious truth that it communicates.

[2 : 1 0] And so we pray now as we plunge the depths of the beauty and the glory of the gospel. Lord, would you teach us again? Maybe for the first time, if this is our first time understanding these words and hearing these words, Lord, would you draw us to new faith in Christ?

And for us who believe, Lord, would you refresh our hearts this morning with the beauty of your glory and the gospel of your Son? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated.

One of my favorite books growing up was a story about a young boy who was an orphan. And by all accounts, at the beginning of the book at least, the boy was an ordinary kid. He was 11 years old, living with his aunt and uncle. Apparently, according to his aunt and uncle, his parents had died in a car crash when the boy was just a baby. And so now the boy lives with his aunt and uncle, and his aunt and uncle are left reluctantly caring for him. But it becomes very clear very quickly they didn't really want him in the house. They didn't want to care for him. They didn't really care much for him at all.

In fact, they despised the boy. He spent 11 years sleeping in a small closet under the stairs, eating whatever scraps his aunt and uncle would give him. It became very clear very fast that this young boy was hated. His entire identity was as a hated, hopeless orphan, as a miserable life. But then, something happens. It changes everything. And the boy receives a letter inviting him to come to a school that he didn't even know existed. In fact, he had never even received a piece of mail before. But he received this piece of mail. He could hardly believe it. And it's inviting him to come to this school. But it's no ordinary school. In fact, it's a magical school.

In a magical world that he didn't even know existed, completely unlike anything he had ever dreamed of. And one of my favorite parts of the book was when someone who belonged to this magical school, this magical world, comes and he begins to explain what it is and why the boy needs to come. And he shares that his parents, in fact, did not die in a car crash, as his aunt and uncle had told him, but rather that they had died sacrificing themselves for him. They had given their lives as a substitute in his place. And as the man shares all of this for the first time, you begin

to realize that you begin to see this boy begin to understand his true identity. And to understand that he actually belonged to an entirely different world, a better world. And to see that there might be hope for him to leave this terrible existence behind and to come and be a part of something infinitely, unimaginably greater. And if leaving that terrible world behind wasn't good enough, it actually gets even better than that. The man takes the boy to go buy his school supplies. And I love this moment when the boy realizes, he says, I don't have any money. How am I supposed to buy my supplies? And how am I supposed to be able to afford going to school? And the man looks almost surprised by this. And he says, well, don't you think your parents left you anything? And he takes him to the bank and he opens up a vault. And the boy just stares in awe and disbelief at piles and piles and mounds and mounds of gold and silver. More money than this boy had ever dreamed of in his entire life. Just piles and piles of riches and treasure. And the man looks at the boy and he says, it's all yours. That book would go on to sell over 120 million copies, making it the fourth best-selling book of all time. And I think it's easy to see why there is an irresistible appeal in a story of hope for a new world. There is an irresistible appeal in a story of hope, the dream of leaving everything behind that is bad and wrong and broken and going instead to something glorious and beyond our wildest dreams. And the reason why I think stories like this are so successful and why we love stories like this is because I believe that these make-believe stories tap into the truth of the real story of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of hope for a new world. It's a message of hope to leave behind what is lost and broken and sad and to receive instead the riches of a new identity all because of someone else's sacrifice for our sake. And the best news of all is that this gospel is not a work of fiction. This is real life. This is what we believe. This is why we're here this morning. And so this morning in 2 Corinthians 5:21, what I want to do is I want to explore the glories of this wonderful message this morning. I want to unpack for us the truth of the gospel and I want us to see it in three parts this morning. If you're taking notes, we try to make it easy for you to follow along with an outline. Three parts to this gospel story. The gospel we'll see is God's story. It's his plan.

[7:38] To send a substitute, point number two, for our sake, point number three. It's God's story, his plan, to send a substitute for our sake. First, first, we need to understand that the gospel is God's story. We got to get this straight first and foremost. The gospel is God's story. God is the author of the gospel. It is his plan. In the Bible, it begins with the words in Genesis chapter 1 verse 1, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He created all things. He is before all things. All things exist for him. If there is a gospel message, if there is a gospel story, it's because God himself has authored it. He is the author of the gospel. When did he come up with it? We're told before the ages began. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world. Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 1. He says the gospel is according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time. The gospel is not a choose-your-own-adventure story. I used to enjoy reading those when I was a kid as well, where the choices you make within the story, you go to a different page, and the outcome, the ending, is different based on what chapter you choose, what choices you make as you read the story.

No, there's a different ending based on the different decisions we make. The gospel is God's plan, eternal plan, not in response to anything we've done, not in anticipation of anything we might do, not as a plan B, because plan A didn't go as he expected it to go. The gospel is God's eternal plan from before the ages began. And that truth ought to comfort us, church, to know that the end is already written. God is not ad-libbing the gospel story. He's not writing it as he goes. He's not quite sure where it might end. The end is already written. In fact, we can go to the end of the story in the book of Revelation. I can spoil the ending of the world for you if we turn to the book of Revelation. We can see how the story ends. Let me tell you, Jesus returns. Jesus conquers his enemies. Jesus delivers his people. Jesus establishes his eternal kingdom. And we who belong to him get to enjoy the glory of God for the rest of eternity. That's good news, church. And that ending is not up for decision. It's not up for grabs. It's not up for negotiation. The ending of the story is 100% certain. Why? Because God authored it before the foundation of the world. The gospel is his eternal plan. And so everything that happens in between these two bookends of the word of God, God created and come Lord Jesus, everything that happens here in the middle is the unveiling, the revealing, the unfolding of a beautiful story developing in real time, being revealed in human history with God as its sovereign author and Christ's sacrifice at the very center of it all.

And we see this here in the first part of our verse, 2 Corinthians 5:21. What does it say? For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. He made him, who are we talking about? He, God, made him, Christ, to be sin. Him who knew no sin, the perfect Jesus who knew no sin so that in Jesus we, who are sinful beyond our wildest dreams, we might become the very righteousness of God. This was his plan. Which means, as awful and as terrible and as dark as that moment of crucifixion, the most evil moment in the history of mankind, the crucifixion of Christ, as dark as that moment is, even in that moment, it went exactly according to plan. Exactly as God designed it for good. So we can ask the question, well, who sent Jesus to the cross? Who sent Jesus to the cross? One correct way to answer that question is to say, well, sinful man sent Jesus to the cross. The Jews schemed to send Jesus to the cross. The Romans executed Jesus on the cross and they were wrong to do so. They are responsible and it was a sinful decision for them to do so. That's one correct way to answer that question. But another correct way to answer that question, who sent Jesus to the cross, is to say God sent Jesus to the cross. God planned this execution. God made him to be sin and he was gracious and good and right to do so.

And Peter says as much in his sermon at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, he says this, He says, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Did you hear both parts? Who sent Jesus to the cross? Sinful man, the hands of lawless men, exactly as God planned it. We read this morning from Isaiah chapter 53, one of the clearest Old Testament prophecies about the suffering and death of Jesus written about 700 years before Jesus was even born. You know, one more reason why we can have confidence that this is God's story is that he told us exactly how it would go 700 years before it happened. What did it say?

[13:53] Surely he has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord, the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Verse 10, it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

He has put him to grief. Does that sound familiar to you? He made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Before we take one step further, we have to understand Jesus' death is not a tragic accident of history. Jesus' death is the central focal point of God's eternal plan for our sake, for our redemption, for his glory. The gospel is God's story. It's God's plan.

So what's the plan? Point number two. What's the plan? Second, the gospel is God's plan to send a substitute.

To send a substitute. Let's talk about Jesus. For our sake, he made him, Jesus, to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him, in Jesus, we might become the righteousness of God.

[15:32] There's a swap happening here. Do you hear it? There's a transaction taking place. Some have called this the great exchange. There's a trade taking place here. What's the trade? It's the worst trade in the history of mankind. What's the trade? It is his perfect righteousness for our sin. His glory for our shame. His perfection for our imperfection. His status as a son of God for our status as children of wrath. At the very heart of the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ has come as a substitute in our place. What does that mean? We all know what a substitute is, don't we? We use that language in everyday life. We talked about this in Sunday school just a few weeks ago. Cindy said, when I used to teach, if I got sick or I went on vacation and I couldn't be in the classroom, I had to get a substitute. What is that? It's someone to take her place. Someone to stand where she used to stand. Someone to perform the functions that she was supposed to function. A substitute to take her place.

If you play sports or watch sports, you know that only a certain amount of people are allowed on the field at a time, but if somebody gets hurt or somebody gets tired or somebody's not playing too well that day, guess what? Somebody from the bench comes in as a substitute. They take the place of somebody else. We do this in cooking. Those of you who cook, if you have ingredients, you might not have what you had, what you thought you had in the fridge, and you get a substitute ingredient. I tried to make waffles this week, and normally I do pretty good, but I tried to make waffles yesterday morning, and I realized about halfway through, I had accidentally substituted brownie mix for the waffle mix.

But the boys enjoyed it. It was fine. They did just all right. That was a bad substitution. The gospel is God's eternal plan to send Jesus as the perfect substitute in our place to take the place of sinners. This is God's plan. This is called substitutionary atonement.

You might have heard that phrase before. It's maybe an intimidating phrase. I don't know, but I think it's one that we need to know, one that we need to understand. Substitutionary atonement is at the very center of the gospel. Our sin needs to be atoned for. What does that mean? It means that our sin has earned the wrath of God. The wrath of God is against us and our sin. We have to have something happen for that wrath to be averted from us. In the Old Testament, we had sacrifices. The system where the priesthood would offer up sacrifices, and a lamb or a bull or a goat would take the place, would stand in the gap, would serve as a substitute for the people. And on that substitute, the sin of the people would be laid so that that substitute would bear the wrath of God instead of them. As a substitution in their place. That was never the plan that would last forever. The plan of God was to one day send a perfect substitute. One who knew no sin. One who would endure with his sacrifice for the people of

God forever. Who would live perfectly as we should have lived, but have all failed. And then he would go to the cross. He would suffer. He would die a terrible, physical, agonizing death. But not only a physical death, he would in that moment bear the wrath of God. Bear the weight of our sin and our guilt. He would take our place. He would be our substitute. Jesus Christ on the cross bore the fullness of the wrath of God against our sin. We have to understand this is at the very heart of the gospel. The cross of Jesus Christ is not just a good example. It's not just a motivating story. It's not just an expression of love.

[20 : 00] It's not just a heroic moment that we continue to talk about. The cross of Christ is a substitution. Him for us. Our sin deserves God's wrath and so either it comes upon us or we get a substitute to take our place. Again, this is what Isaiah told us. You remember this passage, Isaiah 53.

He has borne our griefs. He's carried our sorrows. Do you hear that? He was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. With his wounds, we are healed. That is substitutionary atonement. And if it sounds like I'm driving that point home, church, I am. We have to get this right. This glorious doctrine has come under attack in recent years. Many call it just a theory of the atonement.

There are other theories of what Christ has done. Famously in 2012, a hymnal committee from a denomination that has embraced theological liberalism wanted to include the hymn in Christ alone in their hymnal. We just sang that song, In Christ Alone, My Hope is Found. But they took issue with the lyrics and so they sent message to Keith Getty and Stuart Townend and they asked them if they could just make a minor tweak to the words. Here's what they wanted it to say. The original goes like this. It says, Till on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied. We're just saying that.

[21 : 42] Till on the cross, as Jesus died, God's wrath was satisfied. And the hymnal committee wanted to change those words, slight tweak for it to say this. Till on that cross, as Jesus died, the love of God was magnified. Subtle change, isn't it? True, isn't it?

The love of God is magnified at the cross of Christ. Of course it is. God demonstrates His love for us in this, that Christ Jesus died for us while we were still sinners. Jesus died for us.

But here's what we have to understand, church. We cannot fully know God's love unless Christ fully bears God's wrath. We cannot fully know God's love for us unless Jesus Christ bears God's wrath that is against us in our sin. There has to be a substitution. If Christ doesn't bear God's wrath, God's wrath is coming for us, not His love. But because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, God made us alive together with Christ. God made Him to be sin for our sake, Him who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. This is a substitution at the cross. Jesus became the object of God's wrath, so that in Him we might become the objects of God's love. Jesus was rejected that we might be accepted. Jesus was put to death that we might be brought to life. That's substitution. That's the gospel, church. If we get this wrong, we get the gospel wrong. If we get the gospel wrong, we are not Christians. Gettie and Townsend said, no.

You cannot change those lyrics. On the cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God is satisfied. For every sin on Him was laid. Here in the death of Christ I live. There's another word that we need to

understand as we think about the cross, and it's the word imputation. It's another big theological word, but again, I think it's one that we need to understand. Imputation is simply crediting. Crediting. We credit in our imputation all of our sin with all of the guilt and all of the death. Everything that our sin has earned, it is credited. It is imputed. It is given to Jesus Christ. All of it is given to Him. He receives it in full.

He is made to be sin for us, and because of this, we who are in Him are forgiven. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sin from us. This is incredible news. There is forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. He takes it from us. Whatever it is that you have done, whatever it is the sin that you're struggling with right now, whatever you might have walked in yesterday, or this weekend, or last week, or this year, whatever evil deeds, whatever impure thoughts, whatever ways you have dishonored God in your life, you may be forgiven of it completely if you are in Christ Jesus. That's good news.

[25 : 23] It's good news for sinful people like me and like you. But church, that's only half of the equation. It gets even better than this. C.R. Wiley, he says this. He says, most Christians are familiar with salvation as accounting, but they think in terms of single imputation. They think that our sins have been imputed to Christ, and that's why He died on the cross, so that He could pay for them. But that's where it stops for them. They think that Christ's death has left them with a zero balance. Church, that couldn't be further from the truth. The good news of the gospel is that not only is our sin removed from us, but His righteousness is credited to us by faith. There is a double crediting, a double imputation that happens at the cross of Christ. He takes all of our sin, all of our death, all of our guilt, all of the wrath of God against us, and guess what we get? Life, forgiveness, hope, freedom, and all the riches of the righteousness of God. How righteous is God, church? How perfect is God? How holy is God? How pure is God?

God is light in Him. There is no darkness at all. We don't only receive a piece of His righteousness. What does He say? We become the very righteousness of God. If you're in Christ, when God looks at you, He sees perfection. He sees His own holiness. He sees His own righteousness, not based on any good deeds you've done, but because of the perfect righteousness of Christ credited to your account by faith.

This is good news. I'll give you one more example. One more example. I know some of you are baseball fans. There have been 320 no-hitters in baseball history, and only 20 of them are combined no-hitters.

It is what it sounds like, where more than one pitcher combines to pitch a no-hitter. It's incredibly rare, only 20. It basically never happens. Here's my favorite one. On June 23, 1917, Babe Ruth and Ernie Shore combined for a no-hitter. Babe Ruth was pitching for the Boston Red Sox at the time, and he took the mound.

First thing he did was he walked the lead-off batter, Washington Senator's second baseman, Ray Morgan. Apparently, he did not agree with the umpire's decisions, his calls, and so he proceeded to argue until Babe Ruth got so mad that he charged off the mound, and he proceeded to start punching the umpire in the head.

[28 : 29] Obviously, Babe Ruth was ejected from the ballgame. His day was over, and guess what happened? Ernie Shore came in. A substitute was put on the mound, and Ernie Shore went on, entered into Babe Ruth's place, and he proceeded to retire the next 26 batters after he caught Ray Morgan trying to steal second base.

Ernie Shore, all by himself, pitched a no-hitter. The one who should have been on the mound, you following me? Babe Ruth contributed absolutely nothing to the cause.

He walked a man. He made a fool of himself. He punched an umpire, and he got himself sent out of the ballpark, took a seat on the bench. But his substitute, Ernie Shore, did it all.

Listen to this, church. When you dig through the archives of baseball history and you read through the list of all the no-hitters, guess what you'll see? June 23, 1917, the names of Babe Ruth and Ernie Shore are forever listed together.

Why? Because Ruth was credited with the work of a perfect substitute. And so it is with us.

[29 : 48] In this illustration, we are Babe Ruth Church. We have contributed absolutely nothing. But by the grace of God, because of the work of an extraordinary substitute, God sees our name right next to Jesus'.

His perfect accomplishment is credited to us. His perfect righteousness is credited to us. His perfection is credited to us.

This is the gospel. This is God's plan. To send a substitute. To live and to die and to rise for our sake.

Which is our final point this morning. Third. The gospel is for our sake. For our sake.

He made him to be sin. Who knew no sin. So that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.

[30 : 51] You know, maybe the most incredible part of all of this, church, is that it is for us. And it's all right there. For the taking. It is for us.

It's not from us. It's God's plan. It's not because of us. It's all of his grace. It's not ultimately about us. It's about him and his glory. But it is truly for us.

For our good. For our joy. For our salvation. For our benefit. It is for our sake. Paul gives similar language just a few chapters later.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 8. He says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That though he was rich. Yet for your sake. He became poor.

So that you by his poverty might become rich. It's for your sake. For your good. It is for us.

[31 : 50] And so let me just tell you a couple wrong ways to respond to this message this morning. One wrong way is to say, Not for me. It's to reject what you've heard.

I don't really believe any of that. Jesus living perfectly. God writing the story of salvation. Jesus rising from the grave. His perfection for my sin.

I don't believe any of it. It's not for me. That's wrong response number one. Wrong response number two might be a little bit more common though. It's to believe this.

But not personally. It's to believe it like you might read a story in the newspaper about a man who dies for his bride. It might motivate you.

It might be moving emotionally. It might encourage you. You might have some emotional reaction to that story. But it really doesn't have any impact on you, does it? Just reading that story in the newspaper doesn't make any difference whatsoever in your day-to-day life.

[32 : 53] When you go home tomorrow, you go to work tomorrow, you go home this afternoon, that newspaper story doesn't impact your life at all. Ultimately, if you respond to the gospel like this, you are not saved.

We cannot respond to the gospel like this. We must understand and believe with all of our heart that what Jesus has done, he has done for me.

For his bride. For his people. That he took my sin upon himself. Every single act of rebellion in my life against God.

Every single impure thought. Every word. Every evil intention of my heart. Things I'm aware of. Things I have no idea of. The depth of my sin. He took my sin upon himself.

He died the death that I deserve. He bore the wrath of God that was against me. We shouldn't be confused by this transaction language to think that this is impersonal in any way.

[33 : 56] It must be deeply personal. What Jesus has done, he has done for you. For my sake. He made him to be sin. So that in him, I might become the righteousness of God.

You must read yourself into this verse and believe it with faith. That God has done this for you. We sometimes sing the song, how deep the Father's love for us.

Behold the man upon a cross. My sin upon his shoulders. Ashamed I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held him there until it was accomplished.

His dying breath has brought me life. I know that it is finished. Church, could you sing that song and mean it with all your heart this morning?

Do you really believe that all that God has done in Christ, that he has done for your sake? The gospel message is good news that demands a response.

[35 : 06] And that response is twofold. It's repentance and faith. So what does that look like? Repentance. Would you turn from your sin? Turn from your idols. Turn from your false gods.

Turn from your bad habits and your addictions. Turn from your life of dishonoring God. And turn to him in faith. Would you respond to this message of the gospel this morning by saying, I believe that Jesus has done this for me.

And that what he has done is sufficient for my salvation. Would you abandon any sense of self-sufficiency, any sense of earning God's favor, any sense of working your way up the ladder to God, and would you put your faith entirely in the substitute who came to live perfectly in your place?

The gospel is a glorious message, church, of hope for a new world. And the incredible joy of leaving behind what is lost and broken and receiving the riches of a new identity, all because of someone else's work and sacrifice in our place.

And the best news of all, church, is that this message is not a work of fiction. It's very real. For our sake, he made him who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[36 : 31] Let's pray. Lord, this gospel message is greater than we can possibly dream.

That all of our sin, all of our guilt, all of our shame can be taken away in an instant, Lord, by faith in the perfect substitute who you sent for us, for our salvation.

Lord, we pray for any here who do not know you, who have not yet put their faith in that substitute.

God, would you lead them to do so right now? And Father, for the rest of us, Father, those who have been brought into fellowship with you through the blood of your Son, God, we pray that we would be revived again to worship you for the glories of the gospel.

We love you, Lord. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.