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Great Words of the Faith **Christ Died FOR US!** Selected Scriptures

A lot of what goes on in politics seems to involve searching for someone to blame. If the economy takes a downturn, some will blame the leader in charge while others will blame the previous administration. In other problem areas such as education, employment, or social issues, both sides will seek to blame the other for the problems themselves or for the failure to fix them. Yes, much of politics is seeking to make the other party or the other candidate a "scapegoat" for the problems in our state or our nation.

"Scapegoat" is a word we use to describe one who is blamed for the problems, wrongs, or faults of others. It is a Bible term taken from the book of Leviticus. The scapegoat pictures and describes all that Jesus did for us. In a previous study, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross", we considered the central place the cross holds in our Christian faith. We should consider more deeply what it is that happened when Jesus suffered and died on the cross.

The Bible has small words with great meaning. "**But God...**" in Ephesians 2 and other passages is tremendous. We were dead in our sins, lost and without hope, under righteous judgment, "**But God**" in grace and mercy saved us!

Another small word with great meaning is "for". As we read the Bible or share the good news of the gospel, we see a simple message, "Jesus died for us". In that small preposition "for" we find a tremendous truth. What took place on Calvary is that Jesus died for us. Jesus died in our place; He took the punishment that we deserved. In the study of theology, we call this "*substitutionary atonement*" – an important truth to contemplate as we seek to better understand and appreciate our own salvation and as we seek to share the gospel with others.

"Atonement" refers to being made right, or "at one" with an offended God. It speaks of how two estranged parties can be reconciled. How can we who have offended an infinitely holy and righteous God make things right with Him? How can God Who will not allow the guilty to go unpunished demonstrate His compassion, grace, and lovingkindness in forgiving us? This is where we see "substitution". We are only made right with God by the sacrifice of an innocent on our behalf.

This truth is central to the message of the New Testament. In Galatians 2:20 Paul writes of the "**Son of God...who loved me and gave Himself up for me**". Jesus taught His disciples, "**The Son of Man did come not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many**". Romans 5:8 tells us, "**God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**" Peter wrote, "**Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God...**" (1 Peter 3:18). Paul states this most clearly in 2 Corinthians 5:20:

...We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:20-21)

This truth of substitution also runs throughout the Old Testament. In Genesis God killed animals to provide skins to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness (Genesis 3). As Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac, God provided a ram in his place (Gen. 22). On the night of the first Passover, a lamb was killed, its blood spread on the doorposts so the angel of death would pass by the homes of the people of Israel (Exodus 12). God instituted the temple sacrificial system as

animals were slain to provide a covering for the people's sin (Leviticus).

One of most significant sacrifices for the people of Israel was that offered on "The Day of Atonement" (Leviticus 16). On that day, a special sin offering was to be offered for the whole nation, and the fact that it was to be offered annually reminded them that no Levitical sacrifice could finally atone for sins. On this day and only on this day the high priest, representing all the people, entered the presence of God in the Most Holy Place. He entered bearing the blood of a bull and the blood of a goat. First, he would offer the blood of the bull to make atonement for himself—he himself must first be clean—and then he would offer the blood of the goat in order to make atonement for the sins of all the people. On this same day, the high priest placed his hands on a second goat and confessed the sins of Israel over it. This goat, the "scapegoat", is then released into the desert in order to symbolize the total removal of our sin. This vividly pictures what Christ did for us on the cross. He took the punishment for our sin upon Himself as He suffered and died. He came our "scapegoat" – undeservedly taking our blame so that our sins might be forgiven and removed "as far as the East is from the West" (Ps. 103:12).

The clearest presentation in the Old Testament, and perhaps in all of Scripture of the truth of Jesus' substitution for us was given by the prophet Isaiah:

***⁴Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
⁵But He was pierced through for our
transgressions, He was crushed for our
iniquities; the chastening for our well-being
fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are
healed. ⁶All of us like sheep have gone
astray, each of us has turned to his own
way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of
us all to fall on Him. (Isaiah 53:4-6)***

While it is an awesome truth that Jesus died for us as our substitute, we must remember that this only becomes effective for us when we repent and put our faith in Him as our only way of salvation. We are saved only through faith in Christ and what He has done for us.

There are several wrong ideas about why Jesus died on the cross. Most in our world today would deny any need for such a substitutionary death. Many reject the idea of sin itself – that there is a Holy God and we are responsible to Him. Some might agree there is sin but don't believe it is serious enough for eternal damnation or require the death of God's own Son. There many who claim to follow Christ who see substitutionary atonement as primitive and repulsive. They teach that Jesus died merely as an example for us to follow. He demonstrated God's great love so that might produce a love for others in our own lives. They fail to see what substitutionary atonement teaches us. **God is Holy.** We have broken His laws and must be punished. **Sin is serious.** Often, we tend to minimize our own sin even as we point out the sins of others. **Atonement is costly.** For us to be right with God required the death of His own Son in our place. Jesus willingly took our blame upon Himself – He willingly became our "scapegoat". Why is important that we dig more deeply into the simple truth, "Jesus died *for us*"?

It will help us love Christ more and rejoice in the salvation He has provided for us. When the reality hits us that "Jesus died for me", we cannot help but love Him more, seek to serve Him more faithfully, and hate the sin that put Him on that cross.

It will help us as we seek to share the gospel with others. The gospel can be expressed with the simple statement, "Jesus died for us". But that simple statement needs a little explanation. *Why do we need Jesus to die for us?* Because we've sinned against our Holy God and that sin demands punishment. Jesus took that punishment upon Himself. *Who was Jesus?* The Son of God who took on human nature so that He could live, suffer and die, and rise again for us.

In this truth we rejoice as in the great Hymn:

***For me He died;
For me He lives,
And everlasting life and light
He freely gives!***

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12:00 PM McManus Conference Room

(MB 254 located by House minority offices)