

The Great Exchange

1 Peter 3:18

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on April 3, 2015

- ❖ Have you ever tried to imagine what it must be like for a total newcomer to the Christian faith to walk into this building and observe what goes on inside? You walk into this sanctuary and the most prominent feature is this huge white cross looming above us. For those of us who have been going to church for years, it looks normal. There's nothing strange about it.
 - ▶ But imagine if a first-century Roman was to be transported into the future to join us this evening. **He would stare at that cross and think, "What a weird way to decorate a room."** Try to see it from his perspective. It would be like walking into a room decorated with huge hangman's noose on the wall. Remember, in his day, the cross was an object of execution. It was reserved for the worst of criminals.
 - But we decorate our churches with crosses. We wear them around our necks. It's strange, and it's good to be reminded of that.

- ❖ Last Sunday was Palm Sunday. On that day Jesus entered the gates of Jerusalem welcomed by people waving palm branches. But in five days, he was led out those same gates, but this time carrying his cross to Calvary's hill where he was brutally executed by crucifixion. And we, as Christians, have for centuries commemorated that day as Good Friday.
 - ▶ *Good?* That first-century time traveler would say that's a strange choice of words. **Why would you call a crucifixion good?** He'd point out that in his day thousands of people were crucified by the Romans. *So what is so special about this one man's crucifixion? Why would you celebrate it and call it good?*

- ❖ **Worshippers of other religions don't celebrate the death of their leader(s).** Muslims celebrate the life and accomplishments of Mohammed. Buddhists celebrate the wisdom and teaching of Siddhārtha Gautama, the first Buddha. And every modern-day cult has a leader whom they revere, and if that leader died a shameful, tragic death, you can be sure his/her followers will do everything they can to draw attention away from it.
 - ▶ **So again I ask, why in the world do Christians bring so much attention and celebration to Jesus' death every year?** 1 Peter 3:18 answers the question for us. *"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."*

- ❖ *Why do we celebrate the death of Christ as something good?* Because Christ suffered and died *for sins*. Now this phrase, "*for sins*", is very common to the Old Testament. It's referring to what the Mosaic Law calls a **sin-offering**. The OT Law called for death as the payment for sin. **That means anyone who sins before God owes a death to God.**

- ❖ **But within the same Law, God graciously provided a means by which you could sacrifice a sin-offering as a substitute death in your place.** God would allow an exchange of sorts between you (the sinner) and a sacrificial lamb or goat (the substitute). And it couldn't just be any kind of lamb. It had to be a flawless, spotless lamb of pure white wool.

- ▶ **And on this altar an exchange took place between you, a sin-stained sinner, and this pure, stainless lamb.** All of your sin was counted upon this lamb (which died in your place) and all of its purity was counted upon you (who walked away forgiven and humbled that God would allow such a merciful exchange).
- ❖ **This whole of idea of exchanging your sins with the righteousness of a pure sacrifice goes back to the very beginning of the biblical narrative.** In the beginning God made mankind, placed them in a Garden, and set them under his loving rule. He would be their King and they would be his people enjoying life under his benevolent authority. But if they rejected his rule, there would be consequences.
 - ▶ On the day he placed Man in the Garden, the King said, *“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* (2:17) **Death is the appropriate punishment for sin because sin is always, ultimately, a personal rebellion against God and a rejection of his loving rule.**
- ❖ But then we see the first sin-offering – the first death *for* sin – offered at the end of Genesis 3. God had warned that *“for in the day you eat of [the tree] you shall surely die.”* Yet we know that Adam lived until he was 930 years old. But I thought he deserved to die that day? **Yes, he did deserve to die that day, but he didn’t.** Because a sin-offering was made in his place.
 - ▶ After Adam and his wife fell into sin, they were ashamed and tried to cover their shame but fell short with their little fig leaves (3:7). So we read of God’s mercy to them in Genesis 3:21. *“The LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them.”*
- ❖ I don’t know what kind of animal it was, but I do know that it didn’t give up its skin willingly. It had to be sacrificed. It had to die. **That animal died a death that man’s sin deserves.** That animal died *for sins*. That Genesis 3 sin-offering given in exchange for sinners really functioned as the prototype of all the sacrifices to come to be offered up on the altar of God.
- ❖ **Are you starting to see why 1 Peter 3:18 is such good news?** *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous”.* So on that very first Good Friday, the world saw Jesus hanging on the cross, an instrument of execution for the worst of criminals.
 - ▶ And all who witnessed his death assumed he was like all who were crucified before him. He must be up there because he’s being crucified for sins. And in a sense, they were right. **On that day, God was punishing Jesus on the cross for sins.**
 - Of course those witnessing his crucifixion were under the impression that he was being crucified for his own sins. His own crimes. But Peter knows – through years of personal knowledge, 24/7 observation – that this man never sinned. Peter describes him as *“the righteous”* compared to us *“the unrighteous”*.

- ❖ So the obvious question is this: ***How can this Righteous One be crucified for sins if he had none of his own?*** And the obvious answer, in light of the biblical narrative and pattern, is that his death was *for sins* in the sense that it functioned as a sin-offering.
 - ▶ Peter understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of all the sin-offerings made throughout the OT. All of those sacrifices were simply shadows of which Jesus and his sacrifice is the reality. **He's the Greater Substitute, the Greater Sacrifice, the Greater Spotless Lamb, through whom God provides a Greater Exchange.**

- ❖ On the cross a Great Exchange took place. The righteous for the unrighteous. **Righteous Jesus exchanged places with Unrighteous Sinners (like you and I).** All of our sins were counted upon him (who died in our place) and all of his righteousness is now counted upon us (who walk away forgiven and humbled that God would allow such a merciful exchange). *"For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (2 Cor. 5:21)

- ❖ I want you to look back at our verse. *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."* Think back to Genesis 3. God had warned of sin's consequence. He said, *"for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* Of course we know Adam and Eve didn't die. An exchange took place and a sin-offering died instead.

- ❖ But of course they weren't necessarily off the hook. It's true Adam didn't die that day. At least not physically. **But he did experience a death of sorts – a spiritual death characterized by a genuine separation from God.**
 - ▶ Scripture teaches that the wages of sin is death (Rm. 3:23), which includes physical death, but it's referring to something far worse. Genesis 3:23 says God expelled the couple from the Garden, from his very Presence.
 - From that moment on, Man died spiritually because we were cut off from the divine source of life. Our peace with God was gone and in its place sprang up hostility. **Man lost fellowship with God and instead gained his wrath.**

- ❖ **Genesis 3:24 says God placed a cherubim with a flaming sword at the entrance of the Garden,** so even if Adam and Eve could bring themselves to change their minds and seek to return, they could not. Any attempt to enter the Garden and return to God's holy Presence would bring the sword of his wrath upon their heads. We, as a people, were cut off from God. We're distant. Alienated from him.

- ❖ But again this is the very reason why we're celebrating the suffering and death of our Leader, our Lord. This is why Good Friday is so good! **Jesus, the Righteous, is the only man who could walk past that flaming sword into the Presence of God.** He had no sin to bar him from God. But on that very first Good Friday, Jesus bore upon himself the sins of others. The Righteous became unrighteous. He who knew no sin became sin for us. **So that when he approached God's holy Presence, the flaming sword of wrath struck *him* down.**

- ▶ It killed him. He died. The devil squealed. The demons howled. The world stood by and just watched. The faithful were crushed. Our one glimmering flame of hope was snuffed out. **It look as if we would never be able to return to God.** That we would remain cut off and distant. Our Leader, our Lord was dead.

- ❖ But oh how we were wrong. **God looked upon Jesus' sacrifice and he was pleased.** The Righteous One had fully paid the penalty of the Unrighteous. And so it pleased God, on the third day, to raise Christ from the dead. On Friday he was "*put to death in the flesh*" but on Sunday he was "*made alive in the spirit*".
 - ▶ On that glorious morning, Jesus arose. **He stood up and continued walking towards God's Presence. But this time he did not walk alone.** This time he brought with him a countless multitude of people from every nation, tribe, and tongue.
 - Every one of them walking under the banner of 1 Peter 3:18. "Christ died for me, for my sins. The righteous for the unrighteous to bring me back to God!" In Christ, every one of us is able to walk past that flaming sword back into God's holy Presence.

- ❖ *Do you now see why we make so much of the cross? Why we celebrate and proclaim the suffering and death of Jesus as such good news for the world?*
 - ▶ And what's more important is that all of this can be good news for *you* personally – if you turn from your sins and to Christ in faith, trusting him to be your Great Substitute, your Great Sacrifice, he who offers to make a Great Exchange with you.