

Christ – Our Substitute

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Isaiah 53

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The Lord Jesus Christ asked the disciples one day, “Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

The disciples replied, “Well, some say you are John the Baptist. Some say you are Elijah. Some say you are one of the prophets.”

And the Lord said, “But whom do you say that I am?”

And the apostle Peter answered, “We believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

And the Lord replied, “Blessed art thou, Simon. Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you, but my Father which is in heaven. Blessed are your eyes for they see and blessed are your ears for they hear.”

The world has eyes, but they do not see; ears, but they do not hear; hearts, but they do not understand. And that is what Isaiah is talking about in Isaiah 53 when he says, “Who hath believed our report?” Who hath believed our message? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? Who hath believed our doctrine? Who hath believed this message that we declare? Unto the Jews it is a stumbling block. Why they said to Christ, “You are not 50 years old. You claim to have known Abraham? You claim to have seen Abraham? You are not even 50 years old. How could you have seen Abraham? How could you have known Abraham? Is not this the carpenter whose mother we know and whose brothers and sisters we know? And yet he claims to be God.”

They took up stones to stone him and he said, “Many good works have I done among you. For which of these do you stone me?”

Why they said, “We are not stoning you for a good work, we are stoning you because you are a man and you claim to be God. How can a man be God? Nobody believes that.”

To the Greeks foolishness. Standing before the governor Pilate, dripping blood, the very essence of human weakness, standing there in bonds with a crown of thorns pressed upon his brow, rejected even of his own people, forsaken of his own disciples, rejected by his

own family, alone, deserted. And Pilate looked at him and said, “Are you a king? Are you a king?”

And then he turned to that mob of Jews howling for the blood of Christ and said, “Behold your king. Here he is. Here is your king.” And I am sure everybody laughed.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of God.” Paul said in 1 Corinthians, “They are foolishness to him.” He cannot understand them. He cannot know them.

Who believes this message? Who believes this report?

“He is a root out of dry ground,” verse two, Isaiah 53. “He hath no form. He hath no vigor. He hath no strength. Despised. Hated. Rejected of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.”

A little old Jewish maiden gave birth to a baby. They were too poor without influence so they put him in a stable, laid him in a manger. He grew up in a carpenter’s shop. He worked with his hands. He sweated and toiled. He had no education, no recognized education. He never owned a piece of property. He never owned a horse. He never owned a lot. He never owned a home. His friends were fishermen, publicans, prostitutes, sinners. Anybody who was anybody turned thumbs down on him.

He was arrested. When he was arrested his own disciples deserted him. The people who had followed him by the thousands, whom he had healed, who had proclaimed that he was the Messiah deserted him. He was alone. He was nailed to a cross outside the city wall between two thieves. He was taken down and because he had no money he was buried in a borrowed sepulchre and people say that this man is the Son of God.

People say that this man is God’s own Son, sent into this world to be the redeemer of sinners. People say that this man is the creator of all things. He was before all things. And in him all things live and move and have their being. His disciples said he arose from the tomb and that he ascended to heaven in their own presence and that he is seated at the right hand of God from whence he will come again, that he is the king of the universe, that he has a name exalted above every name and at his name, the name of the despised Jesus, the name of the despised carpenter, at his name every knee shall bow in heaven, earth and hell and every tongue shall confess that he is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. That is our message. Now don’t many people believe it because it is difficult to believe. In fact, it is impossible to believe apart from the divine revelation of the Holy Spirit.

“Who hath believed this report?”

Take your Bibles and turn to the book of 1 John, chapter one. Who hath believed this doctrine? Who hath believed this message? John said in 1 John chapter one, “That which was from the beginning...In the beginning God, before the world, before the creation, before the stars, before the angels, in the beginning. That which was from the

beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of life. For the life, all physical life, all natural life, all spiritual life, for the life was manifested, made flesh, incarnate and we have seen it. And we bare witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us, that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that you also may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And these things right we unto you that your joy may be full and this is the message. This, then, is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you. This is that message. Now, who hath believed it?"

In Isaiah 53 here is the message, beginning with verse four. Christ Jesus, the suffering substitute. It says in verse four, "Surely he hath borne our griefs." Now, I want you take the word "our" in these next four verses, three verses, and I want you to change the word "our" to "my."

"Christ hath borne my griefs and carried my sorrows."

My friends, man cannot make Christ sin. Man cannot make Christ sin. We can't transfer our guilt to anybody. We can't transfer our guilt to another. But the Father could and the Father did. He laid on Christ my iniquities. He laid on Christ my sins. That is what it is saying here. Surely he because the Father purposed it and because the Father ordained it and because the Father effected it, he hath borne my griefs and he hath carried my sorrows. And yet I did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for my transgressions. He was bruised for my iniquities. For the chastisement of my peace, the chastisement of my peace was upon him and with his stripes I am healed. Like a sheep I have gone astray. I have turned to my own way and the Lord hath laid on him my iniquity.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was not sin. He was not sinful. He was not guilty. He was pure and perfect and holy. But he was treated by his Father as if he had not only been sinful, but as if he had been sin itself. The Father actually transferred my guilt and my iniquity and my transgression from me to Christ.

Down here in verse 12 when I was reading the Scripture a few moments ago I paused and deliberately, slowly read this statement in verse 12, the latter part. "And he was numbered...and he was numbered with the transgressors." He was identified with us. He had no guilt of his own. He had no sin of his own. But he took my sin.

And Martin Luther said, and this statement must be carefully guarded because it will be misunderstood by the profane. But Martin Luther said, "Jesus Christ was the greatest sinner who ever lived." He never committed a sin. He was not sinful. He had no transgressions, but he was treated by the Father not only as if he had been sinful, but as he was sin itself. When the judge of the earth says, "Where is sin that it may be punished? Where is sin that it might be dealt with? Where is sin that it might be purged?" Christ Jesus presented himself. He was made sin for us.

Turn to 2 Corinthians five. This is one of the most important verses in all of this Bible, 2 Corinthians chapter five, verse 21. "For he," that is the Father, "hath made him," the Son," to be what? To be sin. "He hath made him to be sin for us." He knew no sin. Christ had no sin. "That we might be made the righteousness of God in him." God looks on Christ as being sin. He was made sin for us. And sin must be taken without the camp. It is a leprous thing. Like the scapegoat, sin must be driven away. Like the leper who cried unclean, he must be put away. And so they take him out, they cast him out, they run him out of town because he was made sin.

God looks on Christ as being sin. And God cannot look on sin with fellowship and communion. So at the cross the Father turned his back and even Christ must cry, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Because you are sin.

God looks on Christ as sin and sin must bear the punishment of the cross. Therefore he is punished. He is nailed to a tree. He is bruised. He is humiliated. He is put to shame and finally he is put to death. In that moment at Calvary. No wonder Christ cried, in the Garden of Gethsemane, "if it be thy will let this cup pass from me." No wonder he wrestled with the Father all night in prayer. No wonder his blood came through the pores of his skin. For in that moment at Calvary, all sin of all believers of all ages and generations was gathered in one mass, all the murder, all the theft, all the lies, all the hate, all the adultery, all the jealousy, all the covetousness, all the incest, all manner of crime, all evil in one heap, in one mass, in one person, at one time, all the sins were laid on Christ.

It is no wonder the Father turned his back. It is no wonder the sun refused to shine. It is no wonder the earth trembled and the graves opened and the rocks rent. It is no wonder for at that moment Christ became S-I-N, sin. He didn't die a nice death. He died the death of a criminal. He didn't die only as a martyr. He died as a criminal. He didn't die only as an example. He died a dirty, filthy, humiliating, shameful, guilty, naked, horrible, hellish, God forsaken death because he was made sin.

Take all of the hell of all believers and all of the shame of all believers and all of the vileness and filthiness and guilt of all believers, of all ages and pile it in one mass and one heap upon one person. He bore our sins, all of them, in his body and sin is not a nice thing. Sin is not a nice thing. It is a dirty thing. It is a filthy thing.

Christ Jesus, the suffering substitute.

Now, look at verse seven. We have Christ Jesus the silent substitute. In verse seven it says he was oppressed, oppressed by God, oppressed by Satan, oppressed by men and he was afflicted. Oh, how afflicted, hated, rejected, despised, not loved and yet he was lied about, false witnesses gathered against him, he was mocked.

“If you be the Christ, save yourself. You called on God. Let’s see if God will have you now. Here is your king.”

They mocked him and ridiculed him. They lied about him. They brought false accusations against him. And yet he opened not his mouth.

In all these accusations and under all of this persecution and hatred and ill treatment, all of it, undeserved, totally innocent, and yet he offered no defense. He offered no reply.

Turn to 1 Peter chapter two. I want you to read this Scripture with me. 1 Peter, the second chapter, verse 23. It says in verse 22, “He did no sin.” We know that. “There was no guile in his mouth.” We know that. “Who when he was reviled, he reviled not again. When he suffered he threatened not.”

He said to Peter there in the garden when Peter drew his sword and would have cut off the high priest’s servant’s head, he said, “Put away your sword, Peter. Don’t you know that I could call on my Father and he would send legions of angels?”

But our Lord never called for any help. Our Lord offered no resistance. Our Lord offered no defense. He gave no reply though all the accusations were false, and though all the punishment was underserved. Why?

Well, first of all because he willingly, willingly, voluntarily came into this world for the very purpose, for the very cause, for the very death that he was now dying. That is why he came here.

“No man taketh my life from me,” he said. “I lay it down. I have the power to lay it down. I have the power to take it up again. No man taketh my life from me.” Jesus Christ was never helpless before men. He was submissive, but not helpless. He surrendered. He committed himself. Jesus Christ the Lord gave his life. It was not taken from him. He yielded up the ghost. He willingly, lovingly voluntarily gave his life. That is the reason he offered no reply. That is the reason he offered no resistance. That is the reason he offered no defense because that is why he came down here to be our substitute.

And, secondly, he so loved his people and his love sealed his lips. Our sins deserved punishment. He took our punishment. Our guilt deserved the wrath of God. He took that wrath. He came down here to die. He must die. They cried out, “He saved others. Himself he cannot save.” Right, that is our doctrine. Because he gave himself, then he saved us. If he had saved himself, he would have committed us to eternal damnation. He wore my crown, the crown of thorns that I might wear his crown, the crown of glory. He wore my nakedness on the cross that I might wear his robe of righteousness. He bore my shame and my guilt and my filth that I might bear his honor and his praise and his glory. He endured my suffering that I might partake of his joy. And he died my death that I might live his life. The sinless became sinful that the utterly sinful might become sinless.

“He who knew no sin was made sin for us in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Now, verse nine. Jesus Christ the suffering substitute, Jesus Christ the silent substitute and verse nine tells us about Jesus Christ the sinless substitute. Verse nine. “And he made his grave with the wicked.” That is, he died between two thieves. He was crucified between two guilty men. And on that center cross, as Luther said, the guiltiest of men. They bearing their guilt. He bearing our guilt. Those thieves bearing their shame. Christ Jesus bearing all shame, multiplied by thousands and thousands and thousands. And with the rich in his death, that is, this rich man Joseph of Arimathaea provided him a grave.

“Though,” the word “because” is “though.” “He had done no violence neither was any deceit in his mouth.”

Now, my friends, it is easy to understand that if one is going to be the substitute for another, if one is going to work out a righteousness for another, if one is going to suffer sins penalty for another, then that one, that substitute must himself be totally, absolutely free from all sins. If he has sins of his own, then the suffering that he bears will be for his own sin. If he has guilt of his own, then the suffering and condemnation he bears will be for his own sins. But Christ had no sin. Therefore he could be our substitute. He is the only creature in God’s creation who is totally free from all sin and the possibility to sin. No corruption entered into his carnation. He was the seed of woman. He was not of the sinful seed of his father Joseph. He was brought into this world immaculate. In him that black blood received from Adam never flowed. Through his heart that evil nature received from Adam never lived. Christ Jesus in his incarnation, in his conception, in his birth, being born of the Holy Ghost was totally, absolutely free from every stain of sin. No sin ever marked his life. His eyes never looked upon anything with covetousness. His lips never uttered in any way any deceit or any wrath. His heart never harbored one evil thought. His mind never conceived one evil imagination. His hands never reached out in one evil deed, only in mercy. His feet never walked except in paths of absolute, immaculate righteousness.

And I want you to go back to 2 Corinthians five one more time and I want you to note this very carefully. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, “He hath made him,” Christ, “to be sin for us.” He was identified with the transgressors, numbered with the transgressors. Our sins were laid on him. He was one of us, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, but he knew no sin. Underscore that word, K-N-E-W. He knew no sin.

It does not say only that he did no sin. He didn’t. It doesn’t only say that he thought no sin. He didn’t. It doesn’t only say he committed no sin. He didn’t. But he didn’t even know sin. He was a stranger to sin. He walked through this world and he saw sin and he understood sin. And he beheld sin. And he hated sin. And he condemned sin, but he never, any time, ever had any fellowship with sin. He knew no sin.

Christ Jesus was not a pretty good man. He was goodness personified. Christ Jesus was not only a holy man, he was holiness in the flesh. Christ Jesus was not only a righteous man, Christ Jesus was righteousness itself. He knew no sin.

He couldn't sin.

And then verse 10 we see Christ Jesus the successful substitute, Christ Jesus the successful substitute. God had shown... Who hath believed this message? Impossible to believe. To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

Now, then, it is possible to believe. When God's arm, God's power, God's might, God's wisdom is revealed by God's Spirit, it can be received.

"Flesh and blood didn't show that to you, Peter. My Father showed that to you."

Christ Jesus, the successful substitute. Verse 10. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him." Who is the Lord here? The heavenly Father.

My friend, the...it says in the last line here, "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."

David said, "Whatsoever the Lord please."

They said, "David, where is your God? Our gods are down in our temple. Our gods are made of stone and wood and marble. We know where our gods are. We can touch them and feel them and take them with us. If we move to another house we take our gods with us. If we move to another town we pack up our gods in our suitcases and take them with us. Where is your God?"

He said, "My God is in the heavens."

"What is your God like, David?"

"My God does as he pleases in heaven, earth and the seas and all deep places."

"What does it please your God to do?"

"Well, it pleased God to make you his people. He didn't have to. He didn't owe you anything."

"It pleased God," Moses wrote in Deuteronomy, "to make you his people."

It pleased God to make Christ our surety. That is what the Bible says. It pleased God that in him, Christ, should all fulness dwell. It pleased God to bruise him on a cross. That is what it says here in our text. Christ Jesus didn't come down here by accident. Christ Jesus didn't go to the cross by accident. Christ Jesus didn't die by accident. It pleased the Father to bruise him. It pleased God to reveal Christ to you.

You go through life blind, deaf, dumb with darkened understanding, “But God, Paul said, “Who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, it pleased him to reveal his Son in me.” It pleased God. It pleased God to exalt us and all of this because Christ suffered for us. Look at it. “It pleased the Lord to bruise him. He,” the Father, “hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul,” not just his body, but his soul, “an offering for sin. He shall see his seed. He shall see his people. He shall see this beloved nation. He shall prolong his days and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper, be successful in his hand.” He said, “I come to do the will of him that sent me.” And when he died he said, “It is finished.” “I come to do the work of him that sent me.” And when he died he said, “It is finished.” “I come to redeem my people.” “Thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.” And when he died he said, “It is finished. It is finished.”

2 Corinthians 5:21 again. Let’s look over there one more time. Listen to this. 2 Corinthians 5:21. “For God the Father, it pleased him to make him, Christ, to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made,” watch this now, “the righteousness of God in Christ.”

God looks on every believer not only as being a righteous person. Now, listen to this.

You say, “God’s people because Christ died are righteous.”

You are right, but it is more than that. You are just in the first grade. You want to graduate? You want to get promoted? It doesn’t say God’s people are righteous. It doesn’t say that he made them righteous. It says more than that. That is just first base. It says they are the righteousness of God. That is what it says.

Now, if I have a box in my hand and that box is covered with gold I have a golden box. But if have in my hand a box not only covered with gold, but filled with gold I have a box of gold. If a man is covered with righteousness, he is a righteous man. But if a man is filled with righteousness he is not only a righteous man, he is righteousness. He is holiness. Can you conceive of that? Can you fathom that? Can you just catch the hem of that garment? Can you just enter into it a little bit?

That we might be made not only righteous, but that we might be made in him the very righteousness of God. That is what it says. That we might be made the righteousness of God; not just covered with it, not just applied to our account, not just imputed unto us. But we are actually in Christ the very righteousness and holiness of God. And that is the only way a man can enter glory.

A man can’t enter glory with a robe on covering his dirty flesh because God’s eyes don’t start with outer garments. God’s eyes pierce the heart. That is what the average preacher is preaching, that at the cross Christ draped our dirty flesh with a robe of holiness. But Christ is more than that. Christ so purged and cleansed and put away guilt and shame and sin that the very essence of our being is righteousness.

Do you see what I am saying?

How good does a man have to be to go to heaven? He has to be as good as God. He has to be as holy as God. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Only the righteousness of God, only the holiness of God could survive in that holy atmosphere. And that is what Christ is made of, the righteousness of God.

The successful Savior. He didn't take a shot at it. He didn't take a swing at it. He didn't make an attempt at it. He did it. "He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied." The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. He did what he came to do. He purified and cleansed and sanctified and made the righteousness of God everybody he set out to redeem. That's right. That's right. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands."

Back yonder in the counsel halls of eternity the Father laid the covenant of mercy in capable hands, in the hands of Christ. And he said, "Adam's race is polluted and corrupted and permeated with sin and shame and guilt. Man is fallen. Man is nothing. Man is sin. "Bring my people home pure." And Christ came down here to do it and he did it. He did it. He is going to take them home and the Father is going to gather together in one all things in Christ in that great day. And there is not going to be a stain, not a spot, not a mark, not even a jot or a tittle of rebellion anywhere in him because we are the righteousness of God in him. And everything about us that is identified with Adam is going to be left here. And everything about us that is marked with Adam's transgression is going to be left in the grave. And everything about us that even has the slightest mark or stain of the old world and old creation is going to be left. That new man which is created in righteousness in Christ Jesus is going to live eternally.

Who hath believed that doctrine? Who believes that? Do you believe that? I tell you. If you do, you had better sing all the way home. Do you believe that? Not many people do. Those who believe it have died for it. Those who believe it have burned for it. Those who believe it are consecrated to it. Those who believe it want to hear more of it. Those who believe it, it is first in their heart. It is before wife and husband and children and friends and job and the world and everything else. Those who believe it are dedicated to it. Those who believe in it, it is the heart beat of their very existence. Those who believe it, it is the thought of their mind. Those who believe it, it is the anticipation of their soul. Those who believe it.

All right, last of all, verse 11. Christ the satisfied substitute. "He shall see in his omniscience, in his omnipotence, he shall see in his foreknowledge, he shall see in his ability to declare the end from the beginning, he shall see the travail of his soul."

You see, he made his soul an offering for sin. And he is going to see the results of it. And he is going to be perfectly satisfied, perfectly satisfied.

Turn to John six, John the sixth chapter, verse 37. And the Lord Jesus speaks to this crowd, John 6:37. And this is that gang that walked off and left him. Five thousand of them. He had fed them. He had healed them. He preached to them. They walked off and left him and he knew they would. He foresaw their exodus. But he says in verse 37 of John chapter six, "All that my Father giveth me shall come to me. And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

It grieves our hearts to see people depart from the so called religious faith. It breaks our hearts to see people turn their back upon the only redeemer of the soul. It breaks our hearts to see people put first that which is really last and unimportant and insignificant and neglect that which is most important and sell their souls for a mess of pottage.

But Christ saw and Christ comforted his heart with this promise: All that my Father giveth me will come to me. They will come. If they ever believe that report they will come. If God ever opens their hearts they will come. If God ever does a work of grace in their souls, they will come.

For, verse 38, "I came down from heaven not to do my own will." That is not why we are here today. We are not here to do our own will. We are not here to see how big we can make the 13th Street Baptist Church. We are not here to see how many decisions we can get folks to make under our high pressure evangelism and mass psychology.

Christ said, "I didn't come down here to do my will. I came to do the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will, which hath sent me. That of all which he hath given me, I will lose nothing, but I will raise it up at the last day. That is my Father's will. And that is why I came. And that is why I am here. I am here to call out a people for his name."

The Holy Ghost is here to call out a people for his name. The gospel is preached to call out a people for his name. We won't compromise it. We won't keep back anything that is profitable to that purpose. We won't shun to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. But if you can't receive Christ as he is you can't have him. If you can't bow at his feet as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings you can't have him. If you can't see him and believe on him and receive him as the suffering substitute, as the silent substitute, as the submissive substitute, as the successful substitute, as the satisfied mediator, you can't have him. You can't have him.

The Jews would have made him king, but he didn't come down here to be the king. He came down here to be the Savior. They would have put him on a material throne, but he didn't come here to reign over men's bodies. He came to reign over their hearts, over their hearts.

You render to Caesar the things that are Caesars and to God the things that are God's.

Do you believe that report? Bless God if you do. If you don't, that's all right, too. But I come to do my Father's will. I come to do my Father's will.

Our Father, anoint the message with the power of the Holy Spirit. Leave us not to ourselves. We can reach the ears. We cannot reach the hearts. We can paint the picture of redemption. But we cannot make the eye behold it. We can preach the gospel, the mystery of godliness, but to the dark and foolish heart it is foolishness. It is a stumbling block. It is a scandalous thing. But oh to them who are being saved by thy grace and by thy power, it is the power of God unto salvation. We thank thee, Lord, for saving our souls. Thank you, Lord, for making us whole. Thank you, Lord, for giving to us thy great salvation so rich and so free. In the name of our Lord we pray. Amen.