

EASTER – THE POWER OF SUBSTITUTION

Steve Winger from Lubbock, Texas, had a last college test - a final in a logic class known for its difficult exams: The professor told them they could bring as much information to the exam as could fit on to a piece of notebook paper. Most students crammed as many facts as possible on their 8-1/2 x 11 inch sheet of paper. But one student walked into class, put a piece of notebook paper on the floor, and had an advanced logic student stand on the paper. The advanced logic student told him everything he needed to know. He was the only student to receive an "A." The ultimate final exam will come when we stand before God and he asks, "Why should I let you in?" On our own we cannot pass that exam. Our creative attempts to earn eternal life fall far short. But we have someone who will stand in for us.

Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Why did Jesus have to die on a cross? To understand Easter we need to understand what happened on the cross the day Jesus died for our sins.

1. PENALTY OF SIN IS REMOVED - Jesus takes our sin (justified through faith)

On the cross Jesus died in our place. The idea of substitution is clearly seen throughout the Bible. In Genesis we see this when Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac but sacrificing the ram instead. The sheep died in Isaac's place. God provided the sacrifice. In the Old Testament God gave Israel a pattern to follow which pointed to what would happen on the cross.

Lev 16:7 Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 8 He is to cast lots for the two goats--one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat . 9 Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. 10 But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat

The sacrificial system which God initiated was a picture of the cross. It pointed to the day that the true Lamb of God would take away the sins of the world forever. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus he understood this truth.

Joh 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The Old Testament sacrificial system of substitutionary atonement looked was a model of the cross. Obviously a goat cannot die in our place. The blood of animals cannot remove sin. The writer of Hebrews says that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. They are simply a reminder of the true Lamb of God that would someday die in our place.

Heb 10:11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

1Pet 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

In early Greece in about 500 B.C. Zaleucus was king and judge over Locri on the western coast of Greece. He established the first Greek written law. One of the laws in his kingdom was if you committed adultery you would have both of your eyes plucked out. One day the king's own son committed adultery. What was King Zaleucus going to do? He loved his son, but he wanted to be a just king and judge. The king, "in order to maintain the authority of the laws, and to show at the same time parental leniency, shared the penalty with his son, by causing to be thrust out one of his own eyes and one of the eyes of his offending son. In this way, the majesty of his government was maintained, and his own character as a just and righteous sovereign was magnified in the eyes of his subject"

On the cross Jesus became our substitute. A divine exchange occurred. Jesus took our place and died the death which we deserved. This explains His words from the cross:

Matt. 27: 45 From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" -- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

These are the only words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew and Mark. Perhaps this is because they made such an impact on those who heard them. On the cross a divine exchange takes place. Jesus was punished in our place. He took our sins and God the Father had to look away. We are justified because Jesus removed our sins by dying in our place. But there is more...

2. PARTITION OF SIN IS REMOVED - Jesus gives us His righteousness (peace with God)

On the cross a divine exchange occurred. Jesus not only became our substitute and paid for our sin but through the cross we have been given the righteousness of Christ.

2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Because we are given the righteousness of Christ there is no longer anything which keeps us from entering into God's presence. In the Old Testament sacrificial system the priest would enter into the Holy of Holies only once a year and then only with a perfect sacrifice. A rope would be tied to his leg unless the holiness of God killed him and he had to be dragged out. We no longer have to fear. God welcomes us into his presence.

Heb 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

One day we will all have to stand before God and give an account of our lives. One that day a book will be opened. God will turn it to the page marked Stephen Sheane and begin to read all the things I have done, but instead of all the dumb things I did He will instead read all the wonderful things Jesus did. When God looks at us He does not see our sin. He only sees the righteousness of Christ.

Mark 15:37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

To say that we are given the righteousness of Christ means that we are credited with all of the good things that Jesus ever did. We do not enter heaven with an empty account. When God looks down upon us all He sees is His perfect son. There is nothing which stands in the way of intimate fellowship with the father.

During the US civil war a soldier in the Union army had had lost his older brother and his father in the war. He went to Washington, D.C., to see President Lincoln to ask for an exemption from military service so he could go back and help his sister and mother with the spring planting on the farm. He got a day pass from the military to go to the White House and plead his case. When he arrived he was told, "You can't see the president! Don't you know there's a war on? The president's a very busy man. Now go away, son!" So he left, very disheartened, and was sitting on a little park bench beside the White House when a little boy came up to him. The lad said, "Soldier, you look unhappy. What's wrong?" The soldier looked at this young boy and began to spill his heart out to this young lad about his situation, about his father and his brother having died in the war, and how he was the only male left in the family and was needed desperately back at the farm for the Spring planting. The little boy took the soldier by the hand and led him around to the back of the White House. They went through the back door, past the guards, past all the generals and the high ranking government officials until they got to the president's office itself. The little boy didn't even knock on the door but just opened it and walked in. There was President Lincoln with his secretary of state, looking over battle plans on the desk. President Lincoln looked up and said, "What can I do for you, Todd?" And Todd said, "Daddy, this soldier needs to talk to you." And right then and there the soldier had a chance to plead his case to President Lincoln, and he was exempted from military service due to the hardship he was under. Such is the case with our ascended Lord. We have access to the Father through the Son. It is the Son who brings us to the Father's throne and says, "Daddy, here is someone who wants to talk to You."

3. POWER OF SIN IS REMOVED – Jesus sends the Holy Spirit (grace in which we now stand)

Not only has the penalty and partition of sin been removed but so has it's power over us. Without Christ in our lives we were bound by the law, separated from God and at the mercy of the devil. All that changed because of Jesus.

Rom 6:11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus

Rom 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

A duck hunter was with a friend in the wide-open land of southeastern Georgia. Far away on the horizon he noticed a cloud of smoke. Soon he could hear crackling as the wind shifted. He realized the terrible truth: a brushfire was advancing, so fast they couldn't outrun it. Rifling through his pockets, he soon found what he was looking for—a book of matches. He lit a small fire around the two of them. Soon they were standing in a circle of blackened earth, waiting for the fire to come. They didn't have to wait long. They covered their mouths with handkerchiefs and braced themselves. The fire came near -- and swept over them. But they were completely unhurt, untouched. Fire would not pass where fire had already passed.

The law is like a brushfire. I cannot escape it. But if I stand in the burned over place, not a hair of my head will be singed. Christ's death is the burned-over place. There I huddle, hardly believing yet relieved. The law is powerful, yet powerless: Christ's death has disarmed it

Not only are we no longer under the law but Christ has given us His Spirit which guides us into all truth and is, if we allow him, shaping us into the likeness of Jesus

Because on the cross the penalty of sin has been removed – Jesus has paid the debt. In the cross the partition of sin has been removed – Jesus has given us His righteousness so we have free access into the very presence of God. Lastly on the cross the power of sin is also removed. We have been set free and given the Holy Spirit to live in us and guide us.

The power of sin is broken in our lives because we have one with us who is able to do what we cannot.

Years ago, there was a master violinist in Europe. He would play in concerts, and he had a magnificent Stradivarius violin, extremely expensive. He would play the Stradivarius in concerts and everyone would whisper in the crowd, "Listen to the beautiful sounds of the Stradivarius." He would play in churches, and people would say, "Listen to the beautiful sounds of the Stradivarius." He even played before kings and queens, and they, too, would turn to one another and say, "Listen to the beautiful sounds of the Stradivarius." All the glory went to the instrument. Then one day this master violinist was walking by a pawn shop. He noticed an old, beat-up, worn-out violin. He walked into the pawn shop and asked how much it would cost. The owner of the pawn shop told him the American equivalent of five dollars. He bought the violin, and he took it home. He polished it, and he refined it, and he tuned it, and he retuned it, and he built some character into that violin. Then, when he was to play the greatest performance of his life in a concert hall, he took out the little, five-dollar, worn-out, beat-up violin that he had polished and refined. He put it up to his chin, and he began to play, and everybody in the concert hall whispered, "Listen to the beautiful sounds of the Stradivarius."

Each one of us is like that beat up, worn out 5 dollar violin. You may feel like an unworthy common instrument but take heart, you are in the hands of the master. Receive the pardon that Jesus offers in the cross though you do not deserve it. Receive the forgiveness which he gives and rest in it. Then walk in the freedom that you have in Jesus and use it to reach out to a world that is lost and dying. God can use each one of us as a blessing.