

# Substitution

*Communion Meditation*

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Well, we have the wonderful privilege once again to celebrate Communion together as a church family, and as we often do, we are setting it apart in our service here to give it the focus and attention that it deserves. We think Communion is an important part of church life and so we want to treat it that way, not a tack-on at the end of the service but to consider it in a worthy manner.

So as we often do, we pause for a meditation about the cross, about Christ in one way or another, and as we come, let me just say a couple of things by way of invitation and consideration. We invite every true Christian to share in this Table together with us. If you're a Christian, even if you're not a member of our church, you're welcome to share in this. We only ask that you would examine your heart and repent of any known sin in your life before you partake of the elements; that in honor and recognition of Christ, if he died to take away our sins, then we shouldn't be clinging to sin and claiming to share in that which delivers us. That wouldn't make much sense, would it, and that would be dishonoring to Christ if we did. So consider that.

If you lack assurance of salvation, I invite you to look again at the fresh wounds, the bleeding wounds, as it were, of Christ and how he died for sinners just like you to take away sin and to trust in him, and to know that if you humbly ask him to save you, that he will keep your soul and bring you to heaven. If you're not a Christian and you know that, if you think that you're good enough for God without Christ, friends, I would appeal to you, please don't take of these elements. It's far better for you in that condition to simply let them pass because your self-righteousness is an indication that you're not trusting in Christ. Salvation is for those, Jesus said that he came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance, and it's those who are conscious of sin and mourning over sin that are invited to this Table. So this Table is for repentant sinners who trust in Christ alone, not for the self-righteous that trust in themselves and boast in their own goodness. Those are two separate realms and only one comes to the Table.

Well, as you contemplate those things personally, let's remember the nature of the work of Christ on our behalf and the nature of Christ's work for sinners, and preeminently it was a work of substitution. That's our word for this morning as we contemplate Communion. In the Old Testament, God required a lamb, an innocent perfect lamb as a daily sacrifice for sinners that would want to come before him. As the Jews came to meet

God, they needed to bring a lamb as a sacrifice and that lamb was slain in place of the offerer. In its innocence it was slain for those who were guilty so that the guilty could approach God, and it was a picture, it was a symbol of innocence and it was picturing Christ who was to come, and what Jesus Christ did for us was he offered himself as a substitute for sinners. He did a work of substitution and Scripture says that when he shed his blood on the cross, it was an act that he did for us. It was something he did on behalf of us. It was an act that he did in our place that we might escape the death and condemnation that our sin had brought upon us.

And several Scriptures emphasize that truth for us. In Mark 10:45 it says that, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." In 1 Corinthians 15:3 it says, "that Christ died for our sins." In Galatians 3:13 it says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us." In 1 Timothy, Paul says, "He gave himself as a ransom for all." And in Titus it says that, "He gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed." Do you see the theme? Across many different books of Scripture you see this emphasized again and again and again. And the Apostle Peter says in chapter 2 of 1 Peter, he says, "Christ suffered for you." And that's what we're remembering here.

This is not a religious motion that we go through. This is not a mere formality that we are about to engage in. We are remembering the eternal blood of the covenant. We are remembering how Christ laid himself down for us. In real time, in real history, at a real place, the real Christ suffered really in his flesh for us. He really bore the wrath of God on our behalf. He really had tribulation of soul. He really had physical sufferings as he hung on that cursed Roman cross for us. He really looked out at those who were crucifying him and he really said, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." And those words that he spoke about those that were at his feet as he was being crucified, hanging, as it were, between heaven and earth, suspended by nails on a wooden beam, the words and the effect of what he was doing was not simply for them but for all of his people. It's as though he were hanging looking upon us and saying, "Father, forgive them for their sins. I do this on their behalf." He was our representative. He was our substitute.

Beloved, Christ acted for us. He did in our place what we could not do. You could not have paid an eternal price for your sins against an eternal God. You were hopeless and without God in the world. Christ acted as a substitute and stepped into your place and said, "Father, punish Me for these that I love. I will bear the suffering. I will feel the eternal torments in My soul so that You can forgive them, that Your violated law can be upheld, that You can be just as punishment is required. Just do it to Me, Lord. Do it to Me, Father," I should say. "Do it to Me, Father, rather than upon My people." It was an act of substitution for us.

The Christian writer, Ian Murray, said this and I quote, he said, "What can undo our past sin and remove its demerit in the sight of God? The whole world has no answer to that question." He goes on to say, "Only revelation can supply the answer and it can be stated

in a single word: substitution; an exchange of places; a transference of responsibility. This is the good news to be proclaimed, the One has taken the place of the many."

So the responsibility for our sin was transferred to Christ as he hung on that cross. He represented us. He took the blame. The one who was innocent, undefiled, holy, separated from sinners said, as it were, "I will take the blame for all of them, My Father. You can punish Me on their behalf." And this great act of love, this great act of kindness and mercy was something that none of us could have asked for. It's certainly nothing that any of us deserved or could have demanded. We were guilty and without hope. We had no basis upon which to approach God and yet our lovely Savior, the Lord Jesus, did that voluntarily. He said, "No one takes it away from Me. I lay My life down on My own initiative," John 10. And we're overwhelmed with his goodness and the magnitude of his sacrifice, that in a one-time act he was able to pay for the sins of everyone that would ever believe in him.

So substitution elevates two thoughts in our minds. 1. It elevates our helplessness. We could not have done this for ourselves. We were utterly dead and without hope. There was nothing that we could have done to save ourselves. And on the other side of the equation, substitution magnifies the love, grace and kindness of Christ. He voluntarily took our place that he might save us from wrath and reconcile us to a holy God, and now divine blessing can flow to you because of what Christ has done.

So Christians, as we come to the Table this morning, you have been saved by the work of someone else and that's what we remember. We separate out this moment as a moment of gratitude and worship to the one who saved us. For those of you who have not yet come to Christ, I invite you to look to this bleeding, dying Savior whose death accomplished redemption for everyone who believed in him, and I urgently invite you, I lovingly call you to this Christ who is the Savior and who is the friend of sinners. As we pass the elements, you who do not know Christ have a standing invitation that comes from Christ himself, "Come to Me," he says, "for the forgiveness of your sins."

Let's pray together in light of those biblical thoughts.

*Dear Lamb of God, we thank You for Your work of substitution on our behalf. You suffered, our dear Lord, and You died, our Christ, in our place. It is only by You and Your work that we are forgiven of our many sins and we thank You from the depths of our hearts for what You have done. Truly, You are the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep, and here in this ordinance of Communion which You have appointed for Your people, we remember You with much gratitude here this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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