

WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE**GALATIANS 3:10-14; 1 TIMOTHY 2:5-6**

“Substitute.” What comes into your mind when you hear that word – “substitute”? Probably something less than the best. I guess I immediately think of substitute teachers. When I was in school, a substitute teacher was usually a sort of naïve, hapless creature who muddled through the day because our regular teacher was ill. They meant well and did their best, but they were kind of ineffective and could be taken advantage of by some of my classmates. I heard about one man who was asked to fill in for Billy Graham at the very last minute when Billy was scheduled to preach at some big, downtown church. Can you imagine having to substitute for Billy Graham? No, thanks! Anyway, this man accepted the challenge gracefully. As he started his sermon that day, he alluded to this whole business of being a substitute by pointing out something to the congregation. “As I was sitting here, I looked up at your large, stained glass window and noticed that one of the small sections of glass up there is broken out. You’ve put a piece of cardboard up there as a substitute. No, it’s not the real thing, but it’s better than nothing.” With that humble observation, he preached his message. After the service, he was greeting people at the door. One little, old lady came up to him and said, “Now, Preacher, I just wanted you to know that you mustn’t see yourself as some kind of cardboard substitute for our broken window pane. You’re a real pane!”

Substitute. For followers of Jesus, ironically, that’s a wonderful word! Jesus was and is our substitute on the cross. He took our place. He died the death we deserve and made it possible to receive the forgiveness we don’t deserve. We’re considering why the cross is more than just a piece of wood this Lenten season – this 40 day period of time when Christians all over the world think deeply about Jesus’s suffering, death, and resurrection. Last week we considered why Jesus had to die – with the emphasis on the word “die.” Today, I want you to think about the same phrase with me, but the emphasis is on the word “Jesus.” Why did Jesus have to die? What was it about Jesus that made Him the most acceptable and perfect substitute for us on the cross? Let’s consider two important Scriptures as we try to answer those questions. Both were written by the great Christian leader, Paul. One was written to a church, and the other was written to a young man Paul had mentored, Timothy. So, why did Jesus have to die? One answer to that question is certainly...

GOD’S NEED FOR SATISFACTION.

It sounds odd both to talk about God needing something and God satisfying Himself, but such are the limits of human language when it comes to talking about God! When someone says, “Well, I must satisfy myself” it sounds selfish and self-centered. Or, even worse, when someone say, “Well, I’m satisfied with myself” we pick up the scent of pride. When we say, however, that God has a need for satisfaction, we mean that God must be true to Himself and to His own character. At all times, God must act like God.

What’s God like? What kind of a Being is He? One window into God’s character is the Ten Commandments found in the Old Testament. They reveal what God is like and what He cares about. A few moments ago I read a passage from Paul’s letter to a

group of new Jesus followers in an area called Galatia – located in present day Turkey. That church was having a problem understanding how a person got right with God and stayed right with God. Some began to believe and teach that if a person tried really hard to keep all the Ten Commandments as well as other Old Testament laws that God would give them eternal life in Heaven as a result. Paul totally rejected that teaching. But he most certainly did not reject the Ten Commandments! They're good, great, and reveal God's character. The problem was in trying to see them as a way to fix a broken relationship with God. No one has ever kept them perfectly and God's standard is perfection. All of us have broken the Ten Commandments in thought, attitude or actual deed. Each of us is a guilty sinner. And every guilty sinner – Paul says there in Galatians – is under God's curse of death and eternal separation from God.

Now, if what I just said sounds really harsh and extreme, then you probably didn't hear last week's message. Last week we were reminded that sin – which is a word that means to break God's moral laws in any way – is something God takes very seriously. He can't just forget about sin and sweep it under some proverbial rug! Sure, we forgive and ask forgiveness of other people because we're all imperfect sinners. God offers forgiveness to you and me only if there is a reason and a foundation on which to forgive. God's forgiveness has to have substance to it. God forgives your sin and mine – not by overlooking or excusing it – but by dealing with it.

This is what's meant by God satisfying Himself. God wants to forgive your sin and extend His grace to you. Why? Because He loves you! But God is also just. He must uphold all that is right in His universe. His own character prevents Him from offering forgiveness until justice is done to your sins. But He also must be loving! If God was only just, He would send you and me to Hell for eternity. If God was only loving, He would overlook or excuse your sin. Only God is able to be both fully just and fully loving all at the same time. How did He do that? God achieved a perfect balance between His justice and His love by providing a substitute for you and me – someone who could pay the penalty for our sins and make it possible to receive His grace, His love, and His eternal friendship. God Himself became the substitute. He did that in and through His one and only Son, Jesus. Why did Jesus need to die? God's need for satisfaction. Now, how exactly was that need satisfied? God's need for satisfaction was met in ...

JESUS' ACT OF SUBSTITUTION.

Jesus became our substitute and that act of substitution took place almost 2,000 years ago on a cross. Back in Old Testament times God had made something very plain to His people, "... according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness." (Heb 9:22 NLT) This was taught primarily through animal sacrifice. A variety of innocent animals – goats, sheep, bulls, even birds – were put to death as a substitute for a person's sin. God was teaching His people that sin has a very serious result. The result is death and somebody or something must die when sin is committed. Justice has to be done to sin.

But God never intended the Old Testament system of animal sacrifice to be a permanent solution. Why not? Two reasons. One, animal sacrifice prepared God's people for the real solution and, two, the blood of animals can't ever truly be an adequate substitute for anyone's sin. The Bible acknowledges that fact. "The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared.... For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Heb 10:1-2, 4 NLT)

Well, if animals couldn't do the job of substitution, who then? What are the qualifications? What are the requirements? The only perfect substitute had to be someone who was both fully God and fully human. On the one hand, our substitute had to be God because no one can satisfy God's demands but God Himself. No mere human being could ever be good or moral enough to satisfy God's absolute holiness. On the other hand, our substitute had to be fully and truly human since it's human beings that need to be rescued. Some person who was God, but not a human being, couldn't serve as a real substitute for us. Oh, and one more thing. This had to be a sinless human being because a human being who had committed even one sin in his or her life could only die for his or her own sin. What, then, does the Bible tell us about Jesus? He was and is both fully God and fully human in one person. The Bible also says He was sinless in thought, word, and action. Jesus meets all the requirements and qualifications for being a substitute. When Jesus died on the cross, then, God substituted Jesus' perfect human life as the payment for the guilt of your sin and my sin.

Some people think this makes God the Father seems like some terrible ogre – someone who was reluctant to forgive our sins and only did so because He was somehow embarrassed into it by Jesus, God the Son. Not true! Remember, this was God the Father's plan. The Bible says, "For this is how God (meaning God the Father) loved the world: He gave his one and only Son (that's Jesus), so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (Jo 3:16 NLT) God isn't some kind of heavenly tyrant who demands His pound of flesh before He forgives! Yes, His justice had to be satisfied. But do did His love. And remember that God the Father and God the Son are one Being. God the Father was in God the Son as He hung there dying on the cross as our substitute. Think, instead, of the Judge of the entire universe taking off His judicial robes and allowing Himself to be nailed to a cross in our place. He suffered in and through His Son, Jesus, the sentence of death He had just delivered. This isn't either harsh justice or mushy love. It's how the Bible defines grace!

Perhaps some of you recall a move entitled "In the Line of Fire." Clint Eastwood played Frank Horrigan, a thirty year veteran of the Secret Service. He was haunted by a terrible memory. He was a young agent assigned to President Kennedy on that fateful day in Dallas in 1963. When the shots were fired, Horrigan had frozen in shock. For the next thirty years, he wrestled with the ultimate question any Secret Service agent

asks, "Can I take a bullet for the President?" In the climax of the movie, Horrigan does what he was unable to do thirty years earlier. He throws himself into the path of an assassin's bullet to save the President. Now, Secret Service agents are willing to do that because they believe the President's life is so valuable to our country and to the world that he's worth dying for. They aren't asked or trained to take a bullet for just anyone. At the cross, the whole situation was reversed. The President of the Universe actually took a bullet for you and me. That's how valuable you are to God! Now in light of all that, let me ask you to think with me about the following...

MY RESPONSE TO GOD'S SALVATION.

Every day you live you're faced with a choice of how you're going to relate to God. You can relate to God on the basis of who you are and what you might do or you can relate to Him on the basis of who He is and what He's done. Most of us want to earn or make our own way through life. We appreciate the help of others, but most of us don't like to feel indebted to others. Being self-reliant is a good feeling, and in many areas of life and living, it's completely appropriate to be self-reliant. We usually kind of resent people who expect us to do for them what they should do for themselves. But when it comes down to the issue of how to get right with God and stay right with God, self-reliance is not only impossible, it's arrogant. On one occasion, a man challenged an evangelist by the name of R.A. Torrey saying, "I'm not a Christian, but I'm moral and upright. I would like to know what you have against me." Torrey looked that man right in the eye and said, "I charge you, sir, with treason against Heaven's King!" When you think you can make yourself acceptable to God, you imply God doesn't know what He's doing.

Most people today still assume or believe that they can somehow earn God's favor by being moral and upright. Just ask them if they think they'll be in Heaven when they die. If they say, "Yes" or "I think so" and you ask them the basis for their optimism, they will give you some variation of - "I've tried to live a good life." It's usually some mish-mash of their own rules, personal dos and donts, and the Ten Commandments thrown in there for good measure. Most admit they haven't kept even their own rules perfectly, but they believe God gives you points for trying. They think they measure up pretty well when they compare themselves to how other people live their lives – and they just might. The problem is, of course, that God judges on His standard, not yours, or mine. Paul was having the same problem with these Galatian followers of Jesus. Some felt they could earn God's love and grace implying that Jesus died for precisely nothing at all. And so it is today. There are millions – maybe billions - of imperfect, but pretty moral people in our country and around the world who are stubbornly self-reliant when it comes to God.

What Paul said to those folk back then is just as true twenty centuries later. Back then, these people were trying to earn God's favor by strict adherence to Old Testament laws. Today, people try to earn God's favor essentially through various forms of what they consider to be good behavior. But Paul's ringing objection is just as true today as it was back then. Can't do it. Won't work. Why not? God's standard is perfection not "kind of" or "sort of" good. We just find it hard to accept that God's standard is absolute, total perfection – nothing less. But there's something much worse than ineffectiveness here.

When you try to relate to God on the basis of who you are and what you've done – in terms of getting and staying right with God – you are, in effect, slapping Him in the face. You're actually guilty of the greatest and most terrible arrogance and disrespect imaginable. By insisting on your self-reliance, you're rejecting the only way to start and maintain a relationship with God – a way that He Himself has provided at a great cost.

It's as if you're saying to God, "Thanks, God, for sending Jesus. He sure was a swell guy. But He didn't really need to die on a cross for me or anyone else. Too bad about that cross thing. Must have been really painful and all – that beating, those nails, the slow suffocation. But it wasn't really necessary, God. I know if I just try really hard today to keep a rule or two, or do something good today, you'll welcome me into Heaven with open arms when I die. I'm sure glad you're a forgiving, understanding God...." You don't get or stay right with God on your terms. The only people who get and stay right with God do so on God's terms. If you continue to insist that your flawed and frequently unsuccessful attempts at being good are adequate to present before God Almighty, you will have all of eternity in a place called Hell to contemplate your incredible arrogance and disrespect.

What are God's terms for getting and staying right with Him yesterday, today, and tomorrow? The Bible's word for it is faith. Essentially, faith is transferring trust away from yourself and putting it in Jesus and what He did for you at the cross. This kind of faith is more than believing God exists. It's more than asking God to heal your sick child or protect you when you go on a trip. There's nothing wrong with that, by the way, but it's not what the Bible means by faith. Faith is rejecting self-reliance and becoming Jesus-reliant when it comes to getting and staying right with God every day you live.

Someone here might be thinking, "But, Rick, doesn't God care whether I live a good, moral, and upright life?" Of course, He does! But the motivation is what matters. Are you doing these good things in order to somehow impress God? "Look here, God. I'm not telling lies much anymore. Pretty impressive, huh? Oh, did you notice I got baptized, joined the church, and I've even starting doing this thing called 'tithing'? Just helping you out there the best I can, Big Guy. You probably pretty lucky having such a 'put together well' person like me serving You, huh?" Or, are you living your life in a godly way out of sheer gratitude to God? If your motivation is gratitude and thankfulness, that has tremendous value. God will work in and through your gratitude to help you change your behavior, your attitudes, your values, your desires, and your relationships.

Why go through the hard work of submitting sinful habits to the Lord? Why endure the hard work of doing relationships differently and having the Holy Spirit prune away ungodly attitudes about other people, or your job, or your finances? Why get involved and active in the Lord's church with your time, talents, and tithe? Why read and meditate on God's Word and pray faithfully? Why reach out and try to serve the needs of others? Why put up with potential rejection and a sneer or two when you try to share with someone what Jesus means to you? Why do any of that? Why keep on doing that? Gratitude. Because you love Jesus. Because you're so thankful for all that God

has done and keeps on doing for you. Follower of Jesus, it's easy to slip back into self-reliance when it comes to our relationship with God. Instead, live in a godly way everyday as a response to God's grace – gratitude, in other words – rather than some kind of reason to keep on receiving God's grace. You were made right with God because of Jesus. You also stay right with God because of Jesus.

I'm told that the story I'm going to tell you is a true one. It happened years ago in a small village in the country of Ireland. It was late in the afternoon on a cold day. Half of the fathers who lived in a certain, small village worked in a nearby coal mine. Most of them came home each day on the company bus to a waiting family and a hot meal. On this particular day, the roads were slick with ice. It was one of those times when you dare not hit the brakes hard or turn quickly for fear of skidding of the road. The road from the mine to the village was dangerous enough without the ice. There was a solid rock wall on the right and a sheer cliff drop off on the left. The bus driver carefully guided his precious cargo of men down the hill – the windows of the bus fogged up by the warm breath of those weary miners.

Suddenly, as they approached the village, the bus driver saw something ahead that took his own breath away. There, through the dim light he and the other men could see the form of a small boy sitting in the street, playing in the snow. His back was turned to the fast approaching bus. An eerie hush descended on the bus as the men realized the impact of the situation. In just a few split seconds, the bus driver was forced to make a decision no person every wants to make. If he jumped on the brakes or if he swerved to avoid the child, it probably meant certain death for half of the fathers and husbands in that small village as they would surely plummet over the cliff. But to continue on meant certain death for that little boy in the road. In those few seconds, the bus driver had to decide – the boy or the men? With tears in his eyes, he made his decision. The bus driver was the first one out of the bus. He ran back to pick up the lifeless body of the child. As the story goes, only then did he discover that it was the body of his own son. Who is capable of imagining, much less describing, the anguish that man experienced realizing that he chose to sacrifice his own son to save the lives of all those men?

God the Father drove the bus of His own judgment upon your sin and mine. And He knew exactly who got hit by that bus. It was His Son, Jesus, who had to die. How does the Bible put it? "What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?" (Rom 8:31-32 NLT)