

The Perfect Substitute -- who promises full resurrection

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[0 : 00] We've been looking this Christmas at what the Apostle Peter has to say about the birth and the life and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the reason why God became man.

I'm going to read a few verses from 1 Peter chapter 1 and then from chapter 3, and we'll look at those shortly. Peter says, Ready to be revealed in the last time.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you. In the things that have now been announced to you through those who preach the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Things into which angels long to look. Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober minded. Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[1 : 45] And Peter says, 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 by the Spirit. But Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to him.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, as you know, I'm sure the John Lewis Christmas ad has become something of an institution.

Although actually in recent years, it's had a lot of criticism. There was a rather weird one a year or two ago, wasn't there, with that man on the moon. It was a bit creepy and a bit strange.

So I wonder what it would be like this year. Well, I don't have a TV because I prefer to avoid propaganda wherever I can. And I certainly don't like to pay for it. So I thought, well, I better have a look on the Internet, see if I can find it.

[2 : 56] So I searched. And the first result that came up on Google was this. John Lewis Christmas advert, the most unapologetically depressing thing in human history. Well, that was the crit from The Guardian.

Which, of course, made me realize that actually it must be really quite a good advert this year. So I watched it. And it was. It was actually quite heartwarming, if you've seen it.

Highlighting the wonderful gift of an open home for foster children in care at Christmas. And indeed throughout the year. Now, of course, as one analyst said, advertisers and their media partners are sensitive to the mood of the nation.

And brands that take steps to make a real difference to people's lives will be appreciated. So, of course, the advertiser is being paid to make the John Lewis brand shine.

But let's give John Lewis the benefit of the doubt. And believe them. Here's what they said. We care deeply about families. And for our biggest moment of the year, we decided to focus on one kind of family that's often overlooked.

[4 : 03] And as they say, the home that Ellie, that's the little girl in the ad, the home that she enters is filled with kindness. And the foster father's actions demonstrate that ultimately it's what you do that matters most.

Well, indeed, a loving welcome into a home full of kindness. That is a far greater value, isn't it?

Than even the best gift that a shop like John Lewis can sell to you. And in a far greater way, in fact, in the ultimate way, that is what Christmas is really about.

It's what a loving father has done in sending Jesus Christ, his son, to bring us home into a home of wonderful love.

Peter says Christ came and suffered for our sins to bring us to God into his perfect home of peace and of joy and of kindness and of love forever and ever.

Of course, it's easy, isn't it, to talk rather glibly about peace and love at Christmas. And in a sense, we all know that we're just playing a game by doing that. We're playing let's pretend like the, well, like the Allied and the German soldiers did in the trenches, famously, in World War I, when they went and had that game of football in no man's land on Christmas Day.

[5 : 30] But, of course, by Boxing Day, they were shooting each other again, weren't they? And I guess it'll be a little bit like that by this evening in many houses across the nation, won't it? When the in-laws and the outlaws have fallen out with each other, when the kids are fighting each other for the Christmas presents, and all semblance of peace has probably disappeared.

Maybe it has already by this time on Christmas Day. I read last year, I think it was, that Christmas Day turns out to be the biggest day for online shopping in the whole year.

You can imagine just everybody disappearing to their bedrooms and their iPads and doing that sort of thing. So, in a sense, this idea of peace and reconciliation among people on earth, it does seem to be little more than a dream, a fantasy.

And certainly our news is full, not of peace, but of war. It's full of turmoil. It's full of terror. It's full of countless tragedies. And it can be hard, in a way, not to be rather cynical about this talk of peace and harmony.

But, friends, let me just say the Bible is not the least bit naive. It doesn't deal in fantasy. It's very plain. It tells us that Christmas is only part of the story.

[6 : 45] It's only the beginning. Part of God's gift has been unwrapped for us at Christmas. But the best and the fullness of it is unequivocally still to be.

It's a bit like on Christmas early morning, perhaps, the kids open their stockings. Lots of presents, and it's great fun. But you know that the main present is still to come.

It's still under the tree. Well, so it is with God's gift at Christmas. We who are alive today, we've already unwrapped the gift of Christ in the cradle.

And, indeed, the gift of Christ on the cross. But we have yet to receive the full gift of the crown that he has won for us.

We don't yet see the full glory of God's gift to us in Jesus completely unwrapped. But the day is coming when we will see that, and we will share in that glory.

[7 : 45] When we see him with our own eyes, not in that poor lowly stable, but set at God's right hand on high.

When he leads his children on to the place where he has gone. You see, Jesus came to bring us to God. And that's the ultimate wonder of the perfect gift of Christmas.

In Jesus, God's gift to us is a perfect substitute. He gives himself in his death and also in his life for us.

And in the gift of his death, we've already unwrapped and received the peace of personal reconciliation with God forever. But we're still yet to receive the gift of his life, which is the promise of a personal resurrection with Christ forever.

But every Christmas season reminds us that that full salvation for which we await, it's nearer. It's nearer today than when we first believed.

[8 : 53] Because although earth gave him no welcome, he did come. And he'll come again. And we will see him again. Never again rejected.

But triumphant in glory when he comes to reign. Let's think for a bit about this pledge of Christmas past. The gifts that, as it were, we've already unwrapped.

We've already received from God in Jesus Christ. Christian believers have already received the peace of personal reconciliation with God forever.

In Romans chapter 5, Paul says that through the Lord Jesus, we have now received reconciliation. And Peter tells us here that that is because of the perfect substitution of Jesus' death once for all for our sins.

Christ also suffered for the unrighteous, he says, that he might bring us to God.

[9 : 59] Being put to death in the flesh. And only through that substitution, he says, that great exchange of Jesus' death for our death, can we be brought to God.

That we can come into his presence, personally reconciled with him. You see, the Bible is very clear. God is holy.

He is just. He is right. He is true. And that means that nothing that is unholy and unjust and unright can be in his presence. Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, said the prophet Isaiah very starkly.

The apostle Paul says the same thing. In fact, he sums up the verdict of the whole Bible in these words in Romans chapter 3. None is righteous. No, not one.

All have turned aside. All have sinned. All lack the glory of God. And so none can know that peace in God's presence.

[11 : 08] But you see, God has done through Jesus Christ what we could never ever do for ourselves. He has declared righteous those who are unrighteous.

So that those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ are seen as righteous in God's sight. And therefore, they can be brought back into fellowship with God. And we can have peace with God because Jesus brings us back to God in personal reconciliation.

That's Peter's message here. And he describes how it happens. The perfect substitution of Jesus' death for our sins.

He, the righteous one, takes the punishment of our unrighteousness, he says. And it's a substitution that is so perfect, that is so powerful.

But as Paul says to the Roman church in Romans 5, Now we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have access to the grace in which we now stand.

[12 : 14] He says to the Corinthians, For our sake he made him, Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

That is the great exchange. That's the perfect substitution. Through the death of Jesus, once in history, on that wooden cross, which was the whole purpose of his birth, of being placed in that wooden cradle.

We have received the peace of personal reconciliation with God forever. He came to bring us to God.

There was no room in Bethlehem for Christ, the Prince of Heaven. But there was room at Calvary, upon a cross of shame, for him to die, uplifted high, to bear the sinner's blame.

And all who come will find a home in Jesus crucified. Let's think for a bit about this pledge of Christmas past, the gifts that, as it were, we've already unwrapped, we've already received from God in Jesus Christ.

[13 : 30] Christian believers have already received the peace of personal reconciliation with God forever. In Romans chapter 5, Paul says that through the Lord Jesus, we have now received reconciliation.

And Peter tells us here that that is because of the perfect substitution of Jesus' death, once for all, for our sins. Christ also suffered for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, he says, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh.

And only through that substitution, he says, that great exchange of Jesus' death for our death, can we be brought to God. That we can come into his presence, personally reconciled with him.

You see, the Bible's very clear. God is holy. He is just. He is right. He is true. And that means that nothing that is unholy, and unjust, and unright, can be in his presence.

Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, said the prophet Isaiah, very starkly. The apostle Paul says the same thing.

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[15 : 58] He, the righteous one, takes the punishment of our unrighteousness, he says. And it's a substitution that is so perfect, that is so powerful, that as Paul says to the Roman church, in Romans 5, now we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him, we have access to the grace in which we now stand. He says to the Corinthians, for our sake, he made him, Jesus, who knew no sin to be sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

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we have received the peace of personal reconciliation with God forever. He came to bring us to God.

There was no room in Bethlehem for Christ, the Prince of Heaven, but there was room at Calvary upon a cross of shame for him to die, uplifted high, to bear the sinner's blame, and all who come will find a home in Jesus crucified.

[17 : 26] Well, Christians, that is those who believe and who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, they have already peace with God. That's the gift of Christmas that we unwrapped.

The very moment that we believed, the moment that we trusted in Jesus Christ, we've been reconciled already to God spiritually, and the barriers of sin were broken down at that very moment. You know that if you're a Christian believer, because when you believed, you began to hear God's voice, didn't you, in his word as you listened to the Bible being proclaimed, as you read the Bible yourself.

God's word came alive to you, or rather, to put it more properly, you woke up and you came alive to it, having been deaf to it and blind to it before. And then you began speaking to God in prayer, because you knew him, because that relationship with God had been restored through the peace of that personal reconciliation that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

But you see, there is more, much, much more, to God's Christmas gift than just that. There's a pledge of Christmas about the future, about a Christmas gift that is yet to come, because in Jesus Christ, you see, we have the promise of personal resurrection with him forever.

[19 : 00] We've received already that reconciliation with God through Christ's death, but the promise is that we will receive the full gift of resurrection through his life.

Peter says that he might bring us to God, he was made alive by the Spirit. And that means that the best for us is yet to be.

We're reconciled to God in Christ, but, well, as Peter said, we don't yet see him, we don't yet share his glory physically, that's still to come, that is what Peter calls our living hope.

And it will be brought to us, he says, at the revelation of Jesus Christ, when he returns in glory to judge the world. He will bring us to God then in that ultimate reconciliation of our bodily resurrection like Christ.

So we have the gift of Jesus' risen life, we have the promise of our own personal resurrection to that glory which is everlasting. That he might bring us to God, he was made alive by the Spirit.

[20 : 12] And Peter says we also will be made alive by the same Spirit. The Apostle Paul said exactly the same thing in Romans chapter 8. Listen, he said, if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

That's clear, isn't it? That's the pledge of Christmas future. The best is yet to be. But Christmas is a pledge, a sure and certain hope that it will be so.

See, the past is a reality. He came and he suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous. And that means the present is a reality.

He was put to death in the flesh and he was made alive by the Spirit. Jesus is risen. And that means, friends, the future for you and for me. If we trust in Jesus Christ, the future is a certainty. That glory will be brought to us, says Peter, at the revelation of Jesus Christ. And he will raise up our mortal bodies. And he will bring us physically to be with God in his glory forever.

[21 : 35] That's the pledge of the message of Christmas for every single one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ this Christmas day. He came as a substitute so perfect so that we can have now, right now, the peace of personal reconciliation with God.

And so that we can have the promise of a personal resurrection with Christ in his glory. Never ending. Forever and ever.

But you see, the gospel of Christmas signs the revy. It says, wake up. It says, daybreak is here. The joy has begun. It breathes to us that warm wind of hope that banishes the bitter cold in the darkness of night.

It was like that warm air that on Monday morning last week, do you remember? You opened your front door after that freezing, freezing two weeks and suddenly warm air was coming into our cold houses from outside.

That's the message of Christmas. Maybe you can't see it because this world still seems to be a very cold place, a dark place. But it is.

[22 : 44] But that's the nature of daybreak, isn't it? Begins with just the slightest streak of grey over the dark sky on the eastern horizon. That's how dawn begins.

It's like the great thaw in C.S. Lewis's marvelous book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in the land of Narnia. The great thaw that breaks that never-ending winter of the dark misery of the white witch.

And everybody who knows and understands what that means, knows that Aslan is on the move. Everything is changed.

Winter is ended because the new day has dawned and springtime is coming and full summer will surely, surely come. Friends, the real meaning of Christmas is that because Jesus came as the perfect substitute that first Christmas, it means that that new day can dawn in our lives now through the forgiveness of our sins.

It means the sunrise of that new day can bathe your life now with the peace of personal reconciliation with God and with that promise of a personal resurrection that is to come.

[24 : 02] It was Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, who sang so beautifully of that sunrise in the birth of Jesus, the perfect gift from man to God. He said to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

In our church readings this week, this comment was made on these words. There's a sound of many voices in these words. The sob of the widow, the agony of the sufferer on the sick bed, the burden of the guilty soul, the loneliness of the old and unwanted, the desolation of the orphan.

Many different circumstances, but the same need in each, the way of peace. Friend, in Jesus Christ, the perfect substitute, the perfect gift of us to us from God, that day of peace, it's begun.

And that means that whoever you are, whatever you've done, that peace of personal reconciliation with God can be yours this Christmas, today, right now. And just as silently as the virgin birth came to Bethlehem when Christ was born into the world at that first Christmas, he can be born in you today, in our hearts, through that same virgin birth of faith in our souls.

He longs for that to be so. As the carol proclaims to us, where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in to bring that peace of real reconciliation now, through the forgiveness of your sins, and the promise of a personal resurrection to life everlasting.

[25 : 54] Because that child, so dear and gentle, already he's our Lord in heaven above. And he leads his children on to the place where he already has gone and waits to welcome us.

The very best part of Christmas hasn't happened yet. It's still to be that it's nearer this Christmas than ever before.

And I hope that the joy of that reality will fill our hearts this Christmas time. next on.