

Introduction

We have been undergoing a series of changes as a body to facilitate worship in a more meaningful way. And today as we meet together as one service on a Sunday morning for the first time in three years we want to set aside our 2 Peter series and focus on the person of Christ and his work on the cross. So the entire Sunday message will be centered around the Lord's table.

Occasionally we take a Sunday to think through a particular aspect of the Lord's table. Today we are going to think through the aspect of Christ becoming a man to be our substitute. Now there is some mental work you are going to have to invest if you are to appreciate this concept. And this extra effort is required because the theological language that is necessary to describe what is going on tends to insulate us from the rawness of the reality.

What is going on is substitution and what is going on in the incarnation is truly staggering. A lot of times we use words without really thinking about them. They have a very simplistic, symbolic meaning and we think we understand when we really only have glossed over the concept. I know this is the case for me when it comes to the incarnation (God becoming man) and substitution. To really have some sort of accurate picture in my head of what is going on in substitution is near impossible. All my mental images of that transaction are stick figure simplifications that my mind can accept but don't even come close to doing justice to the actual event. So the goal of today is to turn our stick figures simplifications into a photographic quality, 3D panoramic.

Why is it that when we think about the concept of substitution and that death on a cross for our behalf, why is it when we think about this incredibly personal intervention our minds simplify this down to an elementary math problem. A for B and B for A. That's boring because it's easy. How does this happen? How does it happen that the most significant event in all of history,

the event that the entire OT anticipates and the event which the entire NT contemplates and the event upon which all of eternity meditates becomes insignificant background noise in life compared to the foreground of yard projects, soccer, basketball, golf games, school programs, job responsibilities, and family vacations?

It is because we all struggle with idolatry. **We all come here today with varying levels of wanting something or someone other than God to provide us with joy and meaning and significance.** **We worship freedom** and long to be the man with no ties. We idealize leisure and entertainment and freedom from suffering as the goal of life. **We worship the concept of power.** We want to perhaps influence people or be respected. We don't want our financial or social situation to dictate our course. We want to make our own decisions. **We worship relationships.** We think that a perfect marriage will make us happy. We think that a perfect family will make us happy. We concentrate all our energy on developing relationships in the home and worship our family. **We worship good health** (exercise, eating the right kinds of organically grown foods, going to the right kinds of doctors, getting the right amount of sun). **We worship education.** We want to go to the best schools and fear that going to the wrong schools will ruin our potential or our kids potential. **We worship personality types.** Strong personalities, personalities that are good at decision making, personalities that are good at building relationships, personalities that are good at handling conflict, personalities that are funny or witty. **We worship sports** and the opportunities for recognition and fame and glory and power that are built into that. **We worship finances.** Money purchases a lifestyle. Money means freedom. Money means power. **We worship beauty** which means extreme concentration on the proper length of hair, the right kinds of highlights mixed into the hair, the right types of clothing, the way a piece of clothing fits. ¼ inch of material makes all the difference between keeping it as a favorite pair

of jeans and returning it to Ross. Attention to smells, dots on the skin, colors in the cheeks. **We worship technology** and the high that is associated with buying up the fastest, most advanced product on the market. **We worship efficiency** and the ability to do an incredible amount of things within a fixed period of time.

And all of these tiny gods in our life take time and demand our attention.

And the cumulative effect of managing a 100 micro gods is that THE ONE TRUE GOD is functionally ignored. And that is not good. And so today we want to focus on Christ and come back to the heart of our mission statement. **We exist to glorify God by pointing the affections of all peoples to the all satisfying person of Jesus Christ.**

You see, there is only one thing that will change the idolatry in our lives. It will not do to tell yourself, “I should not worship beauty. I should not worship sports. I should not worship my job.” This never works. **And the reason it won’t work is because you always worship the thing that is most important to you.** That’s the way God made you. You can’t change that. Telling yourself, “I should not love money is like telling yourself I should not be bleeding.” That is a true statement but it is not addressing the cause of the problem. **Your body bleeds when you get hurt. It was made to do that.** We can’t help but worship things that are valuable to us. We are built to worship things that are awesome. And that is why it never helps to say, “money is not awesome, I shouldn’t worship it. Power and fame are not awesome; I shouldn’t worship them.” Because on a certain level, they are. **But what changes our hearts from worshipping the world to worshipping Christ is by seeing with a renewed perspective that Christ is far better than all the world has to offer.** And like a child that loses interest in the toy he has and drops it in favor of something much greater, we release our hold on this world. Christ is not in the least threatened by the beauty and attractiveness of the

world. Any honest comparison reveals that the world is a single candle next to the combined power of every star in the universe. What threatens worship is the blinding of eyes so that they cannot see Christ. And the world becomes the Christ-substitute.

Today we want to try to take the blinders off by focusing on the person of Jesus Christ and specifically focus on his incarnation and his work of substitution on the cross for us. **The incarnation and subsequent substitution of Jesus Christ, these are perhaps the greatest indicators of what God is like and the greatest attractors to him.**

Let's start with a definition of substitution and then work backwards from there. This is from Dr. Charles Cranfield in his commentary on Romans:

God, because of his mercy willed to forgive sinful men, and, being truly merciful, willed to forgive them righteously, that is, without in any way condoning their sin, purposed to direct against his own very self in the person of his Son the full weight of that righteous wrath which they deserved.

So in very plain terms substitution refers to the fact that God takes our place in absorbing the wrath of God while at the same time we receive all the benefits of Christ's perfect life as if we lived that life.

Now, In order for Jesus Christ to be our Substitute he had to become a man. And this is by far the greatest mystery of the Christian faith. It was something that the OT saint, even though he had many clues, had no ability to even dream about. It was so far outside of the box of their thinking. They could not have even imagined that God could somehow take on human form.

1 Timothy 3:16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh,

There is mystery here. So we are acknowledging the reality. But let us try anyway to explore for a little while why this had to be the case. Why did God need to become man? Why this unexpected and surprising unfolding in the plan of God? There are perhaps dozens of reasons for this, but for our purposes today we are only going to look at two.

**1. God became man because our substitute must die:
God cannot die.**

The entirety of the OT and specifically the OT law makes the point that in order for sins to be atoned for there must be death.

Leviticus 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

And to state the obvious, the blood does not atone as it is coursing through the veins of the animal. It is through the violent shedding of that blood and the spilling of that blood onto the ground. It is through the ending of life that atonement is received. The author of Hebrews makes this same point:

Hebrews 9:22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

God moved out of his limitless, inexhaustible love for unworthy creatures desired to absorb the death we deserve. But there was a problem. God cannot die. He is eternal. He is the great I AM. And so this is one of the reasons Jesus needed to become a man. He needed flesh with real flesh and blood so that this blood might be shed and his life given in exchange for the death sentence of the elect. John 1 describes this incarnation.

John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [So there was this eternal WORD who existed before the creation of the world.]

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We call this the incarnation of Christ. The word incarnation is built of the root carne. We have a carne asada burrito. That's a steak meat burrito. So it's an intentionally crude word. It's taking the invisible Spirit of the living God and giving Him flesh. The Word becoming flesh. **God condescended from the unimaginable heights of true freedom and true beauty to take on rags of flesh.** He became the God-man. And he took on a body with flesh and blood with the absolute solitary purpose of spilling that blood for you and me. And HERE is the point we are making: **blood must be spilt if atonement is to be made.**

Matthew 26:28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

God became a man because our substitute must die. And he did. And he did die voluntarily. Before we get to our second point I am going to read 5 verses. And while those verses are being read, close your eyes and meditate and pray back to God praises for his voluntary act of dying for us.

Ephesians 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and **gave himself up** for us, a fragrant offering and **sacrifice** to God.

Galatians 1:3-5 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who **gave himself** for our sins to deliver us from the present

evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 9:13-14 For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit **offered himself** without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Romans 8:3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and **for sin**, he condemned sin in the flesh,

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once **for sins**, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

2. God became man because we need a mediator.

Our substitute who took our place and died our death on the cross was not just man and he was not just God. He was the God-man, God in Christ, which makes him fully and uniquely qualified to represent man and God and mediate between them.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

So you have one side of the room the white hot holy God of the Universe. The power of Unapproachable splendor. He is spirit in substance and wholly other. He moves freely through dimensions and is not bound by either space or time or matter. There is inescapable perfection that literally scares tears down your cheeks. Coming into proximity with this God is you in fact

experiencing what is in fact infinity and total unknowability. As 1 Cor 2:16 states, “Who can know the mind of the Lord.”

And there is on the other side of the room, you. Just a tiny little man.

Now the goal is to communicate with this God. But there are two problems. First, there is the problem of unequal beings and second there is the problem of morality. **The problem of unequal beings is the same problem a single celled amoeba has in trying to communicate to you that he doesn't appreciate you boiling him when you cook soup.** He's an amoeba and you're a man and you can't communicate. You need an amoeba-man mediator. And the same problem exists between God and man. He is not human. What language does he speak?

The second problem is a moral one. We know that God is perfectly holy and because of his nature cannot tolerate sin. And the Bible pictures us as literally clothed in filthy garments. **Garments that are so soiled that the stench would cause you to literally uncontrollably gag if you were to be within a few feet.** **Is God going to hug you like that?** How are you going to appeal to God, the very definition of morality, in this condition? Are you really going to walk down the hallway of the palace with filth dripping off your body onto the Kings floor and strike up a conversation? You cannot approach him stained in your sin? What is the appropriate first sentence given your offense?

So what we need is a God-man mediator. And that is exactly who Jesus is.

Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 9 and we are going to read through 15 verses here to hopefully appreciate the fact that Jesus was our mediator.

Hebrews 9:1-15 Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. [he is speaking of the law of Moses and the way in which people would atone for their sins.] ² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the

Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. ⁶ These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, ⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

Now what the author of Hebrews is doing here is talking about how the Law of Moses dealt with the mediator problem. God over here; man over here. And they need to communicate given the moral problem and the unequal being problem. **Well the OT way of doing that was to setup a tabernacle or temple in which priests AS MEDIATORS would take blood into the Holy of Holies one time a year and "atone" for the sins of the people.**

⁸ By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing ⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age). [in other words, annual act of atonement performed by the priests, did NOT remove the barrier between God and man] According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

What is this trying saying? It is saying that the sacrificial system did not actually deal with sin but only provided for a fleshly ceremonial purification. It was a way of foreshadowing what Christ was going to do in the "time of reformation." And what did he do?

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh [meaning ceremonial purification], ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God [meaning true atonement]. ¹⁵ Therefore he is the **mediator** of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Christ Jesus is now our mediator! He became a man so that we could have a mediator. What a blessing. What a joy. What a privilege. We have a God-man mediator who is able to sympathize with our weakness in every way but who is also fully God and able to mediate on our behalf before a perfectly righteous Father. And he satisfies the just demands of a holy God by mediating with his own blood. One of the things that will cause our love for Christ to grow and grow and grow is to contemplate the sacrifice God was willing to make to redeem worthless people.

Philippians 2:4-8 ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

The death of Christ totally aside, think about what it would have been like for Jesus to condescend as a man. Consider the freedom that Christ surrendered. All we can conceptualize is limitation. All we know is limitation upon

limitation upon limitation. We need food. We need water. We need it to be a certain temperature for us to survive. We need oxygen to breathe. We need relationships. We cannot think of more than two or three things at the same time. We cannot remember everything we want to. We don't know what others are thinking. We can't learn very quickly. We are tempted. We become tired and need sleep. Are any of these things true of God? God is perfectly free. God surrendered his divine attributes which means he surrendered his freedom and became a man so that he could mediate for us on our behalf.

Perhaps this word picture would help: Consider for a moment a poor man in Calcutta, India. This poor man, he wears rags, is weak, no happiness on his face, he is sad, he is frustrated, he is dirty, his clothes are torn, he lives in a mud house, or maybe he lives in a hut, or maybe he is sleeping under the open skies, or maybe he is dumped in some small room. Because of this he has no bath room, he does not take a bath, he has no privacy and therefore, he has to go in the open; the streets are open sewers.

He has no dependable items for his breakfast, for his lunch and for his dinner. He has to fill the belly on whatever is available and at what time that is available. It of course is not necessary that the items he is eating are fresh, hot or preserved for him, but he eats them without considering the fact that what he eats will create some trouble downstream and so he hopes that the bacteria available in his body will counter the bacteria coming from outside. He has got no arrangement for the summer or for the winter and no science and technology is helping him in the hot days or in the cold days.

He is often ill but he must continue to try and work because he does not have money to get proper treatment. He is weak because he does not know the art of keeping himself healthy and it must be accepted that he has no knowledge of food which could provide him energy. If he has got some

knowledge, he is not in a position to purchase this kind of food because it is expensive.

People who employ this poor man of course will take advantage of him. They will scold him. They will work him harder than his body can bear and demand overtime for very meager wages. He of course has no savings with him for the rainy days. This poor man's children will not be going to school because they need to work to supplement their family's meager wages and this vicious cycle will continue for generations.

The poor person is condemned to an inferiority complex and he is found with folded hands at every place and is easily recognizable. The poor man is the first to go to jail because it is assumed in India that all crimes, all sins and all misconducts are committed by the poor people and therefore, they should go to jails and all the rich are out showing that they do not commit crimes, sins and the misconducts.

Every day of this man's life is burdened by monotony. There is no future, no hope of change, no expectation for anything different. This man only survives. There is extreme boredom, extreme longing for happiness and extreme discomfort. There is no future for this man only survival. Words like free time, recreation and leisure are theoretical concepts but because of life's difficulty he lacks any real experiential ability to categorize these thoughts. This is perhaps a glimpse into the life of a poor man.

Now would you voluntarily exchange places with this man. Would you exchange educational opportunities, lifestyle choices, status, privileges, respect, freedom? The answer to that question is no. Because none of us have.

The fact that the average American spends a mere 9.5 percent of their income on food compared to 53% in India is something that we value and do

not want to give up. The true freedom and privilege of **not needing to** spending every waking hour working for food or preparing food is something we value and do not want to give up. The fact that we get to brush our teeth and take showers and have running water....all these things we value and do not want to give up.

Now all this is intended to help us begin to conceptualize by a weak comparison what it means for Christ to surrender his freedom to become a man and “take our place” and become our mediator and substitute.

It is one thing to condescend into a poor, humble state. But Phil 4 is not finished.

⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross

Jesus gave up his life. God did this. A painful excruciating death on a cross for you and me.

Why Did God Die?

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved-

1 John 4:9-10 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.