

# Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

## Trading Places

(Exodus 12; Leviticus 16)

**Introduction:** Substituting downward...

One of the most popular new TV shows of the season is “Undercover Boss.” If you haven’t seen it yet, here’s the gist of it.

The show’s producers look for a willing CEO or the President of a major corporation and send him, incognito, on an assignment for a few days to learn what it would be like to work for him.

I’ve watched parts of a few episodes. The president of a waste management company hauls trash. The CEO of White Castle Hamburgers flips burgers (and wastes thousands of buns by mismanaging machinery!)

In the shows I’ve watched the executive lessons from the front lines transforms the leader AND the company. It is all a result of trading places.

The multi-millionaire learns what it’s like to earn minimum wage. The boss learns what it is to take orders. The highly respected gets trash-talked by a disrespectful customer.

Undercover Boss is popular because it works on several levels. It gives viewers - most of whom are **not** CEO’s - the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Bigwig get his! It also highlights the difficulty of actually performing work that often merits little pay.

But it also shows something else. It gives a touching glimpse of the humanity of the boss who is really trying to understand his employees’ lives, who wants to connect with his line workers, who really wants to improve people’s working conditions.

The undercover boss substitutes downward, he trades places with someone on a lower rung in order to help.

That theme of downward substitution is played out as a favorite story line in books and movies.

- There is The Prince and the Pauper, a novel by Mark Twain about two young boys with very different lives who switch roles.
- There is the 1980’s Robert Redford movie “Brubaker” that has the new warden of a horrible prison go undercover as an inmate for a short time to find out what’s really going on inside the walls.
- The family movie “It Takes Two” with Mary-Kate and Ashley Olson follows the same line.

This morning we are going to look at the ultimate “trading places” story. It’s a story found in the Bible.

But before we jump to the biblical “downward substitution story” I need to set the stage a bit, first.

It wouldn’t be far off to say that the story of the Bible centers on God’s passionate pursuit of the people He created. From the beginning, though, that pursuit was fraught with challenges.

On the one hand, there is the very nature of God. If Scripture is clear about nothing else, it is clear that God is holy.

### The Cosmic Conundrum

#### **God - Majestic and Holy**

*God - “wholly other”*

The prophet Isaiah had a vision of God, seated on a throne. Around Him flew angels who cried out,

***[Isaiah 6:3] “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”***

And when Isaiah saw God in His holiness, he said,  
*[Isaiah 6:5] Woe is me, for I am ruined!  
 Because I am a man of unclean lips,  
 And I live among a people of unclean lips;  
 For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*

God is transcendent. He is eternal. He is awesome and majestic and weighty and enormous and powerful. People who come into His presence immediately see that they are not worthy to be there.

God is holy. And God is absolutely pure. The apostle John wrote about God's nature in terms of light.

*God - purity defined*

*[1 John 1:5] This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.*

When John says that God is light he means to say that there is nothing in God that smacks of a hint of the darkness of evil. In fact, God's Word assures us that He will have nothing at all to do with sin. He is purity defined.

That's God. Holy. Pure. On the other hand, there are people - like you and me...

### **All People Everywhere - Sinful**

*Created in the image of God*

*[Genesis 1:27] God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

Every one of us here today has been made in the image and likeness of God. We are free moral agents. We have the capacity for great creativity, for honor and dignity and great achievements.

But, we are all glorious wrecks because of sin.

*Glorious wrecks*

You, me, and everyone else we can think of, we are all fatally flawed. We are damaged goods.

You may have heard the term "total depravity." This term means that every part of us - our thinking life, our emotional life, our volitional life - is affected by sin. It doesn't mean that we are all as bad as we might be. But it does mean that there is no part of us that is not corrupted in some way by sin.

The result?

**Status Quo:** All are separated from God

*[Romans 3:23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

The result is that there is a great gulf between people and God. God is holy. We are sinful.

Because of His nature, He can have nothing to do with us. Because of our nature, we won't have anything to do with Him.

### **How to Bring the Two Together...?**

*The problem stated*

**Conundrum:** an intricate and difficult problem

This state of affairs has resulted in what I'm calling "the cosmic conundrum." And here it is.

WE who are sinful need God. We hunger and thirst for God. We were created in His image and likeness and never feel quite at home until we are in a trusting relationship with God.

GOD, who is holy and pure and cannot abide the presence of sin or sinners, longs for us with the passion of a Father. Our sin doesn't stop Him from loving us any more than the misbehavior of a child causes a parent to stop loving.

How can a holy God enter into a relationship with a sinful person? How can the barrier of sin be removed so that man can know God? Can the barrier of sin that separates God and man be removed in such a way that God's holiness is not compromised?

There would have to be something more going on than simple amnesty. Justice would have to be served. Sin would have to be dealt with.

### *The problem resolved*

The Bible says that the Cosmic Conundrum has been resolved - and the solution God devised to resolve the cosmic conundrum consists of the most shocking display of outrageous love you could ever imagine.

And, like the story line of Undercover Boss, this most shocking display revolves around the theme of **downward substitution** - only on an infinitely greater scale.

On the way to discovering how a holy and righteous God utilized substitution to pave the way for relationship with sinful people, we need to stop off at the Jewish sacrifices.

Understanding the sacrifices of Old Testament Israel is the key to understanding and appreciating what Christianity is all about.

There were, under the Old Testament Law, different kinds of sacrifices, each one with a distinct purpose.

- Some sacrifices were associated with celebration.
- Some were all about commitment and personal consecration.<sup>1</sup>
- Some sacrifices were for forgiveness.

It is the sacrifices that brought forgiveness that we are considering today.

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<sup>1</sup> These sacrifices would include "peace" or "fellowship" offerings which were often associated with thanksgiving (Lev. 7:12), the burnt offering and the ritual of the three annual festivals (Ex. 23:14-17 - Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles). These sacrifices conceived of man as creature, giving God His due as Creator.

## Sacrifices That Brought Forgiveness

### **Various Kinds of Old Testament Sacrifices**

Included in this category were the sin offerings and the guilt offerings.

These sacrifices conceive of man as a sinner needing pardon. These sacrifices answer the question we have raised this morning about bridging the gap between a holy God and sinful people. And these sacrifices answer the question with the word "substitute."

Today, we'll consider two of these forgiveness-granting sacrifices, sacrifices familiar to every Jew and sacrifices with which every Christian should be familiar, as well.

But first, we'll think about two items that were true of every Old Testament sacrifice.

First, for the Jew offering a sacrifice, it was always a very "hands-on" experience.

### Substitution in the Old Testament

#### **"Hands on" Sacrifice (Exodus 29)**

Nearly a dozen times, when the Bible is describing how to offer a sacrifice, we read these words, "***You shall lay your hands on the ram/lamb/heifer/goat.***"<sup>2</sup>

The worshipper was to bring the offering to the place of sacrifice. He was then to place his hands on the animal's head as either he or the priest killed it. Why the laying on of hands? Good question.

Why, even today, do we lay hands on those we elect to serve as Elders and Deacons in our church? Why do we lay hands on those who go out from our church to serve for a week or more on a Missions trip?

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<sup>2</sup> See Exodus 29:10; 29:15; 29:19; Leviticus 4:15; 8:14; 8:18; 8:22; 16:21

Well, we do it to consecrate them to their service, true. But it is more than that.

We lay hands on these people because we are identifying ourselves with them. As they go to the mission field, all of us who are left behind have, in a sense, gone too. They are going for us, as our representatives, as our substitutes.

The laying of hands on an animal about to be sacrificed signified that the worshipper was identifying himself with that animal. *“This animal is standing in my place and is taking the punishment that is due me.”*<sup>3</sup>

The animal was the worshipper’s substitute.

The second ingredient that was always present in a sacrifice in the Old Testament (at least in every sacrifice that was dealing with sin) was the shedding of blood.

### **Sacrifice = Giving Up a Life (Leviticus 17)**

The importance of blood is seen most clearly in Leviticus 17:11.

*[Leviticus 17:11] For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.*<sup>4</sup>

Have you ever asked the-question-behind-the-question when it comes to sacrifices, *“Why were they even necessary?”*?

I mean, what if a Jewish worshipper was really sorry for his sin? Couldn’t he have simply apologized to God for his sin? Couldn’t God have simply done the gentlemanly thing and accepted the apology and let by-gones be by-gones?

What is it that made blood sacrifice necessary and, apparently, the only solution God would allow to deal with sin?

In our justice system it is always true that if a crime is committed, if a law is broken, the perpetrator has to be punished. Even if the victim does not call for punishment, JUSTICE demands punishment.<sup>5</sup>

It is also true in our justice system that the punishment is supposed to “fit” the crime. You don’t get fifteen years to life for jaywalking and you are not fined fifty bucks for premeditated murder.

As it is with our system, so it is with God’s.

When someone sins - breaks God’s law - God’s justice requires that the guilty party pays. When someone has broken His law they have committed a crime against the holiness of God. They have rebelled against the Creator. They have committed high treason against Almighty God.

So a simple apology won’t suffice to deal with sin for the simple reason that the only punishment that will fit the crime of SIN is DEATH.<sup>6</sup>

No token payment will do. A violation of God’s Law requires the forfeit of a life.

And under the Old Testament Law that God ordained, either the guilty sinner was killed, or an innocent animal was killed in his place, as his substitute.<sup>7</sup>

Forgiveness was not possible without the shedding of blood. And, in the case of the worshipper in the Old Testament, that meant no forgiveness without a substitute!

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars go farther and see the laying on of hands as a “symbolic transferal of the sins of the worshipper to the animal” as was explicitly the cases with the scapegoat (which we’ll consider in a minute.)

<sup>4</sup> This verse also explains why the shedding and sprinkling of blood was indispensable to atonement.

<sup>5</sup> “Justice” is not just some arbitrary standard of right and wrong. Our society’s sense of justice stems from the nature of God, who is Just and Holy.

<sup>6</sup> See Romans 6:23, *“The wages of sin is death.”*

<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris makes this case in *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Eerdman, 1955). Blood must be shed when sin is committed, and the shedding of blood **means** the pouring out of a life. When “blood” is spoken of, the issue is not the fluid flowing through the veins, but the giving up of life.

We find two very powerful pictures of substitutionary sacrifice in the Old Testament. We see the first one in the story of the Passover, located in the book of Exodus.

### Graphic Examples of Substitution

#### **The Passover (Exodus 12ff)**

*Recounting the original Passover*

*[Exodus 12:27] It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.*

After four hundred years of Egyptian slavery, God was ready to free His people. He had devastated Egypt with nine wasting plagues. The tenth plague - the death of the first born - would finally convince Pharaoh to let God's people go.

Despite the coming devastation, God provided a way for any family in Egypt - Egyptian or Jewish - to escape the judgment of the death angel. To avoid the judgment this is what any family would have to do.

They were to choose an unblemished one-year old lamb from their flock on the tenth day of the first month. Four days after selecting out this one little lamb from the flock they were to kill that lamb and sprinkle the lamb's blood on their home's doorframe.

They were not to go out of their house at all that night. Having killed the lamb and sprinkled its blood, they were to remain inside under the protection of the blood.

God had already announced His intention to "*pass through*" Egypt in judgment. But He also promised He would "*pass over*" every blood-marked house, because the blood shielded it from destruction.

On the night of the Passover itself, believing Jewish and Egyptian families feasted on roast lamb.

They ate it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. They ate it while their cloaks were tucked into their belt, their sandals were on their feet and their staffs grasped in their hands, ready at any moment for their flight from Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

On each anniversary of the Passover, Israel held a special festival to commemorate God's salvation (and they continue to do it to this day). The feast lasts seven days. And when they actually ate the memorial Passover meal, they were to explain to their children what the whole ceremony meant.

*[Exodus 12:27] It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.*

Then, in addition to the celebration in which the whole family would share, there was to be a special ritual for the firstborn males. It was, after all, these firstborn males had been personally rescued from death by the death of the Passover lambs.

Thus rescued (or "redeemed"), they belonged in a special way to the LORD who had purchased them by blood, and they were consecrated to His service each Passover.

The message of Passover would have been absolutely clear to the Israelites.

#### *Lessons of Passover for the Jews*

- First, redemption was by substitution. The lamb was slain in place of the firstborn;
- Second, the lamb's blood had to be sprinkled after it had been shed. In other words, there had to be particular application of the blood to the doorposts of the house to receive the benefits of the lamb's death and to effect God's provision.
- Third, each individual rescued by God was purchased for God. The firstborn belonged to Him.

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<sup>8</sup> Some features of the meal spoke to them of their former oppression (the bitter herbs) and others of their future liberation (their dress).

Today, we Christians do not observe Passover during the first month of the Jewish calendar. However, we do recognize Passover in our own way. Jesus is our Passover lamb, who was slain that we might escape the judgment of God.

*Christ, our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)*

The New Testament clearly identifies the death of Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover.

- When John the Baptist greeted Jesus, he said, ***[John 1:29]... behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***
- Jesus was crucified at precisely the same time that the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in Jerusalem;
- Over and over again, John, in the Revelation, identifies Jesus as the slain Lamb who by His blood has purchased us for God.

So, first, in the same way that salvation from the death angel was by means of substitution at the Passover, so today, our eternal salvation is by virtue of the substitutionary death of Jesus. He took our place.

Second, the lamb's blood had to be sprinkled after it was shed, signifying that the family had appropriated the blood to effect God's provision. Today, even though Jesus' blood has been shed for all, each person must personally apply that blood to "the doorposts of his or her heart", or else the judgment of God will still fall.

And third, just as each individual rescued by God was purchased for God and their whole life belonged to Him after the Passover, so, today, each one who by faith has been rescued from God's judgment by the shed blood of Jesus belongs to God and owes Him everything. Having received the benefits of Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice, we are now consecrated to God.

Passover is indeed a very powerful example of substitution.

But there is another example and it is equally powerful. We see substitution and sin-bearing in the annual ritual of the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

## The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23)

*The ritual of the Day of Atonement*

### The first goat sacrificed on the altar

On the Day of Atonement, observed in our calendar in mid-October, the high priest would take two male goats for a sin offering. These two goats were necessary to atone for the sins of the people of Israel.

One of the goats was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled in the usual way. He was placed on the altar and killed and burned.

The second goat was treated quite differently.

### The second goat, the "scapegoat"

***[Leviticus 16:22] The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.***

This goat was not killed. Instead, the high priest first laid both his hands on this goat (remember, that was for identification). Then he took time to confess all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites.

He then drove the goat away into the desert, and it would ***[Leviticus 16:22]...carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place.***

Some Bible students make the mistake of driving a wedge between the two goats and referring to them as separate offerings. The Bible doesn't separate them, but refers to the two together as one ***"sin offering."***

Only when both goats were dealt with was there atonement and forgiveness. The shed blood of the one goat plus the other sin-bearing goat being driven into the desert pictured full and complete atonement.

You might have expected the first goat's sacrifice on the altar. But you may not have been aware that the concept of the *scapegoat* dated back to 1500 B.C. in the Sinai Peninsula under the Law of Moses?

The New Testament picks up on the picture painted by the events of the Day of Atonement and says that Jesus is the fulfillment of the entire ritual.

*Jesus, our scapegoat (Hebrews 13)*

The Apostle Peter wrote, “...and **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross**” (1 Peter 2:24). That’s Jesus taking the role of the goat that was offered on the altar.

But then the author of the book of Hebrews sees Jesus fulfilling the role of the scapegoat, too.

*[Hebrews 13:12] Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.*

Today, we stand amazed at our Savior, Jesus. He gave Himself as our Substitute when He suffered and died for our sins.

Because God is **righteous**, He had to inflict punishment for sin. He could not just look away. Because God is **love**, He chose to bear the punishment He inflicted, sending His Son as a Substitute who would suffer for your sins and mine.

God honored justice AND love while saving the guilty by taking His own punishment. On the cross, divine love trumped divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice!

*[Mark 10:45] For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*

Take this Jesus as your own Savior. Come to Him today.