

Thursday, August 27, 2020

SERIES: REWRITING JESUS

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Words of Substitution Pt. 2

How will you be a substitute? How will you show compassion? Those are the questions I asked you yesterday, as I challenged you to lean into the opportunities that God puts before you, and show grace where grace is needed. So that's compassionate substitution, and we saw that, as Jesus provided for his earthly mother. Now, let's turn our attention from Jesus' earthly mother to His Heavenly Father. Turn with me to Matthew 27, beginning in verse 45.

The first three phrases aren't that hard to deal with. The next phrase is very hard to grasp. Pastor Warren Wiersbe said it's a mystery, and Pastor Erwin Lutzer said it's "*the* mystery of our suffering God." They're right and you'll see why.

"Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?' that is, 'MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?'" (Matthew 27:45-46, NASB)

So, at noon (the sixth hour) a darkness fell over the land, and for 3 hours, the land is dark. I believe this is a supernatural darkness, and not an eclipse or some other natural explanation. But, after 3 hours of darkness, and 6 hours on the cross, Jesus cries out from the cross. "MY GOD! MY GOD! WHY? WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME???" What is going on here? This is one of the hardest verses to grasp in the Bible. It's a mystery. Jesus - God the Son - God in the flesh - is hanging on the cross, and He cries out to God the Father, "Why have you forsaken me?" What is happening here?

Let me start by saying this: First, it would be wrong of us to assume, that when we read this, that Christ is an unwilling participant here on the cross. At a casual glance, it may seem that God is a cruel god, who has manipulated Jesus to going to the cross. Some people assume that God is an abusive parent. But is that true? Did God force His son to die on the cross? Is He just an abusive parent? I mean, doesn't the Bible say that God sent His son Jesus, to die for people's sins? Well, the simple answer is yes. God sent Jesus to Earth on a rescue mission. But the question forgets or neglects one key fact: Jesus volunteered for the job.

God didn't need to save humanity from their sins, but He loves His creation, so He knew the only way for reconciliation, the only One who can satisfy an infinite sin debt, is the One who is the infinite One: God. And by His grace, God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was fully God and fully man: The only one capable of paying the debt of sin. Yes, God sent Jesus on a mission, and Jesus being obedient, willingly went to the cross. But He did so in His own free will. Jesus said so in John 10:17-18 (ESV) "For this reason the Father loves

me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

So we get it – he went to the cross willingly. But is God abusive for subjecting His Son to such pain? Though imperfect as a parent, we all subject our children to pain for a greater good. My middle son, as an infant, had cancer. He developed tumors in his skull. I remember laying him down in a surgery bed more times than I care to remember. He looked at me and had tears in his eyes, knowing he was going to be poked, cut, bruised, and in pain. I hated it. I didn't like it. I didn't desire it. I wanted to change it, but there was no other way to fix the problems he had. Even in the past year, he voluntarily laid his body down on the bed, only to experience another painful surgery, but he did so with my approval, because we knew that through that painful experience, there would be restoration. This is just a small glimpse into what God did through His son, Jesus Christ. Is God an abusive parent? No. He's a loving parent, who is willing to do whatever it takes to make things right. This was the plan, and Jesus willingly “gave himself up as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6).

The second thing we need to discuss when Jesus said, *My God, my God why have you forsaken me*, is we need to dismiss the option that there was a break in the Trinity. The Trinity is essential to true Christianity. We believe that God is one essence existing in 3 persons: The Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There has never been a moment that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have never existed as one substance. Never.

So what did happen? What is going on here?

First, this is the fulfillment of Psalm 22. Listen to what David wrote about this coming Messiah: Verse 1 - “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.” Now skip down to verse 14: “I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. ¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. ¹⁷ I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; ¹⁸ They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.” (Vs. 14-18, NASB)

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. There are 353 prophecies about the Messiah. Jesus would fulfill them all. In Psalm 22, we hear this cry of abandonment – “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Then you see the crucifixion scene unfold. As the cross was pulled into the hole, the jolt would dislocate the bones. He is slowly bleeding to death and without hydration. Soldiers and evildoers surround him on the cross. They put nails into his feet and hands. His bones are exposed from the flogging. His garments were gambled for by the soldiers. All this needed to be fulfilled. It was predicted this would happen.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let's me bring in Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole, and let's talk for a moment about these Messianic prophecies. Cara, why is it so important to understand these Old Testament writings?

C: It's a very short answer, but it's a very important understanding. It's God's redemption plan.

N: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. And all Scripture is God breathed, but it points us to the future, and it points us to Jesus Christ. Right? It's all about the redemption. Exactly right. Arnie, I just mentioned the gruesomeness of Christ's death. Talk about who and what that punishment was meant for.

A: You know, the punishment was meant for robbers and thieves. For the Savior to be punished that way, it's the ultimate act of redemption. And you know, for me, it's hard to even think about that. I know they show some pretty gruesome films of Christ's death. You know? And I know the Resurrection is the key thing, but the one thing that has always amazed me, you know, this whole world is all about power - who's got the most power. And to me, the biggest thing is being on the cross, and all the humiliating things they did. And yet, He had the power. He had His finger on the button, if you will, that could - He could just nuke everybody and reign as King, but He loved us enough not to just snap His finger, press that button. That is to me, is just - yeah, all the prophecies and all of that point to Him, and all -That's really great. But the power of the cross, and to me, the power is giving us eternal life -Yes - but also for Him loving us so much, He didn't press the button. I mean, it would just be a snap, a blink of an eye, and they'd all be wiped out.

N: It's a good thing God is God, and I am not, because I would have hit that button.

As we talk about Jesus being forsaken by God to the cross, we see that this act perfectly fulfilled the Scriptures. But it is also important to understand the fact that Jesus being forsaken was not a *break* in the essence of God. The Trinity was *not* divided. What did occur was a break in the *fellowship*. This is indicated by the fact that only here, Jesus does not refer to God as His Father. Here, He says "my God!" So it's a break in the fellowship.

This is the easiest way I can think of it - and it's horrible to think of - But imagine, I need some groceries, so I go to the store and I bring along my 5 year old. I get to the middle of the cereal aisle, and as my son is looking at the cereal, I walk away. He suddenly realizes I am gone. He looks both ways. He can't see me. He listens intently, but there is no familiar voice. He begins to cry, and screams out! "Daddy! Daddy!" In that moment, there was a break in the fellowship. He was forsaken. It's an imperfect example, but I think you get the picture. Jesus knew it would happen, and He willingly experienced it. The love never ended from God, but there was a temporary break in the fellowship.

So why would Jesus need to be totally forsaken - both humanly and divinely? Why? Psalm 22:3 (NASB) tells us this: "Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel." God is holy; That is, perfect - without sin. So what? Well, you and I are not perfect. We are sinners. We all sin, and as we read in Isaiah 59, our sin separates us from a holy God. And because He is holy, He is also just. In fact, listen to Psalm 7:11 "God is a righteous judge, a God who displays his wrath every day" (NIV). God hates injustice. As His image bearers, we do too! When we see bad people get away with their crimes, it makes us angry. Well, God is a righteous

judge - a perfect judge - One who always rules correctly and who will deliver final justice. We desire this, because we know it's right. Can you imagine a world where Hitler wouldn't pay for His crimes? Or terrorism goes unchallenged? Thankfully that world doesn't exist. Final and complete justice will be served in and for eternity by God.

But you see, Christ was forsaken to be a **substitute to God**. Christ shed his blood on the cross for God. Romans 3:23-25 says "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.²⁴ Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past." (NLT) In God's grace, Jesus was the sacrifice for our sin. Christ was our substitute to appease the right and just wrath of God. His blood protects us from God's divine judgment. But what is crazy is that God is the provider of this sacrifice because of His great love (1 John 4:10).

Think of it like this: Imagine that you've been brought into a court room for tax evasion. You've not paid your taxes – in fact you've cheated on your taxes for 10 years. You owe \$250,000 in taxes. But because you've broken the law by cheating on your taxes, the maximum fine is \$100,000 per offense. The judge is a good judge and he finds you guilty and you then owe \$1,250,000. But then he does the unthinkable. He stands up, takes off his robe, and walks down past the bench and stands next to you. He pulls out his checkbook and writes a check for \$1,250,000. He walks up and places it on the judge desk. He returns to his desk and puts on his robe once more. He then says, "Thank you. You may go free."

This is exactly what Christ has done for you. But Christ is not just a substitute to God. He's also a **substitute for us**. Isaiah 53 is another Messianic prophecy, much like Psalm 22. In Isaiah 53, it says this suffering servant – the Messiah - would be despised and forsaken by men. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. He will justify the many. He will bear our sins. This was predicted and fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus came to be our substitute – to make us justified before a holy and just God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Christ was perfect, but on the cross, He was forsaken by God while taking our sin upon Himself. Christ removes our sin from us and puts it upon Himself.

Think about the thing you are most ashamed of. Think about the thing that you would never tell anyone - that thing you wouldn't even put down on an anonymous confession sheet. Well, that deep dark sin, that thing – that sin - Christ died for it. On the cross - if you are a Christian - when God saw that sin, God saw it as Christ's, and not yours. As Charles Spurgeon put it, "Without the cross, there would have been a wound for which there was no ointment, a pain for which there was no balm." Amazing. Scandalous. **That's why He was forsaken. To be a substitute to God for you and for me.**

Now, I want to ask you 2 questions to think about: First, is the question I asked when we began: **how near are you to the cross?** Are you indifferent? Are you uncommitted? Or are you a believer in need of that cross?

This leads me to the second question: Matthew 27:22 says that Pilate asked the question “What shall I do with this Jesus who is called the Christ.” I ask you now, “**What will you do with Jesus?**” What will you do with the perfect son of God who came to earth to be your substitute and offers you freedom from sin? If you are listening today as a Christian, what will you do with Jesus? John 3:36 (NASB) says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” What will you do with Jesus? Will you obey and follow Him?

If you’re listening and you are indifferent, won’t you move nearer to the cross? If you’re listening and you’re uncommitted, won’t you move to a place of belief? We all only get one shot on this Earth. After that, after we die, we will be judged, and then it is either Heaven or Hell for eternity. There is no other option, according to the righteous judge who has graced us with a substitute.

What will you do with Jesus? How you answer that question today will affect not just this life, but your eternity to come.

N: Let me turn now to Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Arnie, tell us how having Jesus as your Savior can affect your life right now.

A: It can radically transform your life, if you let Him. That is the big thing - He has given you a tremendous edge. The minute you accept him as your Savior, you have the Holy Spirit inside of you. So all Satan can do is work to mess you up, to confuse you. But you have this inner voice, this Holy Spirit that will never leave you, and you just have to listen to it, and you need to feed yourself on the Word. So it's a tremendous, tremendous opportunity, but you've got to act on it.

N: You can't just have it be an intellectual moment. It's got to be life transformational. And that's exactly what our Savior can do. Well, speaking of Salvation, Cara, how does Salvation affect your future? Maybe tell us what you're looking forward to.

C: Well, Salvation is God's plan. So it's not humanity's plan. Humanity's plan would be me observing religious rituals, and obeying commands, and achieving these levels of spiritual enlightenment. But I don't have to do any of those things, because this is God's plan for Salvation. So I'm free Nat. I'm liberated from sin. I mean, it's no guess as to where I'm going. It's awesome. And I'm living it now. You know, the minute you just hand your life over to Christ, you're living your eternal life. There's no life here and life there - it's - you're in it. You know, there's nothing that can happen to me. What can man do to me? Nothing. You know, the worst thing that can happen to me is the best thing that can happen to me. I mean, it's just awesome.

N: I love thinking about that freedom. And one of my favorite verses is John 10:10, because in that verse, Jesus said, *I have come that you might have life and life to the fullest*. What a great promise of Christ. People so often view Christianity as something so restrictive, and something that limits your ability to have fun. But I will tell you in that freedom, in that freedom of following Christ, we have life, and it is an abundant life. You experience that, Arnie experiences

that, we get to experience that daily. And I think we're so excited to have our listeners join in, in following Christ and experiencing that life, and that life to the fullest. So I'm just curious, as we wrap up our time, what do each of you find the most amazing about God's plan of substitution?

C: That He would be willing to do it for us. I mean, not just me, but just humanity as a whole. I mean, we're awful. Anything we touch, we pretty much ruin, you know, and He's created this beautiful place for us to be, but we wreck it. We're just awful. And the fact that He still loves us past that, that he would put himself through that, that He would die for me - I mean, that just blows my mind.

A: Yeah. And it's just not logical, you know? Do you think you have problems understanding grace? You know, like how could such a wreck like me be saved? Carry it even a step further, you know, that He would submit himself for a wreck like me. I mean, it's not formulaic; it's not logical. It's just - it's beyond reason. It's pretty amazing.

C: I've heard it, yeah, that the hero dies for the bad guy. [Yeah]. I mean, it's not - like Arnie said - it's just not logical. It's just amazing.

N: Well, that's why they call it grace.