

## The Sin Substitute 2022

Brothers and sisters, we have been learning about God and His attributes and this past Sunday we learned about God's Justice and mercy. And we discovered that even though God says He forgives wickedness, sin and rebellion – He also states that He does not leave the guilty unpunished.

And that left us with a bit of a paradox. How is it possible to forgive the sinner and yet still punish the sinner when God's forgiveness means sinners are spared from His punishment?

Well brothers and sisters, the answer has been presented to us this evening as the gospel of Mark describes the events which lead up to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and His suffering and death upon the cross.

And we are to understand what we have witnessed in these events according to the words of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 53:5-6 *“But **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. We all,*

*like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on **him** the iniquity of **us all**.”*

You see brothers and sisters, God is able to preserve His perfect Justice - His ability and responsibility to ensure that those who obey The Law, His Law are rewarded and those who break His Law are punished - He can preserve this and still offer forgiveness to the sinner by placing the punishment for sin upon someone other than the sinner.

And as we learned last Sunday, it is absolutely necessary that God punishes Sin in order for Him to satisfy His Righteousness and maintain the integrity of who He is, in His very essence of being God. Especially as a Holy God who is set apart not only as Creator from creation but set apart from sin and evil which antithetically violate His Being and His intentions for His creation.

So – what we have witnessed in the crucifixion - is our Lord Jesus Christ willing taking the full punishment that God would have put upon our sins – upon Himself instead.

This would include the consequential wrath of God as Christ suffered on the cross, it included the abandoning wrath of God in delivering people over to Sin – when Christ cried out *“My God, why have you forsaken me!”* And when He died, Christ bore the entire weight of God’s eternal wrath in Hell.

Make no mistake brothers and sisters. The only reason why you and I can be confident that God is not subjecting us to consequential punishment in the trials and hardships that we endure in this life...

The only reason we know for certain that He will not abandon us and give us over to our sinful desires so that we care not for the things of God...

The only reason that we need not fear an eternal punishment described by Jesus himself in Matt 25:41 as an *“eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons...”*

the only reason these punishments will not be applied to us, is because they have been applied to Jesus Christ instead.

And we can be certain of this because the scriptures testify to this substitution and proclaim it - 1 John 2:2 states *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins...”*

And Colossians 2:13-14 says *“God forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.”*

So – on the cross, in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ the paradox is resolved. God can forgive our sin and yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished. (Ex 34:7)

But we may still wonder how this is possible in Jesus - because we know that He was perfect, He was sinless. So how can God correct all the violations to His Righteousness and His Holiness through punishing Jesus if He was not guilty? How can God truly say that the guilty are punished if Jesus was not guilty?

Brothers and sisters, the Apostle Paul’s explains this to us in

2 Cor 5:21 that “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*”

Brothers and sisters, we need to understand that the crucifixion wasn't like Jesus jumping out in front of us to take a bullet meant for us when He died on the cross. Rather He took our sin upon Himself, He assumed our guilt and became guilty and thus the punishment God put upon Him was justified. On the cross – He deserved the bullet. The guilty do not go unpunished.

This is important – because the crucifixion is meant to call us to faith in Jesus satisfying God's wrath, not to be emotionally manipulated to respond by behaving better because we feel badly that innocent person had to suffer because of us. Do you see the difference?

Let's take a closer look at what it means that “Christ became Sin” and was thus deserving of the punishment He bore for us.

The first thing we need to realize, and an important part of what we have witnessed on Good Friday, is that to become Sin and take the punishment for it - it was *necessary* for Jesus 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 the reason for that was 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 brothers and sisters... 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, 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 – such as molesting a child, making child pornography, or being a terrorist in ISIS and cutting off 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 then 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, as excruciating as that may be, rather 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 but willingly taking on the guilt of the guilty in order that you may deserve the punishment for their sin that has now become yours.

No wonder Jesus said *“If there is any other way...”*

But this is what we are to believe and understand took place not just on the cross – but because it WAS a cross.

Brothers and sisters – I pray that through this teaching and explanation of how God preserves His Justice and is still able to forgive sinners and how this occurred in the death of Jesus on the cross – that you will be filled with gratitude for God’s mercy which spares you from His wrath, and for the Love which God showed you in sending His son Jesus to die for you.

This is not about being manipulated because an innocent person had to suffer for you – but because you now realize what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit worked together to achieve, at great personal cost to themselves, having planned this from eternity past! In order to save you from the wrath you deserved, because they have such great Love for us.

and there is one more thing that I need to tell you about...

What happens because of the cross is not just that we are spared the punishment upon our sin... when Christ becomes

sin for us, the scripture says that *“IN Him, we might become the righteousness of God”*

So, Christ takes our sin, our guilt, our punishment – and His perfect righteousness and obedience and faithfulness to God’s law is transferred to us instead, and God considers us perfect.

Brothers and sisters, God’s mercy spares us from what we deserved. God’s Grace gives us something so good that we didn’t deserve. This is the cross-over that comes from the cross and is given to us instead of punishment.

So – let us no longer doubt if God is punishing us in the trials and hardships of life. Show your faith and trust in Jesus by accepting these challenges as proof that you are IN Christ, that you are a child of God as Jesus is the Son of God because you have received His righteousness because of the cross.

And let us show we believe that Christ becomes sin for us by confessing our sins to Him, bare your soul, tell Him your deepest, darkest desires, all that which you are ashamed of –

and especially that which His scriptures convict us of – and give it to him in prayer. Ask for His forgiveness

And then look at the cross and be assured that your forgiveness was accomplished on it, and co-operate with the Holy Spirit as He shows you how to live out of this new righteousness of Christ, this Grace, that you have been given in your day-to-day life.

Brothers and sisters, believe this, trust in this, put your faith in this, live by this...

On the cross, Jesus Christ became sin for us, the punishment we deserved was poured out upon Him, and His righteousness was given to us instead.

All to God's glory and honor – Amen.