

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Re-Center: A Mission to Share
2 Corinthians 5:11-21

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Most high school history students know that the Civil War effectively ended in April of 1865 when Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox Courthouse. What very few of us learned was that the final shots of the Civil War were fired months later in the Pacific Ocean by a confederate warship name the CSS Shenandoah. Since no one could get a message to a ship at sea, the crew of the Shenandoah kept on fighting the Civil War long after the Union had already won. They didn't officially surrender until November 1865 when they came into port in Liverpool, England.

Just think about that. The war was over. The victory had already been decided. But the men on that ship were still living at war, living in unnecessary fear, living in pointless conflict, separated from the people they loved and a life of peace. Why? Because they hadn't gotten the news that the war was over.

And, in many ways, that's the context for our mission as followers of Jesus Christ. Our world is in rebellion against God and enslaved to sin, Jesus has already fought and won the decisive battle. Through His work at the cross, He's made a way for every man, woman, and child to be reconciled to God as their Father. Our mission isn't to help Jesus defeat Satan and the forces of evil. Our mission is to share the Good News that Jesus has already won. That's what our passage of study is about this morning.

We are continuing our short series about living on mission with Jesus. And our focus for this morning is the work God desires to do through us as we share the good news about Jesus. So, look with me at our passage for this morning...

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There is a lot going on in this text – far too much for us to tackle in just one study. But the main things are the plain things and that's what we want to focus today. And one of the main things Paul is doing in this text is describing the ministry God had given to Him as a messenger of Jesus. In verse 20, he says, "we are ambassadors for Christ."

When Paul says we are ambassadors, he uses a word his hearers would have immediately understood. The Roman Empire commissioned a host of ambassadors to carry messages from capital in Rome throughout the entire known world. Those messengers were like network news, public service announcements, and the President's Twitter account all rolled into one.

They were Rome's strategy for getting messages from Caesar to every man, woman, and child in the Roman Empire.

Paul is taking that dynamic and using it to describe God's strategy for spreading the message of Jesus to the people of this world. God's strategy isn't simply to use one or two people who are particularly gifted to tell this world about Jesus. God's strategy is to commission a host of messengers to spread His message through this world. And if you are a follower of Jesus, that strategy includes you. And that gives us our big idea for this morning:

Big Idea: Followers of Jesus are called to be Ambassadors for Christ.

There are 8.3 billion people in the world today, 340 million people in the United States, 23 million people in the state of Florida, over 650,000 in Brevard County, and 35,000 on Merritt Island. Most of them are separated from God because of their sin. Every one of them can be saved if they will believe the Good News of Jesus. Jesus died so that all whosoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

And listen, God's strategy for making that good news known includes you. Followers of Jesus are called to be Ambassadors for Christ.

And in the rest of our time together, I want us to walk through our text and see three, primary things Paul says about being an ambassador for Jesus. He tells us about the message, the ministry, and the motives of an ambassador.

1. WE HAVE A MESSAGE TO DELIVER

2 Corinthians 5:19

that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Our message is a message of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a word that describes the restoration of a broken relationship.

The Bible teaches that mankind has broken our relationship with God because of our sin. Sin separates us from God and all of us have sin...so we are all separated from God. And because we are separated from God, we are separated from every good thing that comes from being in a right relationship with God – things like ultimate meaning and purpose, fullness of joy, complete peace, and satisfaction.

If we die in our sin, we will spend eternity separated from the joy and pleasure of God's presence. But, in His mercy and grace, God has made a way for our sin to be removed and forgiven so that it will no longer separate us from Him. Verse 21 tells us how.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

When Jesus came to this earth, He lived a perfect life in every way. He was perfectly pleasing to God the Father. A bible word for that is “righteous.” Jesus was perfectly righteous. So, when Jesus died, He did not die because of anything He had done wrong. He died as an act of sacrifice.

Verse 21 says that at the cross a great exchange took place. God the Father placed our sin upon Jesus at the cross and Jesus bore the judgment that our sin deserved. That’s how we can be forgiven and restored to God the Father.

The other part of the exchange occurs for those who are willing to place their faith and trust in Jesus. Not only has Jesus received out sin, but we have also received Christ’s perfect righteousness. When we come to faith in Jesus, we are united to the person of Jesus in a way that unites us to His life, death, and resurrection - united to the very righteousness of Christ. That means we are as acceptable and pleasing to God as His own perfect Son. By the miraculous power of God, Christ became sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him.

That message is called the gospel, or the “good news.” And it’s the best, most important news anyone could ever hear. That’s our message.

That’s the message. Which means we aren’t free to come up with our own message – our message isn’t political reform or social justice, it isn’t pop psychology or mainstream philosophy, it isn’t self-help or seven-steps to being a better you...our message is that our greatest problem is our own sin and rebellion against God. Our message is that we can’t do a single thing to solve our sin problem – that’s why we need Jesus. And we don’t just need Jesus, we have Him because God so loved this world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will never perish but will have eternal, abundant, glorious life.

Christian, you are an Ambassador and that’s the message your King has sent you on a mission to deliver.

Just think for a moment about the people where you live, work, learn, and play. Who needs to hear that message? Who in your life is far from God but close to you?

Right now, would you whisper their name to God that Father and ask that they will hear that message?

Ambassadors for Christ have a message of reconciliation.

2. WE HAVE A MINISTRY TO PURSUE

2 Corinthians 5:15

and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Jesus saves us from living selfish lives that revolve around ourselves. We saw that a couple weeks ago in the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus. When Jesus saves us from sin, He saves us to a new kind of life – a life that’s lived for Christ and His Kingdom by His power.

So, what does a life lived for Christ and His Kingdom look like?

2 Corinthians 5:18

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

The way we live for Jesus is by taking part in His work of reconciling people to God. And how do we do that?

2 Corinthians 5:20

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

The way we take part in people being reconciled to God through Jesus is by telling people the good news about Jesus. Paul says that's how God makes His appeal to the people of this world – He makes His appeal through us. It's not a work we do for God, it's a work God does through us. We can't save people and we can't open their hearts and minds. That's up to God. But He wants to do it through us.

Think again about the people where you live, work, learn, and play. Think about your neighbors and your classmates and coworkers. Think about the guys you play golf with or fish with or play pickleball with. There are people all around you who need to hear they can be reconciled to God through Jesus and spend eternity enjoying His amazing grace.

And God's strategy for them to hear that good news is that you and I would tell them. It isn't just a matter of us knowing the message. It's a matter of making the message known. Ambassadors aren't messengers unless they make the message known.

If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are an ambassador sent on a mission to make an appeal to people to be reconciled to God. That's why you and I are still here on earth. You aren't just an engineer or a salesman or a teacher or a doctor. You aren't just a dad or a mom. You aren't just a student. We are ambassadors. We have a mission from God to tell others the good news about Jesus.

Are you living on a mission to tell people the good news about Jesus?

And I know many of us struggle with this. Especially how to turn a regular conversation into a gospel conversation. And there are plenty of tools and methods that are helpful for sharing the message of Jesus. But, let me share one with you that I hope will sound familiar to most of you.

As you are engaging in relationships with people in your life, get to know their stories and their lives. Ask them how they are doing or how you can pray for them. And then listen to them. And as you listen to them, look for an opportunity to say a very simple phrase: that's why we need Jesus.

The truth is that every broken place in our lives represents an area that we need Jesus. Most of the opportunities I've had to tell people about Jesus have come through that simple phrase. Not long ago, I was talking with a guy on my street, and he mentioned how crazy our world is. My response was "that's why we need Jesus. This world is broken and crazy because everyone is a sinner. But Jesus came to die for our sins so that we could be forgiven by God and one day be rescued from this crazy world to spend eternity with Him." A couple weeks ago, I met a guy out in the community. As we talked, I asked him if there was anything I could be praying about for him. He said he was battling cancer. I told him that's why we need Jesus. He came to bring us ultimate healing for our bodies and

our souls by dying on the cross for our sins. He came to give us hope in this life and hope beyond this life.

No matter what our brokenness and pain might look like, all of it is a reminder of why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Him; we have Him because God so loved this world that He gave His Son to die for our sins so we could be reconciled and restored to Him forever.

Again, there are countless ways to share the gospel with the people in your life. I encourage you not to simply adopt a rigid formula. Just love people and learn about their stories and look for an open door to tell them about Jesus.

We are ambassadors and our ministry is to share that good news whenever God gives us an open door.

And that brings us to the final thing Paul tells us about being an ambassador for Christ...

3. WE HAVE MOTIVES THAT COMPEL US

In our text, Paul mentions two, primary motives for sharing the gospel of Jesus with the people in our lives. The first is the fear of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:11

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

What's Paul referring to by "knowing the fear of the Lord?" He's referring to verse 10. Verse 10 is a reminder that everyone will stand before the judgment of Christ.

There is a day of judgment that is coming for everyone. I know this has become a less popular topic in American culture and it's easy to get pinned with a label of being a hellfire and damnation preacher, but that doesn't change reality. The bible clearly teaches that judgment that is coming. Everyone will one day stand before Jesus as the Judge. Every neighbor. Every coworker. Every classmate. Every friend and family member. And knowing that changes the way we see people.

We are souls that will never die. We are heading into eternity where we will stand before God. That gives urgency and importance to our mission. But it isn't the only motive...He says the other motive is the Love of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:14

For the love of Christ controls us...

Paul was motivated by Christ's love. The same love that brought Jesus into this world, the same love that took Jesus to the cross to die in our place...that same love began to fill Paul's heart. It began to control him. He began to love what Jesus loves...people. And that motivated him to live sacrificially so that he could make an appeal to people to be reconciled to God Father through Jesus.

When my son was very little, he had a favorite matchbox car that he carried around with him. He loved that matchbox car. One day, Emily took him to Chick-fil-a for lunch. And Logan sat his car on the tray while he ate...then, when the meal was over, Emily threw the trash away...you know what happened. There was that moment when Logan realized his car was in the trash. Not good. He loved that car. Emily didn't love that two-dollar car...but she loved Logan. And because she loved Logan, what Logan loved became important to her. So, like only an awesome mom would do, she went dumpster diving for a two-dollar matchbox car. I'm pleased to report that it was saved, btw.

Paul is referring to a very similar dynamic here. Christ's love for people began to fill Paul's heart. It began to take control of how he lived and how he saw others. He loved them with the love Jesus has for them. And he did what love would do.

So, what if that love began to control your life where you live, work, learn or play? How would you live toward the people who are around you each day if you loved them with the love Christ has for you? And again, I'm not trying to pile on guilt here. As a matter of fact, I want to end with an incredibly exciting thought.

2 Corinthians 6:1

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

That's an awesome phrase. Working together with God. When you and I embrace our role as ambassadors and begin living on mission to share the gospel, we aren't working for God...we are joining God in the work He has already begun...we are working with Him. This is an incredible invitation God has extended to us.

When I was a kid, my dad used to do all kinds of projects. He remodeled our childhood home, he fixed all our old cars, eventually, he and my brother built the house where mom and dad still live. Often, dad would say something like, "you want to help me, son?" What a thrill! To build a shed or repair the truck...

I remember watching dad work. As a kid, it was amazing to see how much my dad could do and the kind of knowledge he seemed to have about everything. Looking back, I realize that those projects depended very little on me...actually, they didn't depend on me at all. Dad was going to get it done with or without me. The only real question was whether or not I was going to miss out. And that's how we should see our call as ambassadors in this world. God is doing a work that He is inviting you to join. If you want to be amazed by God...if you want a front-row seat to watch Him work and see His wisdom and power...then join Him in His work among the nations. He's inviting you into His work to reach this community... If you are a follower of Jesus, you are an ambassador for Christ.

3 Ways to Respond

1. Trust in Jesus to reconcile you to God.
2. Ask God to stir up the Fear of the Lord and Christ-like love in your heart...think of your One...
3. Commit to live as an ambassador.
 - Who is your one? Before you leave, identify one person who is far from God but close to you.
 - Pray for your one. Ask God
 - Look for open doors. Remember, you are joining God in a work He is doing. So, look for places God may already be working. Look for opportunities to serve others, to listen to their stories, to serve them with the love of Jesus. And as God gives you an open door to tell them about Jesus, take that next step by faith that God will give you what you need. You're joining Him and He is with you.