



*Jesus Came To Be Our Substitute*  
Text: Hebrews 2:5-9; Selected Scriptures  
Series: *Why Did Jesus Come?* [Advent; #1]  
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## Introduction

Someone suggested that three words should be carved in stone over all church doors: “Important if true.”<sup>1</sup> Christmas celebrates Jesus coming to earth. Jesus’ birth, death and resurrection are indispensable to the Christian faith. During this Advent season we will look at the question *Why? Why did Jesus come?*

The answers from the Bible are important because they *are* true. They are God’s certain and unchanging truth. In these four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas I want us to examine and affirm, to be renewed and inspired by the truths that answer the question *Why did Jesus Come?*

Our Biblical home base will be Hebrews chapter 2 verses 5-18. Why did Jesus come? We begin today with the fact that *Jesus came to take our place, to be our Substitute*. We know about substitutes. How many of you plan to watch the Grey Cup game later today? If you do watch it you will see many substitutions being made. Some substitutes don’t measure up while others do, or even excel.

Jesus came to be our Substitute—to take my place, to take your place. Today we are going to see some of what that means. It is described in verse 9,

“But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might *taste death for everyone.*”

Jesus more than measured up as our Substitute. In fact, when He took our place He accomplished what we could never do, and He did it perfectly.

## **We need a Substitute.**

An obvious first question is “Why?” “Why do we need a substitute?” “Why do we need someone to step in and take our place?” We need a substitute to deal with our biggest problem—sin. Our sin creates a separation from God which we cannot bridge. We need someone who can. We have to have a substitute in order to know God.

Understanding this starts with the fact that *God is holy*, or morally pure. Recently we walked through the book of Habakkuk. There the prophet wrote of God, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor” (1:13). That means that God is perfectly pure and separate from all that is not holy. All we think and do that is not pure or holy is sin.

Most of us recognize that we are not perfect, even if we don’t like the word *sin*. If there is any doubt, God’s word tells us, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”<sup>2</sup> And so, as we read in Isaiah, our “iniquities have made a separation between [us] and [our] God, and [our] sins have hidden His face from [us] so that He does not hear.”<sup>3</sup> The Bible also tells us that the result of sin, the wage it pays, is death.<sup>4</sup>

Because we are sinners by nature as well as our actions, we cannot make ourselves holy. We cannot change that sinful spiritual DNA to make ourselves acceptable to God. Paul repeatedly made the point in his letter to the Galatians that our good works cannot save us because we have to be perfect, and we can’t be or do that.<sup>5</sup> Since we cannot, we need a substitute who is holy and can change us.

The Bible shows us our need for a substitute throughout its pages. For example, it is pictured in the Passover. God chose Moses to deliver Israel from bondage in Egypt. As part of doing this God sent a series of plagues on the land, but the Pharaoh refused to let them go. That is, until after the last or tenth plague. This plague was God’s judgment on Egypt’s sin. His judgment of striking down, killing all the firstborn in the land.<sup>6</sup> God graciously provided protection for Israel if they believed and accepted His provision. Each household was to take an unblemished male lamb and care for it until the night of the judgment. That evening they were to kill the lamb, roast it for a meal and put some of its blood on the doorframe of the house.<sup>7</sup>

The blood would be a sign. When God executed the judgment, He would *pass over* each house with the lamb's blood on the doorframe.<sup>8</sup> The lamb was their substitute and covering. God in His grace passed over them when they believed and accepted His provision.

Then we see it clearly in the Old Testament sacrifices which God put in place for Israel. The ongoing burnt offering, sin offering and guilt offering were created to provide a substitute to atone for the people's sins.<sup>9</sup> For example, when someone brought a sin offering to the Tabernacle, or later the Temple, God instructed, "He shall bring the bull to the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, and he shall lay his hand on the head of the bull and slay the bull before the LORD."<sup>10</sup> The bull was that person's substitute. He placed his hand on the animal's head to picture that the animal was his substitute to make atonement for him—it satisfied God's righteous anger aroused by that person's sin. It covered his sin. This was repeated year after year, generation after generation.

Then, once each year on the Day of Atonement two male goats were selected. One was sacrificed as a sin offering for the people and some of its blood was taken into the Holy of Holies where it was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>11</sup> The other goat was presented alive to the LORD to make atonement, and then sent out into the wilderness. This pictured Israel's sins being removed, sent away from them, and God's anger being turned away.<sup>12</sup> This was an ongoing, every year offering of a substitute to cover the people's sins.<sup>13</sup> Why was it repeated year after year? The writer of Hebrews tells us, these sacrifices can never "make perfect those who draw near ... for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."<sup>14</sup>

Yes, we all need a substitute to deal with our sin.

### **Jesus is our Substitute.**

Question: Why don't we offer sacrifices today? Why don't we have an Annual Day of Atonement? Because Jesus came. He came as our Substitute, to take our place. Because He did we do not need the temporary substitutes and covering of sacrificial animals.

No one else could do this for us. Only Jesus was qualified to be our perfect, once-for-all-sins, once-for-all-time Substitute. Jesus Christ was qualified because He came into this world as one of us, being truly, fully human.

The Bible tells us that because sin entered the world through one man,<sup>15</sup> so the substitute to take the punishment for our sin also must be fully human. Right after sin and death entered the world, God gave His promise for providing holiness and life. He told Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”<sup>16</sup> This first statement of the gospel speaks of victory coming through the seed of Eve, through a man. The apostle Paul described it this way, “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”<sup>17</sup>

That is why “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”<sup>18</sup> We read the account of Jesus’ birth each year during this season. It tells us He was born of the virgin Mary, that He was fully human.<sup>19</sup> As Paul wrote to Timothy He described Jesus as the “one mediator ... between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus.”<sup>20</sup>

But in addition to that, our substitute had to be holy, morally pure, unstained by sin. No mere person can meet that qualification. Only God is by nature and action holy. As well, Scripture shows us only God can forgive sins. This is so because all sin is first and primarily an offense against God and His holiness. King David understood this and so cried out to God, “Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight.”<sup>21</sup> God emphatically declared in Isaiah 43, “I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (25).

Even though the religious leaders when Christ was on earth got so many things wrong, they got this right. When Jesus told a paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven”, some of them sitting around instantly thought “He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?”<sup>22</sup> And that was Jesus’ point. He used Daniel’s title of the divine Messiah, “the Son of Man”<sup>23</sup> for Himself when He publically answered their private thoughts. He told them, “so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...”<sup>24</sup>

So our substitute must be both fully human and fully God. Jesus Christ, and only Jesus Christ, is fully man and fully God. He is the eternal Word born of the virgin Mary, who became flesh so He could be our substitute.<sup>25</sup>

Jesus Christ was qualified to be our substitute, and He paid the cost of being our substitute. We can never fully describe let alone comprehend what it cost Jesus to be our substitute.

Consider, for example the starting point in time, when the time came for Jesus to come into this world as one of us. He did not cling to the gates of heaven, as it were. Nor did He did not have to have His hands pried loose from His divine rights and privileges. He willingly, Paul wrote, “emptied Himself.” He willingly humbled Himself and, we read here in Hebrews 2, was made “for a little while lower than the angels” (verse 7).

And as a man He did not have a striking appearance that drew huge numbers of fans and followers.<sup>26</sup> Let me ask another question. How many of you have a Facebook account? Apparently more than are planning on watching the Grey Cup game! Facebook keeps track of pages, how they ran. I checked those page rankings this week, specifically the pages of individuals. The page of the person with the most *Likes* sits at over 117,000,000<sup>27</sup> — I’ll leave the rest of the work to you to explore who that is. Even adjusted for the population of the time, Jesus would not have been close to that number or close to the number one ranking when He was on earth. *And He is eternal, sovereign God the Son!*

But that is just the start. After three years of revealing God to the people they despised and rejected Him.<sup>28</sup> After three years of teaching and performing miracles, they screamed “Away with Him! Crucify! Crucify Him!”<sup>29</sup> And even His disciples deserted Him in His darkest hours.<sup>30</sup>

But we are still a long way from the greatest cost. He was taken away, He was cut off out of the land of living, He was crucified ... for us, as our Substitute. He was pierced through and crushed. He poured out His life for us.<sup>31</sup>

And then the greatest, most unimaginable cost, as the apostle Peter wrote, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.”<sup>32</sup> God the Father was, as Isaiah prophesied, “pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief.”<sup>33</sup> God the Father “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”<sup>34</sup> And when the Father placed all our sins on Him as our Substitute and could not look on His Son our sin-bearer, Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”<sup>35</sup>

I cannot begin to imagine the cost Jesus paid to take my place, to take your place, to be our Substitute.

And then think about the substitution He made for us. When Jesus took our place He bore God’s full rightful wrath and just judgment for our sins. Look at the end of verse 17 here in Hebrews 2. It says Christ was our faithful and merciful high priest “to make

*propitiation* for the sins of the people.” The word propitiation means to satisfy and so to turn away. Here it tells us that Jesus satisfied God’s holy, righteous wrath and demands for judgment on sinners by being our Substitute. This then upholds God’s holiness and righteousness in the face of sin. Jesus was faithful as our high priest to offer the sacrifice God required.

And that sacrifice was Himself. *He* was our substitute. He poured out His “precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless.”<sup>36</sup> He gave His life as a ransom for us.<sup>37</sup> In Romans 3 Paul wrote that we are “justified as a gift by [God’s] grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a *propitiation* in His blood through faith.”<sup>38</sup> And so we have the gospel, the good news that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”<sup>39</sup> Eternal life made available not because, as 1 John 4:10 tells us, “that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the *propitiation* for our sins.”

Jesus Christ took our place. What He did was once for all people and all our sin. Turn ahead to chapter 9 here in Hebrews. Starting at verse 24,

“For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him” (24-28).

And the next chapter, chapter 10 starting at verse 1.

“By this will [God the Father’s will] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from

that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10-14).

## **Conclusion.**

Jesus coming as our Substitute helps us answer the question of why Jesus came. It helps us understand the meaning and purpose of Christmas. You see, you cannot understand Christmas without Good Friday and Easter. You cannot separate Christ’s birth from His death on the cross and resurrection.

There are many Christmas traditions and symbols that are personal and subjective. For example, if you ask a store why they have so many green and red decorations the staff may tell you it is because those are the most popular Christmas colors. Then if you ask a Christian what the significance of green and red at Christmas is, you may be told that green stands for everlasting life and red for the blood of Christ which makes that life possible. Those are widespread but subjective ideas.

One thing that is not subjective is the meaning of Christ’s coming to earth. He came to save us, and He did that by taking our place, by being our Substitute.

What does that mean for us? One of Anita’s brothers tells of the time when he got in trouble at school and was slated to get the strap. If you aren’t familiar with that, ask someone who is a bit older. Getting the strap was not exactly something he looked forward to. But then one of the biggest guys in the school volunteered to take the strap for him. Her brother did not ask him to do that. There were no strings attached, no payback. It was all of *grace*.

Even so, that grace does not begin to measure against, to compare with the grace of God in sending Jesus as your substitute. Jesus took the full punishment for all your sins—past, present and future.

You don’t have be hounded by your sin. The reformer Martin Luther agonized over his sin. He wrote to a friend, “O my sin, my sin, my sin!”<sup>40</sup> You see, he understood that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”<sup>41</sup> He knew full well that “the wages of sin is

death.”<sup>42</sup> But then the day came when God opened Luther’s eyes to see that Christ had provided the propitiation for his sin, and that his part was to accept that gracious work by faith. God released him from his prison cell of sin to the freedom of His grace.

This is what God wants to do, will do for everyone who comes to Him through faith in Christ Jesus. On this first day of Advent, if you have not already done so, accept God’s grace in Jesus who came to take your place. If you want to talk about this I would be happy to do that. If you know and are living in that grace, thank God for it now and throughout this season. Let’s bow our heads. Take these next moments to respond to God, to open your heart to His grace, to thank Him that Jesus Christ came to be your Substitute.

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<sup>1</sup> George F. Will. “The Happiest Holiday.” *The Washington Post*, December 24, 1998.  
< [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1998/12/24/the-happiest-holiday/d0d29ecb-8cb1-4b57-a49a-94a4e8a7afa6/?utm\\_term=.049946f09886](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1998/12/24/the-happiest-holiday/d0d29ecb-8cb1-4b57-a49a-94a4e8a7afa6/?utm_term=.049946f09886)>. Accessed 22 November, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:23.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 59:2.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 6:23.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:10-12.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 11:4-6.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 12:1-8.

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 12:13.

<sup>9</sup> Leviticus 1:1-17; 4:1-5; 5:14 - 6:30; 7:1-10.

<sup>10</sup> Leviticus 4:4.

<sup>11</sup> Leviticus 16:9, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Leviticus 16:10.

<sup>13</sup> Leviticus 16:29, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 10:1, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Romans 5:12.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 3:15.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 5:19.

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 10:4.

- <sup>19</sup> Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7.
- <sup>20</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5.
- <sup>21</sup> Psalm 51:4.
- <sup>22</sup> Mark 2:1-12.
- <sup>23</sup> Daniel 7:13-14.
- <sup>24</sup> Mark 2:1-13; see also Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26.
- <sup>25</sup> see John 1:1, 14; 8:58; 10:30; Colossians 1:15-17 etc.
- <sup>26</sup> See prophesy in Isaiah 53:2.
- <sup>27</sup> “Facebook Page Ranking.” *Quintly*. <<https://www.quintly.com/facebook-page-ranking/>>. Accessed 22 November 2016.
- <sup>28</sup> Isaiah 49:7; 53:3; Luke 18:38; 22:47 - 23:49.
- <sup>29</sup> Luke 23:13.
- <sup>30</sup> Matthew 26:50.
- <sup>31</sup> Isaiah 53:4-8.
- <sup>32</sup> 1 Peter 2:24.
- <sup>33</sup> Isaiah 53:10.
- <sup>34</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- <sup>35</sup> Matthew 27:46.
- <sup>36</sup> 1 Peter 1:19.
- <sup>37</sup> Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6.
- <sup>38</sup> Romans 3:24-25.
- <sup>39</sup> John 3:16
- <sup>40</sup> Arthur Cushman McGiffert. *Martin Luther: The Man And His Work*. Whitefish, MT: Kessenger Publishing LLC, 2003, page 31.
- <sup>41</sup> Romans 1:18.
- <sup>42</sup> Romans 6:23.

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