

Ambassadors For Christ

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Date: 20 October 2024

Preacher: Rev Malcolm Macdonald

[0 : 0 0] We're going to begin the service singing from Psalm 91. Psalm 91. And we're singing from the beginning of the psalm.

He that does in the secret place of the Most High reside, under the shade of him that is, the Almighty shall abide. I of the Lord my God will say he is my refuge still, he is my fortress and my God and in him trust thy will.

Assuredly he shall thee save and give deliverance from subtle foul or snare and from the noise and pestilence. His feathers shall thee hide, thy thrust under his wings shall be, his faithfulness shall be a shield and buckler unto thee.

Psalm 91. We'll sing these first four stanzas. He that does in the secret place of the Most High reside. He that does in the secret place of the Most High reside, under the shade of him that is, the Almighty shall abide.

I of the Lord my God will say he is my refuge still, He is my fortress and my God and in him trust will I.

[2 : 0 7] He is my fortress and my God and in the secret place of the Most High and in the secret place of the Most High. He is my fortress and my blood and in the secret place of the Most High. He is my fortress and my spirit shall be saved and give deliverance from subtle foul or snare and from the night shall pass delence.

His feather shall be hide thy thrust, and God's way shall be.

His faithfulness shall be a shield, and God's way shall be.

Let us join together in prayer. Amen. Ever-blessed God, as we gather in your name this morning, and you we give thanks, that we can anticipate your blessing to accompany the proclamation of your word.

You are a God who has given to us this word that is distinct from any other written word that we may be familiar with, any other spoken word, even though the pages of Holy Writ are closed, and earlier generations were very much of an oral tradition that depended upon the sharing of your word verbally, and the ability that men and women had to speak the word of God as you filled their mouth is much in evidence.

[4 : 2 7] But as these oral traditions passed very much into the background, your word, as it was from the mouth of the Holy Spirit, included and indelibly imprinted on pages that are now complete, from the first verses in Genesis to the last word in the book of the Revelation.

We give thanks that we can trust in this word, and that it is a word that we must heed, and that we must build our life upon, unlike any other wisdom, however elevated it may be, however knowledgeable it professes to be, about the affairs of life in general, and all to do with it.

We give thanks that within this world, around which we are met, under which we sit, that we are assured that you have something to say to us, individually and collectively, that you are able to speak into our life situation, whatever it may be, all our griefs and all our sorrows, all our joys and our happinesses, all the struggles that we have, all situations that seek resolution, all trials and difficulties that are apportioned to us under your loving hand, even now, your word can speak into these situations, and grant to us light, in the darkness, in guidance, in the most mysterious of providence.

we pray, Lord, that you would remember us, each one according to our need this morning. we give thanks that Christ Jesus is lifted up in the gospel, here in this place, in the communities that surround us, in the churches that we represent, that there is still evidence of an abiding, a continual witness to the truth.

And even though we often bemoan the fact that there is declension spiritually, that there is clear evidence of spiritual indifference and apathy, nevertheless, you have not left yourself without witnesses.

[7 : 26] And as long as you are pleased to leave such witnesses amongst us, as long as you are pleased to raise up men who would preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is hope that you would rekindle the flame of genuine spiritual interest in the things of God.

We might see our nation go on a pathway that takes it away from the only living and through God, seeking no God or a multitude of gods, gods that are no gods, and yet you are still able to speak into the darkness and remind us that you are our light.

We pray for blessing to follow the gospel, even today where it is preached in all our congregations. We remember the congregation of Graber as they meet together, not only to hear the gospel preached, but also to commemorate as we ourselves did as our congregation last Lord's Day, the death of the Lord Jesus until he comes.

And he will come as promised. He has ensured that what we do in remembrance of him is to sustain us and uphold us and keep us with our face set upon the path of obedience until he come.

And we ask, Lord, that that would be the outcome of all that is done in your name. Remember our congregation here, all who belong to it, those present, and a number that cannot be here because of illness illness and because of so many differing factors that impact upon their lives.

[9 : 39] We especially pray for our office bearers that are unwell at the present. We pray for them individually, we pray for them collectively, and that the courts of the church would be strengthened, even in the midst of the trials that assail the courts through the removal from their midst of loved ones and ones that they were bound up with in the path of duty.

So those in their homes, in hospitals, we commit to you and ask for their recovery and for the sense of your presence in all that they have to pass through.

Remember, members of the congregation, in their homes, in hospitals, in care homes, we pray, Lord, that you would sanctify your dealings with them.

That we would always remember, even in the midst of our trials, that God means these things for our good. And that even as Joseph of old, who suffered much at the hands of his innermost brothers in the flesh, that he was still able to conclude that God meant these things for good.

And so it is in our reckoning wise for us to reflect on these things. we pray, Lord, for the extension of the kingdom even here in this place, and that they would be unified with the knowledge that God is their God, and Christ is their King, and the gospel is the source of life to perishing souls, and that eyes would gravitate to Christ, and fix upon him as he is lifted up in the gospel.

[11 : 51] We pray for our nation that is wayward and negligent, remembering our King, his family, the parliaments that represent the peoples.

May they be driven to their knees and seek the face of God, and your favour in Murphy. Remember the world in which we live, where there is so many revelations of wickedness, in the destruction brought by man's hand, and the threat of further destruction, where this peace reigns, and the reality of peace that we so much enjoy here in these shores.

We pray that you would remind these peoples that have no knowledge of it, daily waking up with the fear that their life may end suddenly because of the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Lord, in the midst of these terrible situations, your people are found. Guard them, keep them, protect them, enhance their witness, faith, and while they may live by faith in the midst of these things, much of what they know to be true is tried and tested, and they would be put as to shame, because their faith is a living faith, looking and trusting to God, the only living and true God.

God. So remember us, each one, grant mercy for our many sins, cleansing us in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll sing again to God's praise this time from Psalm 116.

[13 : 50] We're singing from verse 7 to 16. Psalm 116 from verse 7. O thou, my soul, do thou return unto thy quiet rest, for largely low the Lord to thee, his bounty hath expressed, for my distressed soul from death delivered was by thee, thou didst my mourning eyes from tears, my feet from falling free, I in the land of those that live will walk the Lord before, I did believe, therefore I speak, I was afflicted sore, I said when I was in my haste that all men liars be, what shall I render to the Lord for all his gifts to me, I love salvation, take the cup, on God's name will I call, I will pay my vows now to the Lord before his people all, dear in God's sight is his saints death, my servant

Lord am high, thy servant sure, thine handmaid's son, my bands thou didst untie, these verses to God's praise, Psalm 116, verse 7, O thou my soul, do thou return unto thy white rest, O thou my soul, do thou shall we turn?

O thou mil vendound the Lord to thee, is the flesh the HP the the hand of vend For my distressed soul from death delivered was I.

Thou didged my mourning eyes wronged you, my big prompile me.

I am the land of the Sabbath, where the hope the Lord gave hope.

[16 : 47] I did believe that, for I speak, I was a wicked soul.

I said when I was in my head, that all men liars be.

What shall I render to the Lord, for all is just to me.

I'll all salvation take the cup.

On God's name will I call. I'll pay my house now to the Lord.

[18 : 12] If all this he belong. Dear God, I did this change yet.

Thy servant, Lord, am I. Thy servant, Lord, am I.

My plans, thou didst untie. We will hear God's word as we have it in Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians.

And we're reading from chapter 5 and verse 9 to the end of the chapter.

2 Corinthians chapter 5, taking up the reading at verse 9. 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 10.

[19 : 41] 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 10.

valuable hearing like from 12 in deep slide. I said why our Christian deep 6 so pedy a must abandon will be beholden. chapter 5, verse 11, Jag SAW 7, Ezra 18, 10 trillion Zecaut 9, 7-18.

[26 : 59] Lord of God is gracious compassionate is he also in mercy he is plenty of but I do rather than yours know I would like us to turn to this passage that we read together Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 20 now then we are ambassadors for Christ as though God did beseech you by us we pray you in

Christ stead be reconciled to God it's not an easy thing to think of what you would want to preach on for your last sermon as a minister in a congregation there are many temptations I suppose that accompany such a desire to find something that you would want to be a memorable service a memorable sermon probably probably for the wrong reason but my thoughts went to this that whatever I would want to be remembered for in this congregation or any other congregation or in any other context where called upon to preach the gospel that

I would want to be remembered as somebody who preaches Christ somebody who preaches Christ in all his fullness so that's why my thoughts went to a passage such as this one there is a long introduction throughout my ministry I've been accused of having long introductions pardon this introduction because it makes sense of the words that we're going to look at without the introduction the words themselves don't really stand as furibly on a basis but the focus is on the text but also on the context the focus is on what we are and I'm talking about the words of

Paul here as he identifies himself they are words which are thought to be Paul's reflections on his own ministry and speaks of himself first and those who share in that ministry with him and he says we are ambassadors so that's the first thing what do we understand by the thought of being ambassadors if we understand what an ambassador does and is then we must ask the question whose ambassador is this the teacher an ambassador who is whose ambassador is he thirdly what is this ambassador entrusted with what is clearly enunciated as this primary principle message that is entrusted to him and fourthly why it is essential for that ambassador to proclaim that message the very thing

I would hope that that today that you're not just looking back and I'm sure looking at this verse that I invite criticism fair enough that I invite a quizzical look at the ministry that is coming to an end in this congregation but I would hope that it would also act as an impetus to what I would hope would be a new ministry that would shortly commence in the congregation because it's natural it's a process it's something when not one of us are meant to be a permanent fixture whether it is in the workplace or in the home or whatever inevitably we are on a pathway and that pathway will involve us in change and in things happening that would mean and inevitably will conclude certain aspects of the life that we have led up until then for you as our congregation it is an end but a beginning because a beginning is for you well who is going to take up this role in our congregation and there are many things

[33 : 13] I'm sure that will feed into that over the coming weeks and months but one thing I would want you to think about is this most important fact that whoever it is that will become minister of this congregation that you would remind yourselves of the role that they have as minister as the ambassador of Christ sent to you with Christ's word and with good reason so I'll explain some of that as we go on the context the context if you read it carefully it all has to do with the doctrine of reconciliation a doctrine you'll find in the Old Testament and a doctrine you will find in the

New Testament and it presupposes this doctrine presupposes that we every one of us without exception are in a state of estrangement from God by nature we are estranged from God we are alienated from God and many of the commentators allude to the fact that while we may think of that thought as being a thought that speaks of how we are with regard to God now some of you will say well I have no problem with God I have no difficulty with God I can live my life and I know

God is there and I know I don't live my life as well as I should with God dominating my thoughts and the moment your mind begins to imagine it to think on these things you're trying to justify why your life is not a Christian's life but you're not quite as severe or as away from the central tenets of Christian doctrine like those who live their lives following other gods you know you're you're make yourself appear much less hostile to God than you believe others are and there's a degree of justification in your thinking and with regard to reconciliation you're thinking yes

I believe the gospel expects me to reconcile to God to align my thinking and to align my life so that it is more more the path that God would want me to be on but the problem is that when your thinking is totally governed by that you've forgotten one important factor and that is that not only are you alienated from God but God is alienated from you and God is hostile towards you as you are by nature now some people say no that's not the kind of God that I that's not the kind of

God that the scripture presents to me surely God invites me to come to himself surely the gospel is all about this willingness on the part of God to receive sinners to himself and that's what the gospel is all about and yet the reality is that the God that the scripture presents to us the only God that there is there is no other God other than the God that the scripture presents to us and what the scripture says to us about this God is that he is a holy God there is a holiness about this God that marks a God as a God that is intolerant of sin in any way shape or form wherever it is found the prophet Habakkuk he tells us about this

[38 : 23] God and what makes him think along these lines is that he's looking at his own generation and he's saying about this generation why is God allowing this generation to exist because he makes a statement about this God he says that he is of purer eyes than to behold evil and he cannot look on iniquity that's the God that he knows that's the God that he has sent out to to preach and then he has to reconcile that thought with a situation that prevails in his own society at the time wickedness surrounding him people behaving inappropriately and totally in opposition to God and denying his word and denying the existence of that God so I was thinking why does God tolerate this why does

God not act why does God not intervene and it is a challenge and it is out of God's grace and mercy that the gospel exists and the fact of God's alienation the fact of God being offended by sin is not in any way dissipated by his patience and long suffering in allowing sinners to exist in this world until God's own time now the passage before us tells us all about the mercy of God and the grace of God it tells us about God's willingness to reconcile sinners to himself but the important thing for us to recognize is this that it is on his terms not ours that if we look at the gospel purely from our own perspective and say

I am willing to be reconciled to God I am willing to have my alienation from God removed whereas the question should be how is God willing to have the alienation that exists by nature removed and Paul answers the question in the context and he answers it by reminding himself and others who follow his footsteps of his ministry that his ministry is a ministry of reconciliation a ministry where he proclaims the way of salvation in Christ Jesus as the only way by which sinners are reconciled to a holy God let me quote to you the words of Donald MacLeod and I always enjoy quoting Donald MacLeod because I don't believe that I've ever read or heard anyone expound the gospel as clearly as in sometimes he says some things that are provocative and deliberately so but this is what he said it is only when we become God's righteousness in

Christ that God is at peace with us that means that the alienation no longer exists that what has separated us from God that that no longer prevails and he asked the question how righteous are we and then he says we are as righteous as Christ how righteous is Christ he is as righteous as God which is an astounding statement is it not to tell you that the way of reconciliation which is God's way of reconciliation is by making the alienated sinner reconciled to God by making that sinner who needs reconciliation righteous by making him or her free from the condemnation that brought about

God's need to distance himself from the sinner he adds to the thought this when the church of God pleads confessing sin praying forgiveness it is not an address and prayer to the divine clemency that is the willingness for God to show mercy it is not a divine a prayer for divine pity but it is addressed to the divine righteousness that is that God in reconciling sinners to himself has found a way has revealed a way and has declared a way by which the unrighteous sinner becomes as righteous as God himself because their righteousness is Christ's righteousness and they are as righteous as God would have them to be in him there's the introduction and the introduction necessarily is followed by the closer examination of these words whose ambassadors are we who preach the gospel what are we if we are ambassadors what is meant to be true about an ambassador for

[44 : 57] Christ Jesus well first and foremost I think the person who was an ambassador for Christ in this role that Paul occupied and that those who were his fellow preachers of the gospel fellow apostles and those who followed in the footsteps of the apostle preaching the gospel their ambassador sent by God to preach God's word they must experience the call and they must recognize the call and I think both have to be true might be thinking the same thing but no the preacher of the gospel the ambassador of Christ Jesus is in this role at God's request and at God's requirement and he doesn't go out ignorantly he doesn't go out without knowing what he's doing he does it with the conviction that he is sent by God to fulfill this role and without a shadow of a doubt the person experiencing that call will have that call tested it will be tested in a number of ways perhaps the testing you might not think of immediately is the testing of that call when the person who experiences the calls sent to preach the gospel in a spiritually profitable situation in the sense that there are times in all congregations in all parts of

God's vineyard in all parts of the world where God sends his ambassadors there are occasions when the sending of his ambassador is accompanied by times of blessing by times of spiritual outpouring by times of the gospel making progress and the gospel clearly yielding fruit that is not disciple in conversions and in the progress in holiness which is part and partial of the reason for the gospel to be preached what is the temptation in that situation the temptation is that the preacher in such a context might mistakenly think that the glory that such a time brings this is all down to them their skills their abilities and so on the contrast to that

I suppose is the situation which many people are exposed to today where the ambassador goes out in Christ's name and the the clear resistance to the message or even the apathy that exists in the hearts and minds of many towards the gospel is something that is very difficult to put up with it's very difficult to sustain a ministry where those who are being ministered to are reluctant to accept God's word we as a denomination have taken it upon ourselves to seek the establishment of a number of congregations new congregations requiring new ministries now the problem

I see with that is this that if God is not calling men to fill these ministries you're going to have a difficulty you're going to have congregations without leaders without pastors many casualties who have taken up the ministry in recent days who have fallen back from fulfilling these ministries far too many although it's always been the case that there are times when men who feel called are finding the testings that come upon that call they suffer demoralizing spiritual darkness and it affects the mind it affects the heart it leads to disillusionment with ministry it's a challenge and it's a challenge that we need to be aware of which takes us back to this the call that God sends and if you're not convinced of it or if you're not persuaded of it when the testing will come that will come to all that you need to come back to this

I am God's ambassador I am not here because it's a job like any other I'm not here because it's something I fancy doing it's not something that seemed good to me and now I've lost interest and I want to try something else we always need to come back to this if the role of ambassador is mine and I believe myself to fill it then we ask ourselves what is it that Christ would have me to do well what is an ambassador let me quote Charles Hodge an American divine an American theologian many years ago and as ambassador he says at once a messenger and a representative he does not speak in his own name he does not act on his own authority what he communicates is not his own opinion or demands but simply what he has been told or commissioned to say this message derives no part of its importance or trustworthiness from him yet he speaks with authority as one accredited to act in the name of his master and there you have

[52 : 46] I think it's not a foolproof secure net against disillusionment but it is a necessary one Moses of old was arguing with God why are you sending me I'm not able to speak send somebody else but God told him you're not sent because you're wise you're not sent because of your ability you're sent because I'm sending you and I'm equipping you and I'm the one in whose name you go out now Paul we have to move on the person they represent is no less than Christ the King and Paul may be conscious of his own role but he is one among many and we have already alluded to the fact that his message is the message of reconciliation read again verse 18 all things are of

God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation in other words this Paul is what you have to tell people about the preacher of the gospel must make it known that reconciliation is needed that it is necessary and that without it we are hopelessly lost and I quoted Dr.

McLeod before but he says and he's talking about preaching in general he says the preacher who is an ambassador for Christ must be an ambassador to Christ with feeling and with compassion and with understanding that the message that is to be delivered is delivered with an understanding that there is nothing like it that can be rehearsed to people as ambassadors authorized to speak for Christ charged with protecting and actioning the interests of Christ they must respect their master's instructions not only as to content but to the tone and that tone he maintains is the throne of exhortation the ambassador must make

God's word known with the urgency and with the fervency and with the pressing intensity that makes the person hearing the message understand there is nothing like this that you will hear elsewhere there is nothing as important as this that you will hear today I don't know what you will hear elsewhere today or whatever you think is important you won't hear anything more important than the gospel of Jesus Christ being made known to you and it's not just that they have God given responsibility or authority it is even more intensive than that or intense than that is a better word they are not only speaking you notice in this passage we are ambassadors for Christ as though

God did beseech you by us we pray you in Christ's dead be reconciled to God the subtle nuances of that statement tell us it is as if Christ himself is speaking to you that is how they ought to speak with the zeal and with the understanding that not only are they coming to you with words that are important not only are they speaking on behalf of Christ it is as if Christ himself is speaking to you the fervor with which this is to be carried out is all important and it can be true that there are times when the ambassador experiences coldness and the ambassador is not as close to his master as he ought to be and that affects the delivery of the message and there are times when those who are hearers of the ambassador's words that they are cold and indifferent and their mind is on other things it's not without reason that some have spoken of the foolishness of preaching somebody was called the prince of preachers and it was

[58 : 16] C.H. Spurgeon and Harry Finlayson quotes Spurgeon on one occasion and he was putting his own ministry in this light he would say I would rather have a pulpit than a throne I would rather have a pulpit than a throne to be royalty is nothing compared to be the ambassador for Christ because of the content of the message because of the importance of the message be reconciled to God are you God's enemy oh no you say I'm not I have nothing against him but is God your enemy and we've said this passage tells you just what Paul tells you perhaps you do not see why you should be reconciled to God but Paul does and Christ does and the ministry of reconciliation requires that we be told as much however much we are offended by that message however much we find ourselves questioning the validity of such a message without realizing the poverty of spirit that prevails within our heart that sits under this message without realizing that nothing as important as this will be into your ears today or any other day for that matter you know it's a very great privilege that you enjoy not that you've had my preaching for 20 years but that you've had an ambassador for Christ bringing

God's word to you and if at the end of this ministry or any other ministry for that martyr what Christ has said to you through his ambassadors is ignored or despised or treated as if there is no merit to it or there is no worth in it how do you think it's going to end up what do you think the end of that will be after him sending his ambassadors to you to declare his word to you the need to be reconciled to God and you refuse to be reconciled you refuse to hear his servants how do you think it's going to end up not a difficult question and those of you who have lived under the gospel and not believe the gospel not believe the message of the gospel you know what it means you know how it will end to the

Christian here I would say to you you should never sit under the word without listening to what the word of Christ is saying to you I've often quoted to you the words of Eric Alexander I love his preaching it's very bible based and very christ centred and he was asked to discuss preaching and his particular task was to what does it mean to preach evangelistically to preach the gospel so that the gospel is believed and this is what he said it is of paramount importance to preach evangelistically and in preaching evangelistically and indeed in every other sphere of our ministry to recognize that salvation is the sovereign work of God left to ourselves there are many things of which we are capable we can persuade people intellectually we can arouse and inspire them emotionally and we can win them to ourselves psychologically but the one thing we cannot do is regenerate them spiritually that is a task that is exclusively

God's I believe that I believe it is within the power of any minister and every minister to preach provocatively to preach with the ability to enthuse and excite and even move emotions all of these things have a place but one thing the preacher can do much as he would like to do that that is he cannot quicken a dead soul but God can and God does the preacher is in the pulpit an enlivened soul sent out with the message of salvation to those who need to have the same experience as they themselves enjoyed and speaking to you who are converts speaking to you who have received the ambassador of Christ and believe this word as the word from

Christ it presses upon you believing as you do that God alone saves God alone quickens God alone brings conversion where does that leave you well you can't do it but you know someone who can and your role in this congregation and the believers role in every congregation is to beat upon the doors of heaven until God opens the doors and sends down blessing that touches the lives of those who need to be reconciled to God well may God in his mercy unite those who are here or here as one those who have prayed for you may they see that you have heard the message of Christ through his ambassadors

[65 : 43] I'm sure you'll have a selection of all kinds of gifts and graces to hear and to listen to our prayer is that their word would be Christ's word and that you would hear it and believe it and trust in that Christ for the saving of your soul may bless this word let's pray ever blessed God we give thanks that you have sent all kinds of ambassadors out in your name we look at the scriptures and they describe to us all kinds of all kinds of prophets and all kinds of apostles and all kinds of men who are shown for their gifts differing as they may be but the prevailing interest they have is making Christ known and so it is and so it should be we pray his blessing in his name upon all here what

Job has kept us cleansed from sin in Jesus name amen son men shall be blessed in him and blessed all nations shall him call now blessed be the Lord of God the God of Israel for he alone doth wondrous works in glory that excel and blessed be his glorious name to all eternity the whole earth let his glory fill amen so let it be just a reminder that there is provision made in the hall after this service and you're all encouraged to stay behind for that and if you'd give me a moment to go to the door be most grateful his name forever shall endure his name forever shall endure last like the son it shall men shall be blessed in him and blessed all nations shall him come now blessed be the

Lord now God the God of Israel for he alone the wondrous world and glory in the dead sound and blessed be as joyous in to of his glory be on in so

Now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit rest and abide with you all now and always. Amen.