

THE WORD OF SUBSTITUTION

Good morning! We're continuing in this series on the **Seven Greatest Words of Love**. We're now on the fourth word.

One of the things that I started paying attention to when I turned 50 two years ago was food labels. Ok, I know I have poor memory and need to pay attention to dates. Anyway, I never paid attention to food labels before. I didn't really care what I put in my mouth, whether it was healthy or not. But there's one word that I've noticed as I started paying attention to labels. It's the word "substitute." Have you ever seen this on a product label for food? The word "substitute." Like sugar substitute? I have become conscious of substitutes. That's why you see a jar of Equal packets and lots of cans of Coke Zero at home.

In school, we also have substitutes. Substitute Teachers, right? However, substitute teachers don't get much respect. To the school's principals, substitute teachers are heroes. Because they have saved the day for many of them. Because when a teacher gets sick somebody's got to care for the kids. But a lot of times the kids don't give the substitute teacher any respect. They think they're not at the same level as classroom teachers.

Well, this is not always true. But most of the time if we get a substitute, we're disappointed. Like if you go to a concert and the emcee gets up and says, "I'm sorry, Taylor Swift can't be here tonight. We've got Travis Kelce." You're going to go, "Huh?" Substitutes just don't work. You want the real thing.

But sometimes, you know what I've discovered? Sometimes substitutes are better than the original. Sometimes a substitute teacher can actually be more engaging, more interesting, less boring than the one you had every week. And Coke Zero can be better tasting than the original plus it's better for you, health-wise.

Today I want us to look at this concept of substitution. We're going to look at the **Word of Substitution**. We're in this series of the seven greatest words of love which are the seven statements that Jesus said on the cross.

Now, the Bible tells us that Jesus was on the cross for six hours. From nine a.m. in the morning to three p.m. in the afternoon. In the first three hours when Jesus was hanging on the cross, he says the first three statements. The first three words. We've already covered those. First we covered the Word of Forgiveness where he says, "*Father forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.*" Then we covered, two weeks ago, the Word of Assurance when he says to the thief on the cross who had said, "*Lord, remember me.*" He said, "*Today you'll be with me in paradise.*" And last week we looked at the Word of Love, which is really about relationships. We talked about family and what Jesus said to his mother, Mary, and his best friend, John. "*Mother, this is your son. Son, this is your mother.*"

That's in the first three hours. Nine o'clock, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock. At noon things changed. At noon everything goes dark. Now, you know as well as I do that from noon to three are usually the brightest parts of the day. It's usually the hottest part of the day – from noon to three, except in winter. But when Jesus is hanging on the cross after three hours it goes dark at noon. Matthew 27:45-46 says this, "***From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. [So there's three hours that it's just like night in the middle of the day. I'm pretty sure God made it dark.] About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, [He's been hanging there in the dark for three hours.] 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*'"**

This is the fourth word that Jesus says from the cross. I'm calling it "The Word of Substitution". God makes it dark in the middle of the day. The word there in Greek *skatas* literally means obscurity. He's obscuring what's going on on the

cross. The darkness is like a curtain falling over this scene in the final torture of Jesus Christ. It's a grim picture of what's taking place on that lonely hill.

In one way God is saying this is so bad, this is so evil, this is so terrible to watch. And it's such an ugly, horrible sight that Jesus Christ cries out. He cries out this fourth word. And literally *anabo aho* in Greek literally means he screamed it.

The fourth thing that Jesus says from the cross is this: '*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*' That's Aramaic, the language they spoke during that time. And it means, "*My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?*"

This is the most shocking word of all the things that Jesus says on the cross. We can understand "*Father, forgive them.*" We can understand "*Today you'll be with me in paradise.*" But when now he says to God the Father, "*Why have you forsaken me?*" that's hard to understand. God abandoning someone? Especially his own son?

Some of you know the pain and the sting of abandonment. Nothing hurts more than being rejected by somebody. If you've ever felt the sting of rejection you know how bad that hurts.

Some of you growing up were rejected, abandoned by a parent. Some of you as an adult have been rejected or abandoned by a spouse. Or maybe a boyfriend. This happens.

In Jesus' crucifixion, in the last days he's progressively abandoned by everybody. First he's abandoned by Judas, one of the twelve disciples. Then he's abandoned by the other disciples when he was arrested at the garden. They all leave. They're afraid they're going to get arrested and killed. Now on the cross he says, "*My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?*"

It's interesting. Every time Jesus refers to God in the Bible he always calls him, "Father". This is the only time in the Bible where Jesus has not called God

the Father, Father. He just calls him “My God, my God.” Because at this point the relationship had been broken between the Father and the Son because of the sin that Jesus is carrying on the cross. BTW, this very statement is a direct quote from Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help?” In fact, Psalm 22 is a prophecy of the suffering and death of the Messiah on the cross. Turn to Psalm 22 on your Bibles and let’s see. (6-8, 14, 16, 18)

Folks, I want you to understand the price that Jesus Christ paid for you to be able to go to heaven. Your salvation is free. But it certainly was not inexpensive. And it broke the relationship between God the Father and God the Son at this very moment. Jesus had never known what it meant to be out of fellowship with God. But we know what it’s like. We know when it feels like God’s a million miles away. The coldness. The feeling like your prayers aren’t being heard. Feeling like you’re estranged from God. Jesus had never known that. He’d always lived his life in complete fellowship with God. Yet at this moment when he takes the sin of the world on his life, God has to look away. And he says, “My God, my God, even you, you’ve forsaken me in this moment.”

What is going on in his fourth word? I want you to take note of this.

Jesus became my substitute.

On the cross, Jesus became your substitute. He took the punishment that you deserve, and he took it on himself. He took the punishment for everything you’ve ever done wrong and everything you will ever do wrong. Jesus on the cross paid for the sins you haven’t even committed yet. He became the substitute by taking your punishment on himself. He paid the penalty for your sins and he assumed your place.

Here’s what the Bible says. I John 2:2, *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*

There is a group of Christians called Calvinists, they're believers too like you. I have friends who are Calvinists. Now, Calvinists don't believe that Jesus died for everybody. They believed that he died only for those who were going to be believers. They believe he died only for those who were going to be a part of the church. But there are many verses such as this one that say Jesus died not just for our sins but for the sins of the whole world.

You see, if somebody dies and goes to hell, they go to hell with their sins already paid for by Jesus. He's already paid for everybody's sins. They just reject it. They reject the grace of God. It's like I pay for my wife's ticket to the Philippines. But she says, "I can't go without you, Rolly" so she doesn't go but I already paid for the ticket. It was hers for the taking but she disregards it. I know that's unlikely but it's just an illustration of how Jesus can pay for the sins of the whole world but not the whole world takes advantage of it.

Now, I want you to take note of the word "atoning". It says, "*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*" What is an atonement? That's a word we rarely use. The word "atonement" literally means payment for damage done. You bust up somebody's car you have to pay for the damage done. That's called atoning. It means compensation for our offense. You break it, you pay for it.

What atonement does is, it satisfies justice. Would you want to live in a world where nobody is held accountable for any crime? Justice demands that when crimes, when sins are committed somebody has to pay for it. So, the verse says Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He satisfied the law.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (That means all the things I've done wrong. Every lie I've told, every lust I've had, every cheating, every sin, He poured all that into Jesus. He is the atoning sacrifice. God took the sinless Christ and poured into him our sins. And here's the incredible but most wonderful part) so that in him we might become the righteousness of*

God.” In short, we became righteous because all of our sins were transferred to Jesus! That’s the best deal you’re ever going to get.

Folks, this is what it means that Jesus is your substitute. If Jesus isn’t your substitute then you will pay for your own sins. Either you’re going to pay for them or Jesus is going to pay for them. But God says I don’t want you to have to pay for them.

What does this concept of substitution then show us? It shows us the holiness of God. It shows us the seriousness of sin. And it shows us the expensiveness of grace. Salvation costs a lot.

So, we see from the fourth word, we learn **three things about Substitution:**

1. GOD IS HOLY.

God is holy. Revelation 4:8 says, **“Holy, holy, holy [he’s saying get the message. I say it three times. Holy, holy, holy...] is the Lord God Almighty, who was, [existed in the past] and is, [he exists right now] and is to come [he exists in the future].”** The first thing we learn through this word is that God is holy.

Let me explain what I’m talking about. In Greek mythology and in Roman mythology they had all these gods – Zeus or Jupiter and Apollo and Mars and Venus. All the Roman gods. About 42 of them. The one thing about those gods is they all had human frailties. Every one of them. They got angry. They lusted. They were impetuous. Sometimes the Greek gods and the Roman gods got impatient. They zapped people with lightning bolts. Or they got jealous of each other. They were fickle. They were unreliable. They are all fake gods.

But the real God, the God who created the universe is 100 percent pure. 100 percent just. 100 percent unpolluted. The real God is 100 percent perfect. That’s called holy.

God is holy. He’s perfect. He’s never done anything wrong. He’s never done anything imperfect. He’s never done anything impure. He’s never done anything

polluted. God is holy. An imperfect God is just another human being. And certainly not worthy of worship.

Because God is 100 percent perfect and 100 percent pure and 100 percent righteous and 100 percent holy, he cannot stand to be around imperfection, unholiness, evil, and sin. He can't stand to be around it. That means we've got a real problem, right? Because I'm not perfect and neither are you.

The Bible has so much to say about God's perfection. Let me just show you one verse. The Bible says in Habakkuk 1:13 about God, *"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing."*

So here's what's happening on the cross. God is perfect and Jesus is perfect. But all of a sudden God in his infinite love says I'm going to take all the sins of all mankind, every rape ever committed, every child abuse ever committed, every murder ever committed, every adultery ever committed, I'm going to take all of that and I'm going to pour all of that on my Son, Jesus Christ, who's volunteered to do this – to take away the sin of the world.

You know how bad you feel when you feel guilty over one sin? How would you like to have the guilt over every murder ever committed? How would you like to have the guilt of every rape ever committed, every sin that you can think of? That is mental, physical, emotional, spiritual torture. An indescribable agony. And when Jesus is willingly taking the sin of the world on himself, God who is holy cannot even stand to look at his Son. And he looks away because his eyes are too pure to look on evil. On the cross, Jesus bore our sins and he is guilty on each sin that was laid on him. What an awful distressful feeling. But the most terrible feeling is the feeling of being abandoned.

So Jesus cries out, *"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"* But God is silent. His cries fell on deaf ears. God has to pour his wrath on the wrongdoer.

At that moment in history Jesus Christ is separated from intimacy with the Father. Only at that very moment. God has to look away. He rejects his own Son. Because God is holy.

The second thing we learn from the concept of substitution is this:

2. SIN IS UGLY!

Sin is ugly. And on the cross we see how ugly sin really is. The truth is we don't think sin is ugly. We live in the 21st century. We think sin is fun! And we think sin is funny. In fact most TV shows and most movies use sin for humor. And this is Satan's strategy. To get you to laugh at what put Jesus on the cross. Rarely on TV and in the movies, you rarely see the consequences of sin. You see the fun part but you never see the consequences. You see the bed-hopping, the adultery, the smoking and drinking with abandon, the gambling, the killing, the cursing and swearing and all that evil stuff and people laugh at them or take delight in them. We laugh at them and enjoy them.

If you want to know how ugly sin is, if you want to know the damage sin does, look at Jesus bleeding on the cross. He's saying this is how much it takes to pay for your sins. The cross shows the damage that sin does. And **sin, we don't realize this, it does three things to us.**

• SIN ALIENATES ME FROM GOD

It alienates me from God. Why? Because God is holy and I'm not. So it breaks the relationship. It always separates you from God. Isaiah 59:2 says, ***“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”***

Anybody who's been married for any length of time knows how conflict strains and separates and stresses a marriage. I've been married 20 years. Bel doesn't have to tell me anymore when she's mad. I know it. I know it intuitively. I can feel the vibrations.

Guys, you married a sinner. And she married a bigger one. And you can't take two imperfect people and have a perfect relationship. It isn't going to happen. You're going to have misunderstandings. You're going to have conflict.

Sin alienates. It alienates me from God. It alienates me from other people. Second thing is,

- **SIN DISTRESSES ME**

It causes enormous amounts of stress in my life. It causes guilt, anxiety and shame and insecurities. In Psalm 38:4, David says, *"My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear."* You know that. You've experienced it. The third thing is,

- **SIN CONDEMNS ME**

In fact all three of these, alienation, distress and condemnation, we see them in Jesus on the cross. The Bible says in Psalm 7:11 (GNT), *"God is a righteous judge and always condemns the wicked."*

Notice the word "righteous". This is another word for holy. What's righteous? The only thing we know is the Righteous Brothers. God is a righteous judge. He's not a righteous brother. He's a righteous judge. And he always condemns the wicked.

So, we learned that God is holy. That sin is ugly. And there's a third thing that we need to learn.

3. SALVATION IS COSTLY.

Salvation is costly. It is free but it is costly. Yes, you can get a free ticket to heaven. But somebody paid for it. Jesus did. But many people don't recognize this. They think they're going to heaven because they're good, they're nice people, they go to church, they give alms to the poor, and all those seemingly righteous acts. But we saw that there's no one righteous, no not one, as the Bible says.

The cross shows that sin is destructive, that sin is ugly, and that salvation is costly. It is the most expensive gift you will ever be given.

Romans 3:25, *“God sent him to die in our place to take away our sins. We receive forgiveness through faith. And all of this is because of the blood of Jesus’ death.”*

Folks, that’s substitution.

What happened on Calvary is both justice and mercy were satisfied at the same time. This is what was playing out on the cross for you. When Jesus Christ yelled out, *“My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?”* God is playing the prosecutor, the defense attorney, the criminal and the judge all at once. He’s playing every single part of the role. And he’s paying your debt.

Salvation has nothing to do with you. It has everything to do with God. He did it from the beginning to the end.

Here’s what the Bible says. Galatians 3:13, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’”*

Will you learn from this? God is holy. Sin is ugly. And salvation is costly. It cost Jesus his life. Based on that, **what should be my response?** What should be your response?

Three things.

1. TURN FROM MY SIN & TRUST JESUS TO SAVE ME

I turn from my sin and I trust Jesus to save me. That’s the first thing I do. There’s no snowball’s chance in hell I’m getting to heaven any other way. Otherwise, Jesus wasted his life. I turn from my sin, because it’s ugly, and I trust Jesus to save me.

Romans 3:22 (EASY), the Bible says this: *“God accepts every person who believes in Christ. It is the same way for everyone, whether they are Jews or*

Gentiles.” I don’t know about you but I like that verse in the Bible. I’m glad that verse is there. It says “*It is the same way for everyone.*”

Second.

2. LIVE IN A STATE OF GRATITUDE

The second thing I do and this is why we sing at church and we’re going to sing in just a minute. I live in a state of gratitude. I live in a complete state of gratitude once I understand the full magnitude of what Jesus Christ did for me on the cross. I could not help but be grateful for a God who would love me that much and suffer for me that much even when I was thumbing my nose and turning my back, rejecting him and saying, I’m going to be my own little god.

Romans 5:11 (NLT) says, “*So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.*”

So I turn from my sin and I trust him to save me. And then I just start living my life in gratitude.

Number three. The third thing that I do is...

3. TELL OTHERS THE GOOD NEWS!

Friends, this is why Fil-Am Church was started 27 years ago – to tell other people the good news. Can you imagine keeping such life-changing news a secret? If somebody died for you wouldn’t you want to know about it? This is why we do everything we do. It’s why we do small groups. It’s why we do worship services. It’s why we sing and pray, and have Class 101 and 201 and 301 and 401. It’s why we go on mission trips. It’s why we send kids to camp. We do it for this. We don’t do it for any other reason. We do it for this – for Jesus’ sake. He gave his all for us. And we give our all to him in return in deep gratitude and love.

Jesus died for everybody and he wants everybody to know it. If you had the cure for cancer and you didn’t share it with your neighbor and they had cancer they ought to put you in prison for that. It’s criminal. It would be criminal to have a

life saving solution and not tell it to the person who's dying next door. Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you? You're going to heaven. Is anybody else going to go because of you?

Everybody needs Jesus. We need to keep reaching out. Do you have unsaved friends and loved ones? All you need to do is to invite them to church. Then pray they come. And when they come, pray they respond to the gospel. That's our mission folks. And your closest mission field is your family, your friends, your neighbors. Tell them about the love of Jesus. Show them the love of Jesus. And invite them to come to church. Just do it over and over. What do you have you to lose? But if you don't do it, you lose a soul.

Jesus was separated from God so we could be united with God. He was forsaken so that we could be forgiven. And let me tell you one very important thing. It is God's great love for you that made God the Father forsake his own Son Jesus. This act of sacrifice means that you never have to make any sacrifices anymore. It means God will never ever forsake you or abandon you. Jesus already took your place on the cross. He was forsaken for you.

God is faithful, the Bible says. He will never leave you nor forsake you. You receive the full benefit of the substitution. God is always watching over you. You may be going through a difficult time, you feel like your prayers are not being heard, take heart, because God knows everything that's going in your life. You just wait and he will come through for you.

Let us pray.