

Session 3. How the cross answers the problem: sacrifice and substitution

Jeremiah 31:31–34; John 1:29–34; Matthew 26:26–28; Romans 5:6–19

Before we start: When you hear the word ‘substitution’, what do you immediately think of?

After God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt, he made a covenant with them. He would be their God and they his people, living in a way which showed they belonged to him. God is portrayed in the Bible as the perfect judge who must because of his character dispense justice. But when people broke God’s commandments, the sacrificial system offered a way to be restored.

Leviticus 4 (selected verses)

1. How do these instructions allow God to balance the fact that he is a God of love *and* a God of justice?
2. What is the recurring theme with all these instructions? What was the cost to those who had sinned?
3. What was the significance of laying hands on the animal’s head?

Jeremiah 31:31–34

1. What does this passage tell us about how God’s people kept his covenant?
2. If they didn’t keep the first one, how is it possible that they’ll be able to keep another one?

We jump to the New Testament and begin with the ministry of John the Baptist.

John 1:29–34

1. We are given part of John’s message in v30. What else was he preaching (see Matthew 3:2 and Luke 3:3)?
2. What does repent mean in this context?
3. But in that case, where does the sacrificial system fit in?
4. What were the criteria for a lamb that was to be used as a sacrifice? What then do you think it actually means to say that someone is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”?

Matthew 26:26–28

1. To recap from Jeremiah, why did God say he was going to make a ‘new’ covenant?
2. How does Jesus imply that this new covenant will be inaugurated?
3. What does this tell us about the significance of his death then?
4. Why do you think Jesus instituted this as a fundamental ritual for his followers?

Romans 5:6–19

1. Are there any words or phrases here you don’t understand? (be honest!)
2. How do verses 6–11 show God’s answer to the problem we face?
3. How can Jesus substitute for us?
4. Verse 9 talks about God’s wrath, the outworking of his justice. So how does Jesus’ death satisfy both his wrath (justice) and his love?
5. Paul introduces Adam, our representative, in v.12. What did Adam’s sin (or trespass) result in?
6. What does Jesus’ death result in?
7. What specifically does this mean for those who accept “the gift of God” (v16)? And how do we receive these blessings?

And finally, to mediate on: what is the consequence for our lives that Christ has died in our place? One way Paul answers this is in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15. We will look more at the consequences of our salvation in other studies.