

**Wednesday, August 26, 2020**

**SERIES: REWRITING JESUS**

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**TITLE: Words of Substitution Pt. 1**

What comes to mind when I say the word “substitute”? I would bet you might think of the word “teacher.” If you’re a sports person, you think of a sub as a second-string quarterback or maybe a relief pitcher. But you’re probably thinking there’s a reason they are a substitute and not the starter. If you’re into plays and musicals, you think of an understudy. And if you paid \$100 for Phantom of the Opera tickets, and you see that the role of The Phantom will be played by an understudy, you begin to wonder if this was a good investment. I bet many of us think of food. We are in a time where we are looking for healthier options. In the world of COVID-19 especially, now we are looking for healthier options. We avoid butter, so we use powdered butter substitute. We want to avoid sugar, so we use sugar substitute, full of chemicals. Then there’s the ultimate blunder of food substitutes: fake meat. Are you kidding me? Tofu hot dogs. Hot dogs are the wonderful blend of mystery parts from cows, pigs, goats, horses, rats, who knows! What I do know is – it’s not tofu!

I’ll never forget that Thanksgiving, probably 20 years ago. My mother and I drove up to Omaha to celebrate with my Uncle Steve. Thanksgiving is that sacred meal, because you get to gorge yourself on warm, juicy, flavorful turkey covered in gravy. Well, that year I saw the movie “Babe,” remember, the movie about the pig. I left that movie saying to myself “I will never eat meat again!” So that following Thanksgiving, with my Uncle Steve, we served Tofurkey. Friends, after that Thanksgiving meal, I quickly reverted back to being a meat eater. Tofurkey is to-trashey. It is a bad substitute!

So substitutes aren’t always ideal or even salvageable. But today, we will see how precious and how life changing Jesus’ words of substitution are for us. So we are going to spend time walking with Jesus in John Chapter 19, beginning in verse 25.

Well if this is your first time listening or you haven’t listened for a while, we are getting close to wrapping up our series called Rewriting Jesus. *Unfortunately, many* people today, non-Christians and Christians alike, *rewrite* Jesus. They ignore what He actually said. They ignore the breadth of His life. They rewrite Jesus to look like them. They rewrite Jesus to be a little bit of Buddha, a little bit of Deepak Chopra, and sprinkled with little bit of Oprah on top. They rewrite Jesus. And as I said before, it’s not just a non-believer who does this. Christians do this all the time.

Some paint Jesus to be just like any man, but who was a very good moral teacher, who could do some pretty cool parlor tricks. Some paint Jesus as God, but *not always* being God. He became God. Others paint Jesus as the founder of universalism, who saves ALL whether we want saving or not.

You get the picture. People rewrite Jesus. Even us. So that's why we're going back to the Bible. We want to hear and see Jesus firsthand through the Bible.

Today we are looking at two statements by Jesus from the cross, and they are words of substitution. So let's hear his words now, John Chapter 19, beginning in verse 25 (ESV).

But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"<sup>27</sup> Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own *household*." (John 19:25-27)

Christ was put on the cross around 9am on that Friday. In the previous verses, you see that soldiers are near the cross and they are dividing up Jesus' garments. But also standing near the cross are 4 women and John - the disciple whom Jesus loved. Now, before we proceed into the topic of substitution, I can't help but notice the phrase in verse 25, "standing by the cross". Perhaps your version says standing "near the cross" I want to ask you this question, because it's a question we all need to answer: How near are you to the cross of Christ?

We know there were people who were at the crucifixion site, but *far* from the cross. They didn't care about Jesus and they didn't care why He was there. **In other words, they were indifferent. Is this you?** Are you far from the cross with indifference towards Christ? You have been around church your whole life. You hear the Easter story each year. You see the cross on your wall at home. And over time, you've become indifferent. When you see the cross, you see a piece of art or jewelry, but you forgot the horrific history it is to remind us of. You see the cross, but you ignore the price it represents for your salvation.

Theologian John Stott said, "The essential background to the cross, therefore, is a balanced understanding of the gravity of sin and the majesty of God. If we diminish either, we diminish the cross." For many – they may be near the cross, but they've diminished it's meaning. And now they're indifferent.

There were the soldiers who were near the cross. These soldiers likely had heard His trial with Pilate. They walked with Him as He carried the cross. They heard His words of forgiveness and compassion from the cross, yet they didn't believe Him. **They were uncommitted. Is this you?** Have you been near the cross for a long time? Coming to church for years, but you remain disbelieving and uncommitted?

I think many people are near the cross today. They have gone to church most of their life, or at least, as a youth. They likely went to a youth camp of some kind. They probably did a Vacation Bible school or two. They hit the two major Christian holiday services. When you check their profile on social media, they have Christian as their worldview.

But when you look at their pictures online, it's bars, parties, and curse words. They don't tithe. They really don't go to church. They haven't looked at a Bible in ages. *In their mind*, they're near the cross. But in *reality* they are uncommitted. Is this you?

But think about the 4 women and John. They were near the cross and believed Jesus. They needed Him. **They needed the cross. Is this you?** Do you believe in Him? Do you recognize how much you need Him and His cross?

Whether you've been saved 5 minutes, 5 years, or 50 years, you still recognize the power of the cross. You still recognize your need of the cross. Some people become saved and over time, they think, "Well, I'm glad that saving part is over. Time to keep living." They don't live a gross life. They don't live an offensive life, but they forget the daily need of God's grace. They forget the reason why they are a child of God, is because of the cross of Christ.

So, are you daily dependent upon the cross? Do you still recognize you need the cross? So which one are you today? Know this: proximity to the cross is not what makes you a Christian. I know many people who have been near the cross their whole lives, but have rejected Jesus and the salvation He provides. How near are you?

How you answer will shape how you will hear and apply today's message.

### **DISCUSSION:**

N: As you think about that, I want to go to our discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney for a moment. Arnie, what kind of posture should we have toward people who call themselves Christian, but don't act like it? They're either indifferent or uncommitted.

A: Actually Nat, with all of our research on people's spiritual lives, I think the hardest group of people to convince they need Jesus are the notional Christians. They follow their notions of Jesus Christ. They say they believe in Jesus, but they're not committed. They think they're going to Heaven, but there's no outward proof of any life transformation, any changed behavior. And they're the ones, you know, they're thinking they're going to Heaven. They're a tough, tough group, who don't have an unmet need. And until there's a crisis in their life, they just don't come around. And you find a lot of kids that walk away from their faith. They really still think they're going to Heaven. You know, they've made a decision at camp when they were in fifth grade, and yeah, they'd be, "You know, all roads lead to Heaven. You know, Jesus is a great guy". They have no need. So it's a tremendous challenge of those of us that are interested in evangelism and discipleship, of those people that they think they're a part of the body, and they're not.

N: So what do you suggest to do with those people? I mean, should we pray for them? Should we confront them? I mean, what's your posture on this?

A: You know, it's evangelism by daily discipleship. You've got to work with people on a daily basis. So sure. Pray, get to know, but it takes a daily walk with someone, especially like that.

N: Yeah. In a couple of days, we're actually going to be talking about the Lukewarm Church from Revelation Three. So I think that it's going to be an eye opening conversation for people, but I think you're exactly right. The notional nominal Christians, they are one of the hardest groups, because they think they've got it. They think that they've accomplished that they've gotten their golden ticket to Heaven, and so they're good. But the reality is, they are those people, or could be those people, that on that day, Jesus goes, *I never knew you*. That is a scary thought. And that's why we need to be constantly preaching the Gospel to ourselves, and to those around

us; not to be judgmental, not to be harsh, but simply because this really does matter for here and eternity. Cara, Christianity is counter-cultural, and our culture does not like the term need, needs, or needy, but why are those words so crucial to our lives as Christians?

C: Because we sin every day and we need the cross. There's not one day that goes by that I don't need forgiveness from God. Some days I might appear up here to be more Christlike than other days, but I need Jesus' salvation plan every day - new mercies, new heaping amounts of grace from God – pour it on - me and also towards other people.

N: I think that's one of the opportunities for pain and suffering in the world. It reminds people that they do need God. And so those moments where it's hard to watch our friends and family and the people we encounter struggle so much, but it's in those moments that they do recognize that they are powerless, and they need some help from someone outside of themselves. And it's those moments that we can point them back to God.

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Now, think about this, the Son of God – Jesus Christ - is hanging on the cross. He's been mocked, flogged, and is experiencing the most excruciating form of punishment ever conceived – preparing to take His suffering to a whole new level. Yet He doesn't forget His own humanity and His relationship to His mother and His disciple whom He loved. He looks down on His weeping mother and His grieving disciple and has compassion on them. Here we see Jesus' words to His mother and John are not just words of substitution, but they are **compassionate substitution**.

He looks down and says, “Woman” – now, if you read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, you won't find Jesus calling Mary, “Mother” – instead he calls her, Woman. This was respectful, but also reflective of him being a Heavenly Son and her an earthly mother. Jesus was the firstborn, and this meant as a widow, Mary was Jesus' responsibility to care for. Even while dying on the cross, He has compassion, and in this He provides a substitution for a son. Jesus' half-brothers did not believe that Jesus was divine. So, He puts the care of Mary in the hands of John – His beloved disciple.

If you are here today and you are a Christian – a follower of Christ - this compassionate substitution affects you today. How? Just like Mary gaining a son and John gaining a mother, so you too, when you become a follower of Christ, you come into a new family.

Paul writes in Ephesians 1:5: “God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure” (NLT).

Because of Jesus' death on the cross, we now become part of His family. Because of this we have new responsibilities. We are His substitute – His ambassadors on this Earth as His family members. Just like John had the responsibility of caring for Mary, we too have the responsibility of caring for each other as believers. **Galatians 6:2** says, “Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.” We are to keep an eye out for the needs of each other and help out

when we can. The Bible gets even more specific. Paul writes in 1 Timothy, “Take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her. <sup>4</sup> But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God” (1 Tim. 4:3-4).

I can guarantee you that there are widows in your church and in your neighborhood. There are single mothers trying and struggling to care for their kids in your workplace, where you shop, and in your own backyard. What are you doing to care for the needs of the widow? The single mom? What about the children today who need a surrogate father or mother? Are you stepping up to help them? Jesus’ words of compassionate substitution apply to us today.

Now, perhaps you’ve heard this story before, but even so, it’s incredibly powerful and convicting. A number of years ago, a woman was abandoned by her husband for the affections of another woman. The affair went all the way when he divorced his wife and married his mistress. Years later, this man had children with his new spouse. And then he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He knew his new wife could not care for the children on her own. So, he called up his ex-wife and asked her to help with the responsibility of raising his children that resulted from his infidelity. Amazingly, she does as he asks. She would end up raising these children as if they were her own. When asked how she could do this, show such compassion for these kids, she said, “God’s love gave me the grace to forgive and accept his children as my own.” That is substitution – that is compassion. We, as God’s adopted children, are called to show supernatural compassion to those in the body of Christ and those outside of the church.

When I was young, I didn’t have a lot of male role models in my life. I was raised in a hair salon, so I had a good idea of how to carry on a conversation, wash someone’s hair, and even answer some phones, but that traditional male influence wasn’t there. But thankfully, I had friends with dads who stepped up. One dad, Mark, was especially kind. He would be working on projects at his home or watching *This Old House*. He would show me different tools and how he was using them on different projects. But he would go *beyond* just the teaching about tools; he would ask me how I was doing. He would ask about life. In time, he would be my small group leader through youth group. Mark had a *great impact* on me, because he recognized a need that he could fill, so he stepped up as a follower of Christ.

This is one of the reasons I coach youth sports. First and foremost, I do it to be with my kids. I won’t lie about that. My time and intimate influence is slowly fading away, so I want to capitalize on it. One of the ways I can do so is by coaching. I began coaching football 5 years ago. I didn’t play football myself growing up. Well, I played on the Xbox, but I know that doesn’t count. However, I knew I could learn, so I began to coach. We had anywhere from 6-12 kids on a team. Some were friends of my sons and others came from the community. But many came from broken homes and sometimes very difficult situations. I could never be a true substitute for all their needs, or people they were missing, but I could contribute when needed. Because of this posture, I’ve taken calls and late night texts from parents who are confused and broken. I’ve heard kids cry because of hard situations at home or school. I sit, I listen, I pray, and I’m just there.

We are to show compassion to those around us: To the widows and orphans and anyone God puts in our path. So the question is, *who has God put in your path?*

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N: I have to say that I'm surrounded by people who minister daily to people they come across, and Arnie and Cara, you are two of those people. Would each of you tell us how you run into those opportunities to minister?

C: A lot of times, God brings them to me, so you just have to pay attention. You've got to get your face out of your phone and be obedient to the calling. I've been called to tell people about Jesus, so I'm just looking for those opportunities, but I really do believe God brings them to me.

A: I think the key thing that Cara is saying, and the difference between Cara and I, and what I so admire about her, is she's always looking for those opportunities. And for me, it's like, "Hey, stupid". You know, I'll have my wife say, or my daughter, or both of them say, "Hey, man, I heard that guy's really struggling. Would you go talk to him with his, you know, struggling with his marriage?" And I'm working on some research, or doing this or that. And you know, and somebody texts me, "Hey, weren't you going to go?" And it's like, "Oh yeah". So I work on being more intentional, because it is so wonderful when you can just share with somebody or listen. And at the end of the conversation, to say, you know, "I'm going to commit this week to pray for you and your wife, and that your marriage will be restored. I'm not a therapist. There's not much I can do, but if there's anything I can do to help you, and just know, I'm always here to listen. Here's my phone number", you know, but I need prompting. One of my things is, this year, is to be more intentional, so I don't need, you know, God to paint a banner, fly things over, and then have my family nudge me. So I'm working on it. I'm a work in progress, as they say.

N: Well, I think we all are. And I think being aware, and also creating margin, are two things that we can all do better. I think there are those exceptions, like Cara, who just attracts people, and she's very good at creating that margin in her life for them. But I think we all can work on being aware of the opportunities that God has put around us, and then creating margin to engage in those opportunities. Have either of you been influenced by someone who has shown you extraordinary compassion?

C: Yes, but mostly I've seen someone that's influenced me, in action - my mother-in-law - without divulging anything without her permission - I've witnessed her forgive someone in her life, who the world would easily define as unforgivable. Forgiveness, I think, hands down, is the best, most important form of compassion. And I've seen it work when you're in an impossible situation.

A: Nat, I think for me, extraordinary compassion through my sicknesses. I've had a lot of people pray for me, and that's meant the world, you know? And that is extraordinary. I have one friend though, and I was in chemo I think for four months. And then I had surgery. I was in pretty bad shape for about a year, or several years, but a year in particular, and this friend of

mine called me every single day; every day - only time he didn't call is when I was in surgery, and then he would call Shar. I've never forgotten that. And his compassion towards me has taught me to be much more compassionate to other people.

N: Yeah. It's neat to see how God moves through people and the impact it has on our lives. My best friend has got compassion down to an art form. He's a single guy, but yet, I mean, he's, when Tiffany and I have had moments of struggle, he'll be like, "Hey, can I come over and watch the kids for you?" And I'm like, that's really a big act of compassion, because I mean, that's not - he's not familiar with it. Or someone breaks down, "Hey, can I give you my car?" "No, you don't need to give us your car". But I mean, there's those people who just ooze compassion, and what's great is when we observe it, and we embrace it, it can become part of our lives as well, so that motivates us to show that to others. You know, for someone who is listening today, and on the fence about stepping out and offering themselves in a compassionate substitutionary way, Arnie, what is the first step?

A: You know, it's like the Nike ad - "Just do it". I have this friend of mine who's a farmer - horse guy - and pretty private. And he got pretty sick and somebody must've visited him. Well, he came and visited me. And he's not that kind of guy. And lo and behold, he took that first step. And then three days later, he brought his wife, and then three days later, he brought his wife and kids. And then they came like four or five times. And, but I could see in his life that he was taking one step at a time, and thought, "Oh wow. You know, I'm not only blessing this guy. I'm being blessed". And then he brought his wife. It is a hurting world, and it's easy to take the first step. You've just got to be intentional.

N: Cara, why do they need to do this sooner than later? Just that first step - *just do it*.

C: Because it will change everything, and for generations, I think, depending on the situation. I mean, taking a first step towards compassion, look, I'm an introvert. It's hard for me to reach out, but I just had to make a choice that I loved the Lord, and I trusted Him more than my fear. And so I just reach out, and it changes everything. It changed everything for me. And it changes the lives of other people. I mean, let people know that they matter and they care. That's an awesome gift.

A: I think a lot of times people would say, especially like with Cara, "Oh, it's easy for her". Because they're so intentional, you just assume it's easy. But I know Cara well - I know before she's done interviews, she wants to puke. You know, she's nervous. She's scared. I mean, it's not a natural thing. She's not an insurance salesman, or a used car salesman type. It is being intentional, doing what the Lord directs. I mean, it's just amazing when you see it in another person.

N: Need to be like Bob in *What about Bob?* Right? Baby steps.

C: That's what I do. Man, when I did Fox News, I just let the Lord take the situation. I was so

scared. When I came off of that floor, and I walked through those doors, and it was over, I wept, I bawled; because the Lord just carried me on there. I did it. And you can tell when you watch it, it's awkward, but you know what? I got the Gospel out and that's all. And then my job was done. And then I fell apart, and went and had some eggs, which I couldn't even eat, because I was so sick. [Oh man. Yeah]. But I did it. I did it.

N: Well, and it's all about again, the posture. You wanted to obey God, and you let Him do the heavy lifting. And that's what He does all the time. He's not looking for the "A" players. He's just looking for everyday people, who are willing to be obedient.