

## Words that Last Forever

# Substituting for the Substitute

When you think of a “substitute” what do you think of? A substitute teacher? Now that it’s March madness time, maybe you think of a basketball coach sending a sub - another player - into the basketball game.

If you’re a teacher or a basketball player, it’s normal to have someone else step in to take your place, to be your substitute. There are some roles where you really can’t have someone else be your substitute. You really can’t have someone take your place for you to break off a romantic relationship. It just doesn’t work. You need to do that in person.

We would think that we also really can’t have someone step in to take our place in our family – to be a substitute son or daughter for us. Just try sending a sub for you when mothers’ day rolls around. Try sending a substitute, to take your place as son or daughter, to express your heart-felt thanks to your own mother – that just won’t work.

But, there are some times when even mothers will be glad to have you send in a sub for yourself. That’s what Jesus did from the cross.

If you are just joining us today, these Sundays that lead up to Easter we are talking about the seven statements of Jesus on the cross.

They weren’t the last statements of Jesus because He resurrected and talked a lot after that. But these are the last words as Jesus was dying on the cross.

I want to tell you something: the words a person speaks when they’re dying are important. Not all the time but a lot of the times the words a person says when dying are extremely significant.

We’ve already looked 2 of the things Jesus said dying on the cross: ***“Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they’re doing.”*** And His promise of heaven to a criminal when Jesus said, ***“Today you will be with me in paradise.”***

Now, as Jesus was dying on the cross, His close disciple, John, was the only one who didn’t run away, but stayed with Jesus through His whole trial and crucifixion. It’s John who tells us about Jesus’ final words from the cross to His mother, Mary. It goes like this:

***“Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple (John) whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”***

Four women were there that Good Friday, standing near the cross. There weren’t many people there – this group of 4 women, John, and the Roman soldiers. Now, the Roman executioners were hardened.

It was different for the 4 women. They KNEW Jesus. They LOVED Jesus. It broke their hearts to see Jesus beaten up, bloodied, and nailed to a cross to die like a low-life criminal.

Mary, Jesus’ mother, had been there in Jerusalem the whole week long. She saw all of the trial, and now the crucifixion. What an awful thing for a mother to have to see her own son go through!!

Since it was such an awful thing for a mother to see, that’s probably why the other women were there. Mary needed their support.

We must keep in mind that Jesus was the one pulling the strings that day. Jesus was running this show. He was not some helpless victim, powerless over what was happening to Him. Listen to Jesus’ words. They aren’t wimpy words.

So, what would this dying king say to His own mother? His mother who is in shock, and horror, and grief-stricken, watching her son be tortured to death? Jesus spoke to His own mother.

Normally when we think of Jesus and His mother, Mary, together, we don’t picture the sadness and agony of Good Friday. It’s more like Christmas, isn’t it? You know ...

Silent night, holy night  
All is calm, all is bright  
‘round yon Virgin-mother and child  
Holy infant so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Normally our minds go to the familiar picture of Mary holding her newborn Son in her arms, right? **Jesus, MARY’S son at the cradle, is SIMILAR to, yet OPPOSITE of GOD’S Son on the cross.**

As Mary's son, newborn Jesus was pink with new life. As God's Son dying on the cross, Jesus was ashen white in death. The 2 scenes are similar, yet opposite.

As Mary's newborn son, Jesus cried like all newborn babies do. As God's Son on the cross, Jesus also cried. He cried out, *"My God, My God, Why have you forsaken Me?"*

When Jesus was born, the night shone as bright as the day with the glory of the angels. But on Good Friday, just the opposite happened - the day was as dark as night.

Once, Angels had shaken the skies with their songs. At the cross – not the skies – the earth shakes.

As Mary's son, shepherds came to worship and adore Jesus. People were drawn to come and see Baby Jesus. But as God's Son on the cross, no one adores Him. They curse Him. They turn away. He suffers alone.

Wise men once brought their expensive gifts of gold. But Judas betrayed Jesus for only 30 pieces of silver. Similar, but opposite.

Stables in those days, were usually caves where livestock were kept. Jesus was born in a borrowed cave. In the end, Jesus is buried in a cave – in a borrowed tomb.

How amazing that in His birth, God gave the world His only Son, to come down from heaven, so that whoever would believe in Him would have eternal life. But now, on Good Friday's cross, those same words came true in a way that no man, woman, or child saw coming. On the cross, God loved us so much that He gave up His Son for us all.

It's amazing, isn't it!? The difference between Jesus, Son of Mary, and Jesus Son of God. Everything is so similar, yet at the same time, just the opposite.

And its similar – and opposite at the same time - that Mary was both losing Jesus, and at the same time receiving Him. **Mary was LOSING Jesus as SON, but RECEIVING Jesus as SUBSTITUTE.**

We see this losing Jesus yet receiving Jesus in the words Jesus chose. From the cross, Jesus did not call Mary, "Mother," but "Dear woman." He didn't call her "mother," or "mom." He could have, I guess. But why didn't He?

It sounds disrespectful to us today, but Jesus wasn't being disrespectful by calling His mother, "Dear woman." Instead, He's on the cross now. Jesus is clearly near death. Everyone can see that Mary will soon lose a son. Yet, Mary needed a son to love and cherish the way mothers do, and she needed a son to provide for her. If Jesus were to stay to keep on doing that, then Jesus couldn't give up His life, He couldn't be the Savior of all people. So Jesus said to Mary, "Dear woman, look to John. Call him son. Love him as son. He will take care of you and be with you." Jesus had other work that He must do.

Do you remember the story of Jesus at age 12? Mary and Joseph took Him on the long trip from Nazareth, up the mountains to Jerusalem. They went to celebrate a Passover festival in Jerusalem. When the festival was over, the group from Nazareth started walking back in one big glob of people. It wasn't until a day had passed that Mary discovered that Jesus wasn't in their group from Nazareth. He must still be back in Jerusalem.

Mary was panicked. Her little boy ... alone ... in the big city. She rushed back to Jerusalem. She probably checked the police station, the hospital emergency room, maybe even the morgue. She finally found Jesus in the Temple, talking about God with all the religious elites. Mary said to him; **"Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you."** I can hear Mary's frustration in her voice. But, do you remember what Jesus said to Mary? He said to her, ***I had to be ..., dealing with the things of my Father.*** Jesus had other things -- things as God's Son -- that He also had to do. And His role as God's Son and Savior of the world, is the most important!

Given the choice between doing the things as Mary's son, and the things as God's Son, God's Son was something only He could do. That role took precedence. ***I had to be ..., dealing with the things of my Father,*** Jesus said. He HAD to, came to earth to, was born to ... become the Savior of all people of all time.

Now, on the cross, Jesus could no longer stay doing the things as obedient, perfect, sinless son of Mary, and still give His life for all. It was one or the other. "Dear woman, here is your son." In other words: "Mom, I have to be dealing with the things of my Father. If I remain as your son, then I can't be your Savior. Let John be my substitute." Jesus said.

The last time that Mary is mentioned in the Bible is after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. About 120 believers have gathered together praying. The Bible says:

***[The apostles and believers] “all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.”*** Acts 1:14 (NLT)

So Mary finally got her special place. She's counted among one of the believers. She's forgiven. She's saved.

Mary never got a special place all her own. A place above anybody else, like paintings and stained glass show, or like other churches say she earned. Mary's place was “*along with*” – along with 120 others who trusted in Jesus our Savior and Substitute. She found in the end that it was better to have Jesus as her Savior and Lord, than to have Him as her son.

Mary's family was united and at peace, too. The brothers of Jesus – Mary's other sons, the half-brothers of Jesus - had once disbelieved in Jesus. That may be why Jesus appointed John as His substitute son, instead of one of His siblings. It wasn't until after His resurrection that His half-brothers and sisters finally believed in Christ. By then end, they are all united in prayer. The half-brothers were now whole-hearted believers in Jesus the Messiah. The family is once more reunited.

Mary lost a son, but found a savior. Jesus LEFT His role as SON to become the SAVIOR. Jesus was her Substitute. He died in her place on the cross. Mary was a sinner who needed a savior. Mary needed the Savior. Mary trusted that her Son is that Substitute.

To make sure He could save his mother, and you, and all people, Jesus gave up one thing more on the cross. He gave up His life, His dignity, His reputation, AND on the cross Jesus also gave up ... His earthly family. That's amazing love. Jesus sacrificed Himself in one more way to be your Savior. **Jesus gave up one more thing to save you: He gave up HIS EARTHLY FAMILY. Amazing love!**

“Mary, here is your son. John, here is your mother.” Maybe Jesus nodded His head as He said those words. It was like Jesus said to John, “Take care of My mother. I am doing what no one else can do. I am going to take on the devil, sin, and death. I am going from this cross to the tomb. So, John be My substitute as son. And Mom,

look to John. Call him your son. He will be with you. I have to be dealing with the things of My Father.

Mary was no longer the mother of Jesus. He was no longer her son. He was now her Substitute, dying in her place on the cross as her Savior. John was Jesus' substitute for Jesus, THE Substitute.

On Good Friday, John led Mary away from the cross to his own home so she would not see Jesus' terrible death on the cross. Then John came back and saw the piercing of the side of Jesus by the soldiers (John 19:30-37). Tradition says John took Mary into his home and she lived with him in Jerusalem for eleven years and died. Another tradition says John took her with him to Ephesus and she lived there until she died. John accepted the role as substitute son. He did what Jesus asked. He did it well until Mary died. He did it out of LOVE for Jesus.

**Jesus chose YOU as His substitute. Amazing love!**

You can't be son to Mary. But you can be Jesus' substitute right where you live. Jesus is asking you. He's counting on you. Will you be a substitute for THE SUBSTITUTE?

Just as Jesus chose John as His sub, Jesus chose you. There is no more important job on earth than to substitute for Jesus the Substitute. If the work of Jesus is going to be taken care of it must be by His substitutes.

Jesus is your substitute. He stepped into your place to take your hell on the cross. In love for you, Jesus the sinless One, stepped in to die for you, the sinner. **Like Mary, Jesus IS YOUR SUBSTITUTE, GIVING YOU FORGIVENESS AND HEAVEN.**

And now that you know God's amazing love and forgiveness, then respond to Jesus who loves you. Just like John, Jesus has a job for you. Your job is to substitute for **THE** Substitute. If His work is to be carried on it must be by His substitutes. That's us.

Jesus is counting on YOU. The only way anyone else will ever be saved, is if you point them to the Savior. This is a privilege to substitute for the Substitute.

Jesus doesn't have any hands on earth ... but YOUR hands. He doesn't have any feet, but YOUR feet. He doesn't have any

tongue, but your tongue. **Like John, Jesus APPOINTS YOU AS HIS SUBSTITUTE, GIVING YOU PURPOSE.**

So He sends YOU to go for Him. "Go in My Name" Jesus said. "Make all people My followers."

What an amazing ongoing assurance of His love and confidence in YOU, that Jesus counts on YOU and sends YOU to substitute for Him.

He gives you a purpose for living besides just accumulating stuff, or anesthetizing your pain with any pleasure you can find.

Like John, Jesus is counting on you. He has that much confidence in you.

Step in for Jesus. Be His sub. Substitute for THE Substitute.  
AMEN.