

The Sin Substitute

Friends, this past Sunday we were reminded how important it is that we understand human beings don't just have any old relationship with God, but that we have a covenant relationship with God – and nowhere is this more important to understand than when we are remembering and reflecting upon the death of Jesus on Good Friday.

So tonight as we have listened to the gospel of Mark describe the events which led Jesus to his crucifixion, and the suffering he endured on the cross, my goal is to keep all this in the Covenant Framework so that we come away with an increased faith and trust in Jesus... in addition to a sober appreciation of what exactly was involved in securing an unbreakable new covenant relationship with God for us.

Because we do not want to place our faith in our own sentiment and emotional response, our faith needs to be in Jesus.

However in witnessing what our Savior endured to achieve our salvation, the Holy Spirit will give us love and gratitude and the thankfulness.... And this is important as well because it infuses our faith in Christ with passion!

And indeed friends our Lord was passionate as well – since the measure of passion is what you are willing to suffer for that which you love.

And tonight we need to remember that Jesus was willing to suffer the shame and degradation of becoming Sin in order to create the New Covenant for us, as the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Cor 5:21 - *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

So what does it mean that “Christ became Sin?”

Well to understand what this is referring to we need to go back to the Covenant of Law in Leviticus 16:20-22. Listen to what is described here, it says:

“When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹ He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.

This was the part of the Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement sacrifices and cleansing rituals and the scapegoat symbolized how God would remove the sin of his people and get rid of it – it was taken away... gone

The Day of Atonement was like a ctr/alt/del Covenant relationship reboot.

Any violations of the Covenant were now considered off the official record.

It would be like having all the speeding tickets, all the driving offences and fender benders expunged from your driving record – gone...

Or better yet – think of all those things which we’ve done which have hurt those who are close to us, the things we regret, or the things which we are ashamed of...

While those who we have wronged may have forgiven us for those offences – in many ways they often linger between us, right?

We call them the scars of the past, the water under the bridge, the painful memories we avoid, and the elephants in the room we don’t talk about.

We may be forgiven and things have moved on... but as they say we can’t undo what’s been done.

But when Christ becomes Sin for us – when God lays upon him all the violations of the old covenant like they used to do with

the scapegoat - and all the upcoming violations we will inevitably commit under the new Covenant... what's been done, or will be done - is actually undone!

Friends Jesus became Sin, so he could take our sin **away**, so he could remove it, not just forgive it! It's actually gone – there is no record of it!

This is why King David wrote in Ps 103:12 *“as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”*

And the prophet Jeremiah spoke of a time that would come where God would *“Forgive their wickedness and will **remember their sins no more.**”* (Jer 31:34)

That's good news! But how does Jesus become Sin?

While Jesus' death paid for all the offences under prior Covenant administrations and simultaneously sealed a new

and unbreakable Covenant, to become Sin and remove it from God's sight it was necessary for him to die **on a cross**.

Now in the 2000 years since Good Friday the cross has taken on a life of its own. We venerate it, we wear it on jewelry, stick it on top of our buildings, get it tattooed on our shoulder... it's an important symbol.

In fact you'd be hard pressed to find a symbol that represents the essence of the Christian faith better than the cross, right?

But friends, we've forgotten that in Jesus' day the cross was shameful.

Death by crucifixion was a criminal's death - it was not a noble death. It wasn't like dying in the line of duty as a soldier – defending your country and your home; it wasn't like taking a bullet for your partner...

The Cross represents shame and disgrace for the lowest of the low friends... it's not noble, it's not honorable, it was not

considered sacrificial – it was how the vilest criminals died for their dastardly deeds.

You see friends, if Jesus was to become Sin in our day and age, to get the equivalent of being crucified he would need be falsely accused of something absolutely despicable - like making child pornography, being found guilty as a child molester, or having joined ISIS and cut the heads of their prisoners...

And then he would be sentenced to life in prison, where it would be seen as no big loss if the other inmates killed him.

That would be comparable to what we have just witnessed in the false accusations leveled against our Lord and his being made to carry his cross and being executed upon it.

So if Jesus were to become Sin in our day and age we would not have a cross as our symbol, but perhaps an orange prison suit or an electric chair or a hypodermic needle for death by

lethal injection instead... for this is how the most despicable criminals die today.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

You see friends, if the gospels emphasize anything about what our Lord suffered in being crucified it is the appalling injustice and the scandal he experienced in being made Sin when He himself was without it...

The horror of crucifixion is not in the physical agony, it's the shame and disgrace of being tried and condemned as criminal, treated as any two-bit revolutionary - when you are in fact the Messiah, the perfect Covenant Partner, and innocent of any wrong doing.

It's the anguish of carrying that all the Sin of the prior Covenant administration and all the future violations of the New Covenant away from the presence of God... to be forgotten like the scapegoat in the wilderness...

“My God, My God why have you forsaken me!!!” (Mat 27:46)

This is the Sin substitution that took place friends.

Christ was convicted of our wrong doing, He is sent away, He is scorned and treated with contempt, sent out of the presence of God - and instead... WE are considered to be the perfect Covenant Partners, innocent of any wrong doing, the ones who will save the world...

Why? Because God so loved this beautiful creation that He made, he did not want to give up on the plans He had to glorify those made in His image, He determined He was going to restore and renew what evil and our Sin had destroyed... and Jesus our Lord and Savior agreed to go through with it!

No wonder the cross is so significant for us; it was the instrument through which Jesus became Sin for us and the means by which our sins are taken away and forgotten!

So tonight friends as we have remembered and witnessed the events which lead to our Lord’s crucifixion – may the Holy Spirit work through this to strip away any pride or honor or glory you might have attributed to the cross...

Pray that the Holy Spirit will impress upon us the shame and the scorn and the derision of a criminal’s death that our Lord willingly took upon himself – for our sake

And help us to own up to the Sin which was laid upon him, so that truly our sin can be taken away and removed from us

Friends – let us remember and confess... and respond.

Lord's Supper

Brothers and sisters, so often we think that we need to clean up our life in order to come to Jesus Christ.

We think that Jesus would not be pleased with our bad habits, our deliberate sins... our pride, our anger, our lust, our unforgiveness, and we attempt to try to get these things under control – we're sorry for them, but we still think that we need to do something about them.

Tonight friends – to bring home the truth that Jesus became Sin for us, we're going to come up and take a dirty rag, and in your heart as you pick up this rag you name your sin, that which you are most ashamed about, or even the good that you do that you place your trust in...

And remember these words of scripture from Isaiah 64:6 *"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags..."*

And friends, you lay that sin upon the cross, where Jesus became sin for us so that He might take our sin away, and then you walk away from that sin and forget it.

And then brothers and sisters, receive the Lord's Body and blood, the bread and the cup which symbolize for us the New Covenant where our sins are forgiven and we have a new relationship with God through Jesus.

Come to the table – break off a piece of bread. The Body of Christ that was broken for you. Dip it in the Cup – the blood of Christ which sealed a new Covenant for us that can never be broken by our sins again.

And trust that Jesus Christ became sin for us, so that ALL our sin – past, present and future, was laid upon Him and taken away.

The band will come first and then lead us in singing Nothing but the Blood.

Come let us response and put our faith and trust in the one who became Sin for us.