

We considered, in an introductory way, the teaching of vv. 4-6 last Lord's Day morning. We pointed out that the verses teach what is, in any case, taught in many other places in Scripture and, especially, in those great passages in Paul devoted to explaining the nature of Christ's atonement, viz. that in dying, Christ suffered in our place the penalty our sins had incurred before a holy God. His death, in the language of Christian theology, was penal substitution. It was substitution because he died in our place, in our stead, and it was penal because his suffering and death was the penalty of our sins taken upon himself. His love is demonstrated in this, that he was willing to take upon himself the judgments we deserved so that we might not have to suffer them ourselves. This is the centerpiece of the Gospel and of the Christian faith. Christ suffering in our place, Christ for us.

Today, I want to make that penal substitution more personal to us. The tendency of our sinful natures, demonstrated in the history of Christian theology as well as in the observation of the Christian heart, is to depersonalize Christ's death and our relationship to his suffering. Arminian theology, for example, which is found not only in many Protestant churches but in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions in the largest part, maintains that in suffering and dying for our sins Christ died for mankind in general, died, as it were, for sin in general, and in so dying, while he saved no one, he made salvation a theoretical possibility for everyone. This is the unstudied opinion of a very large number of Christians, however incapable they might be of accounting for this opinion or of defending it in the face of the actual statements of the Bible, and how little they may believe it themselves when they are thinking of their own salvation!

But, I want to demonstrate to you this morning that this is not the perspective of this text at all. I am not interested in theological polemics. I have no particular interest in sniffing out possible Arminians in our midst. I want rather to force upon your thinking the altogether wonderful and glorious fact that Christ's death was for "us," for us Christians and for those to be Christians in the future, that it was, in other words, a specific, particular, and intensely personal substitution, Christ putting himself in your very place under the judgments of the Lord. The fact that he did not, for that reason, place himself in the stead of all men and women in the world is, I confess, a mystery and a problem. It offends many people even to say such a thing. But, that is the subject of another sermon.

Today, I want to point out to you how personal the substitution of our Lord and Redeemer was when he went to the cross and to force upon our hearts the significance of that individual and specific personal substitution.

You have it as the primary feature of verses 4-6 which form the heart of this servant song we have been studying. Perhaps you have noticed the emphasis that falls upon the pronouns in these verses and how those pronouns are all definite. He did not die for sin, but for **us**; not for the sins of mankind, but for **our** sins.

"he took up **our** infirmities and carried **our** sorrows;

"he was pierced for **our** transgressions; crushed for **our** iniquities"

"the punishment that brought **us** peace was upon him and by his wound **we** are healed."

"We all like sheep have gone astray...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of **us** all.

But who is this "we" and "us." Who are those included in those pronouns? Well, the chapter begins with a confession that few believe and few understand this message about the Servant of the Lord who would redeem his people from their sins. But "many" do. And that is the term Isaiah uses, "many." We find it in v. 11 and again in v. 12. And, even were there no other evidence, that word "many" itself suggests a certain limitation. A large number, yes; but not all; as Alec Motyer puts it in his great commentary on Isaiah, "a precise company, numerous but not all-inclusive." [p. 442]

But, in fact, the text itself is much more explicit than that. In v. 8 we read that he was stricken "for the transgression of my people." In v. 10, the result of his great work is said to be that he will see "his offspring," viz. those who will believe in him and be saved by his death, a definite community of people. But, these people, we read in v. 11 are folk that he himself will justify, or make right with God. He will provide righteousness for them by bearing their iniquities. And this is repeated in v. 12. He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. That is, by his work as Redeemer, both on the cross and after, he will see to it that those in whose place he poured his life to death,

will in fact come to salvation.

There is no indefiniteness here at all. There is nothing hypothetical about this salvation. There is no uncertainty of accomplishment. Those He died for He will justify! And over and over again this point is made in the Bible and often was made by the Lord Jesus himself. John 6:37-39 is a representative text:

"All that the Father gives me," Jesus said, "will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."

John 10:14-30 is another:

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me...and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen [he means the Gentiles]. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. [Addressing himself to the unbelievers in the crowd, he said] "...you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

In each case the point is the same made in Isaiah 53. There is a perfect consistency between Christ's work and its effect in people, a perfect effectuality. Those for whom he was sent into the world are those for whom he gave up his life; and those for whom he suffered and died most certainly will come into the possession of the salvation that has been purchased for them. In due time they will heed Christ's call and believe and be saved, for he already purchased their salvation by his blood.

Charles Spurgeon, the greatest preacher of the 19th century, was simply stating what this text says so plainly when in making argument with the Arminian system, which sees Christ's work as indefinite and uncertain, depending upon the decision and the action of man to make it complete and effective, he said,

"We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ because we say that Christ has not made satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved. Now, our reply to this is, that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it, we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, 'No, certainly not.' We ask them the next question--Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer, 'No.' They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say 'No. Christ has died that any man may be saved if' -- and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ's death; we say, 'No, my dear sir, it is you that do it.' We say Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved, but are saved, must be saved and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it." [In Packer, Introduction to Owen's Death of Death, p. 14n.]

You see the point. This chapter and many others draws a direct connection between Christ's substitution and the salvation of those for whom he gave his life. He died not to make salvation a general possibility for everyone, he died, as the Scripture says, to save his people from their sins, his people, those the father gave him to save and sent him into the world to save, the people the Bible variously calls "the elect," "the many," "the sheep," "Israel," "the church," etc. "Christ loved the church and gave himself for her," Paul says, making the same point Isaiah has made here.

That is, he loved particular individuals, and died for them, gave himself up to death for them, took **their** sins and the penalty of **their** sins upon himself to carry **their** guilt away. Or, as Paul so memorably applied this fact to his own

case, "The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved **me** and gave himself for **me**." Not for mankind in the generality; not for Sin as an abstract, but for me and for my particular sins and my own particular guilt. This is what he bore in my place. He made himself a substitute for me!

In his famous Commentary on Galatians, Luther, with his characteristically vigorous imagination, has God the Father saying to his Son, "Be thou Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor; blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that sinner which did eat the apple in Paradise; that thief which hanged upon the cross...see therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them."

Or, to put it the other way round, it is as if you yourself, put your hands upon Christ, just like the ancient worshipper did with his lamb or goat, before it was sacrificed. In that way he indicated that the animal was symbolically a substitute for himself, was to die for his sins -- as an enacted prophecy of the One who would eventually come to be the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. It was as if, each of us who truly believe in Christ stood outside of that barn in Bethlehem and one by one laid our hands on the head of that baby when first he was born in the world and began his life of suffering, and, again, each of us stood outside the city of Jerusalem that day and as he dragged himself by, carrying his cross until Simon was made to carry it for him, we laid our hands upon his head: one after another of God's people, laid our hands upon his head as he went to the cross.

But, now, if we take what the Scripture teaches us here seriously; if we reckon honestly with this very particular and personal substitution, by which Christ put himself in our place and but not in everyone's place, in which he poured out his life to death for us, but not for everyone, for a people that included us but did not include all men, then there are some extraordinarily powerful consequences we must all consider and honor in our hearts and lives.

I. The first is that in that very personal and specific substitution that our Redeemer made of himself for us, it is our sins, our own individual, specific sin and sins, that caused his suffering.

It is not sin in general, it is not even sin such as we participate in being sinners ourselves. No, it is our very own sins. And those sins you committed this morning, and those sins you have already committed in this worship service -- those sins of commission and omission, those thoughts about others that so lacked charity and love, those motions of worship that were so devoid of the truest and deepest sympathy and honesty and reverence and gratitude and fear and love --. With every one of those sins, and every sin before them and every sin that, alas, must come after them until the day we die, with each new sin, we as much as take up the scourge of thorns and add another lash to his back, and take up the hammer in our own hands to give another stroke to the spikes driven into his hands and feet so that he might be hung up on that cross of complete humiliation.

You know the beautiful Horatius Bonar hymn, "I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God..." Well, that is exactly right. That is what you did and what you do every day. Because, Lord of time as he is, God took those very sins of yours, past, present, and future, and laid them upon his Son when he went to the cross for you and for your salvation.

Each of us, as it were, so far as the true meaning and significance of Christ's substitution of himself in our place is concerned, laid our sins on him. Adam laid on him his fall; Abraham his lack of faith; Noah his drunkenness; Jacob his worldliness; Moses his impatience; Aaron and Miriam their envy; David his lust and his cowardice; Isaiah his unclean lips; Manasseh his corrupt and cruel reign; Matthew and Zaccheus their greed and extortion; James and John their proud ambition; the criminal on the cross his theft; and Paul his blasphemy and persecution of the church of God. And, what have you laid on him in your life and what have you laid on him today?

Does he bear in his body any marks of yours? Have you made it impossible for him to say, "I never knew you," for all the marks and the scars that you put upon him when you laid your sins on him one by one. Are there no wounds in his flesh that no sins but yours could have put there? [Whyte, Sermons, 1881-2, p. 82]

When you confessed your sins to God this morning in this house, did you know, did you realize that those sins were as much as being laid upon his back to bear, to carry away for you? Did you think that the forgiveness you were asking

God for could be granted you only because the just and severe penalty of those particular sins had already been borne by the Son of God in your particular place and in your particular name?

Your sins are a terrible evil. You forget that and you ignore that. But, it is true. And you could not get rid of those sins without a terrible experience of bearing those sins and the penalty of those sins -- an experience so terrible you have no idea of it, just as you have so little an idea of how terrible your sins are -- the very experience your Substitute endured in your place. And one of the reasons you and I can for so long forget that every sin we commit must be laid upon the back of our Redeemer, is simply because we know that if we thought carefully and honestly and seriously about that, it would revolt us and shame us.

But my guilty brothers and sisters, this is the truth of the matter. Your sins took Christ to his cross and made that suffering so terrible for him. Not sin in general, but your own, your very own sins, your transgressions, your iniquities, your violations of God's law, your countless failures to love God and your neighbor. Because Christ died not for mankind, but for **you!**

You must remember that, you must never forget that, may memory fall to pieces before you ever forget this -- for this is the fact of all facts in the world to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Christ bore your sins in his body on the tree. And the remembering of that every day will teach you to hate your sins and to strive to commit as few of them as you possibly can, God helping you; and it will make you love Christ as much as a man or woman can.

II. And, then, in the second place, there is this consequence of the very specific and personal substitution of himself for us that our Redeemer made: His death has carried those very sins away and destroyed their power to separate us from the living God, who is our Father in heaven.

That is the great burden of this text, especially of vv. 4-6, which are the heart of this text. Having placed himself in our stead and having borne himself the penalty of our sins, we have been delivered from the guilt of them, God's wrath has been turned away from us, and we have been granted peace with God and healing of all our ills -- a healing only partially realized in this life, but soon to be completely and perfectly realized in the world to come.

No one ever stated this effect more powerfully or memorably than Martin Luther, perhaps because Luther's understanding of this good news came as a glorious deliverance to him personally when he thought himself forever doomed to answer for his sins himself. Speaking of the Bible's emphasis on personal pronouns, especially in such a text as this where "us" and "our" occur so regularly, or a text such as Galatians 2:20, where Paul says that Christ died for "me," Luther wrote,

"But who is this **Me?** It is even I, Martin Luther, a wretched and a condemned sinner. This word **me** is full of saving faith. He who will utter aright this little word **me** shall be a good advocate and disputer against all the accusations of the law, and of his own conscience. For Christ delivered up for **me** neither sheep, nor ox, nor gold, nor silver, but Himself, and that entirely and wholly for **me**. Yes even for **me**, who am such a wretched and miserable sinner. Say **me** then with all thy might, and print this pronoun **me** indelibly in thine heart. Not doubting, no -- not for one moment, but that word is written for thee, to make it thy very own and to make Christ and his death for sin thy very own also."

And, in a pastoral letter to a friend, one George Spenlein, Luther wrote, "Learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to pray to him and, despairing of yourself, say: 'Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness, but I am thy sin. Thou hast taken upon thyself what is mine and hast given to me what is thine. Thou hast taken upon thyself what thou wast not and hast given to me what I was not.'" [In Packer, Intro, p. 32n]

That is what must be uppermost in a Christian's mind and heart, any and every Christian. Christ has, by his death in my place, made me righteous when I was unrighteous, gave me peace with God when God's wrath was upon me, and has taken away the guilt of my sin when that guilt would have condemned me to hell forever. And out of that realization, that recollection every day, comes all the love, and all the devotion, and all the gratitude, and all the reverence, and all the fear of God, and all the sheer stupefied amazement at the genius and the mercy and the goodness of God, from which comes a devout and holy and useful Christian life in this world.

You see, vv. 4-6 are designed to explain the error described in v. 3. Men stood aloof from Christ when he suffered in this world because they imagined that he was being punished by God for something he had done. As he says in v. 4, we thought him one that God was against on account of his sins. But it was not his sins that caused his sufferings but ours!

And so there can be no more standing aloof from Christ for anyone who knows that. No there must be a constant looking to him, and counting on him, and trusting him, and serving him. Just as particular and personal as his substitution was for us -- he in **our** place, yours and mine -- so must be our faith in him and our trust and confidence in him for our peace with God and our hope of everlasting life. Just as he put himself in our place, we must now put ourselves in his, to serve him, to love him, to worship him, and to proclaim the glory of his name to others. Jesus Christ must be the all-consuming personality in our lives, just as we became the all-consuming personalities in his -- indeed, just as we consumed him while he was in this world, he must now consume us.