

Ambassadors for Christ

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[0 : 00] What a joy to be with you today as we prepare in just a moment to just jump into the scriptures and see what God has for us.

I want to invite the kids to go ahead and be dismissed for their programming and the ministry for children here. So you can go ahead and do that now. It is a joy again to be with you as a part of a district which includes around 140 congregations throughout Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

And so on their behalf, I just bring a greeting to you today. And I am so grateful to be able to say that you are part of that family of churches that are committed to supporting one another to the missional calling of the church and for the building up of the saints for the work of ministry.

It's truly a joy to be with you in that regard. I also want to just thank you for being a congregation who so cares for the long-term health of your pastor Mike Salvati that you have given him a sabbatical.

I know it's not convenient. I was discussing with Steve just a few minutes ago. I mean, it's a sacrifice for you to give him that opportunity. And yet, knowing that your goal is his long-term faithfulness as a minister of the gospel, I just thank you for your commitment to give him that opportunity.

[1 : 29] I'm sure it is blessing him greatly. And so, thank you so much for doing that. Well, we're going to be looking today at some scripture verses from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, 2 Corinthians 5, verses 16 through 21.

Now, we're going to read that text in just a moment. But before we do so, as we prepare to explore these verses, I want you to think for a moment about a quote from Archbishop William Temple. And this is what he says. He says, The church is the only society in the world which exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.

Now, just think about that. It's kind of an unusual thought here. Thought-provoking for sure. He said, The church is the only society in the world which exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.

Now, I know this statement. It might feel a little bit controversial. After all, we know the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[2 : 42] Now, while this is true, we also need to remember when Jesus was teaching about his father in John 4, 23, he said, God is seeking worshipers who will worship him in spirit and truth.

And what this shows us is that by his very nature, God is a missionary God. He seeks more worshipers. He seeks more and more people who worship him in spirit and truth.

And it's this idea behind a well-known quote in the Christian community by John Piper that says, Missions exists because worship doesn't.

And all of this really illustrates this idea that we as God's people, as his church, we are to have this missionary posture in life, an outward orientation of our fellowship that exists for the purpose of benefiting, ultimately, those who are not yet with us.

Now, one of the main ideas we'll be learning today is that the more we understand who it is that we are as Christians, as sons and daughters of God through the work of Christ, that once we understand this, we will more faithfully embrace and live out this missionary identity, both individually and collectively as a people.

[4 : 13] Now, I want to provide some context as I prepare to read this text. But in 2 Corinthians 5, it's helpful to know that what we learn from the trajectory of this whole letter and the tone of the letter is that since Paul's departure from the church in Corinth, which he helped to plant, some men had become influential teachers in the church, and they began to criticize him and his work.

And so, in these few verses in particular, we're seeing Paul deliver a defense of sorts related to his commitment to the missionary work of God.

And he wanted to make it clear that his ministry in Corinth wasn't motivated by building his own kingdom, but rather the kingdom of God, and then what, therefore, are the implications for us as God's people in light of that.

And so, we're going to see three things in this text. We're going to see that through the good news of Jesus, through the gospel, we're given three things, a new identity, a new perspective, and a new role.

Through the gospel, we're given a new identity, a new perspective, and a new role. And so, on that note, now let's go together. You'll see the words on the screen, but feel free to also open your Bibles and follow along.

[5 : 30] 2 Corinthians 5, verses 16 through 21. 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. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

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.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

[6 : 37] For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is the reading of God's word. Let's pray together. Father, Father, I just ask this morning on behalf of us as a community and as one who has been called and privileged with the honor today of bringing this word, we pray, Father, your spirit would illumine our hearts, that you would take my words as a broken and needy man, inadequate to fully articulate the beauty and glory of who you are.

May you, through your spirit, open our eyes to see, our hearts to understand and minds to understand, that we might be transformed more and more into your image as we look at your word and consider its truth for us today.

And so, do that work we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen. So again, the first point that we're going to be looking at today from this text is that through the gospel, we are given a new identity.

Now, I'm actually going to explore this identity based on some therefore's, okay? We see this in verse 16 and 17 throughout this text many times, therefore is used.

[8 : 00] Now, those of you who are more knowledgeable in your Bible study, maybe you've been walked with the Lord for some time, you may know that whenever you read a therefore, it's pointing to something outside that specific statement that follows.

In other words, it's saying that we're to do this or we're to live in this certain way because of something that has been stated before. And in these verses, the therefore's, they're really pointing to this gospel, this good news identity that is true for all who are in Christ, all who are Christians. And this has been explained in the verses preceding this section, but it's also very conveniently restated in the last verse of these scripture verses.

And so, to explain our gospel identity, I'm going to go ahead and start at the end by unpacking verse 21. And so, let's look again at where Paul states this in verse 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.

[9 : 08] Now, in these verses, we see that those who are Christians, those of you who identify with this role and this identity, you have a profound benefit.

There is something really beautiful about the gospel and the good news of Jesus that Paul is laying out here for us. This idea being that for those in faith, Jesus took our sin and gave us his righteousness.

And this is what Martin Luther calls the great exchange. Now, so let's think about the first part of this exchange, this idea of God making Jesus our sin.

Now, if you're not a believer or if you're young in your faith, I want to make sure you understand that sin represents our unfaithfulness and disobedience to God. I mean, all that is broken in the world and all that is broken inside of you is because of sin.

And so the idea here is that Jesus died on the cross for our sin, but that his death was much more than only paying off a spiritual debt.

[10:16] It was even more than just taking our punishment. While both of these ideas are true, there is this deeper meaning that Paul is wanting us to see when he says that Jesus literally became sin.

One commentator explained that God making Jesus our sin meant that Christ experienced the consequences for human sin.

The one who lived a sinless life died a sinner's death, estranged from God and the object of wrath. He was treated as a sinner in his death.

And what this means for all of you who are Christians, Jesus died your sinner's death.

So that theft that we committed, when God poured out his righteous anger on Christ, he was treating him as a thief.

[11:18] That lie we told that on the cross, God poured out his indignation on the Son of God, treating him as a liar.

That our impure and lustful thoughts that on the day God was delivering due punishment for our sin, that punishment was directed towards his own Son as if he was the one with those impure thoughts.

That our laziness, our fits of anger, and even our failure to testify to the goodness of God to others. When Christ became sin, he was being treated as the one who had done those things.

And so, this is what it means for Christ to become sin. He was literally this wrath-bearing substitute for you and for me.

Now, as humbling as this is, as beautiful, really, as it is, as wonderful of a sacrifice, as undeserving of a reward as this is, it is only half of the story, half of the exchange.

[12:27] The other half is seen in the latter words of verse 21, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. So what does it mean to become God's righteousness?

Well, what it means is if you're a Christian, in your conversion, in that point of transformation and what the theological word regeneration happened, that there was a switch that was turned inside of you.

Christ not only took your sin, but he gave you his righteousness. In the words of one commentator, this means, in the same way as the innocent was punished as guilty, the guilty was rewarded as innocent.

This means that when God looks upon you, if this is you, that in that state he is just as pleased with you as he is pleased with his own son.

Not because of anything that you've done, but because of what Christ did for you. Now the Heidelberg Catechism describes it this way, that in the moment of this great exchange, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.

[13:51] Now aren't you amazed? Aren't you amazed at what God has done for you in Christ? Doesn't this wonderful truth inspire you to respond in awe and wonder and worship?

And so we've seen, number one, that through the gospel, we, those who are Christians, those who have placed our faith in the work of Christ on our behalf, we have been given a new identity.

Not as sinners, but as righteous sons and daughters, redeemed, reconciled children of God. And this sets the stage for our next two points.

Two, through the gospel, we are given a new perspective. Let's look together at 2 Corinthians 5, verses 16 and 17.

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.

[14:59] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.

So we see verse 16 that before becoming a Christian, before coming into this family through God's gift of grace, we judged and perceived people according to the flesh.

And that we also regarded Jesus this way. But Paul wants us to see, hey, we do so no longer. What Paul is saying is that before Christ changed us, that how we measured people, right?

How we saw them, in particular, how we measured Christ, it was no longer accurate. It was not accurate. Now I want you to think about this answer to this question.

How does the world measure success? In other words, in the eyes of the world, what makes a person successful? You see, the world tells us that our value comes from the things we own.

[16:09] The world tells us that success comes from how smart or beautiful we are. The world tells us that success comes from how much power or influence we possess.

What Paul wants us to see is that when Jesus comes into our life, the standard of success changes. That once our eyes are opened by the grace and truth of the gospel, we're given a new way of seeing everything.

Now, no one personally illustrates this better than Paul himself. You see, in Paul's life, he was not a Christian, but this zealous Jew early in life.

As a young man, he was what some might call an influencer. He was a celebrity. He was well known as this young Jew, the kind of young man that every Jewish mother would want their daughter to marry.

He was so zealous that he persecuted and perhaps even murdered Christians in order to silence their message. You can read about that in Acts 8.

[17:17] But in Acts 9, Paul, at the time known as Saul, had this radical moment of conversion while going along the road to Damascus. A bright light blinded him, and in that moment, he heard the words of Jesus asking him, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Days later, a believer by the name of Ananias, placed his hands on the blind Saul, and in the name of Jesus, he healed him. And at that moment, it was as though scales causing blindness fell from his eyes, and he could once again see.

Now, we learn in this passage that in that moment, Saul's perspective changed immediately. From a zeal for empty religion to a wholehearted faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

And so, as you can imagine, Saul's whole world was turned upside down. It was like a switch had been flipped. His measure for truth was radically transformed.

And it's this experience that I believe Paul is referencing in verse 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

[18:34] The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. So again, Paul is saying when we accept and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ, we're recreated into something new.

And this new person has a new way of seeing the world. The old measure of God is gone. The way we look at everything, right? From our hardships to friendships to the unbeliever to God himself.

It's now entirely different. Now, in the last few years, I had the opportunity to go from a single focus lens with my glasses to something called progressive lenses.

Now, some of you, most of you are probably too young to identify with this journey, but let me fill you in. Progressive lenses, what they do is they give you this progressive prescription that brings clarity and clear vision to every depth of field.

And so when I read a book, I'm looking through a unique part of the lens that brings clarity to that book. When I look at my computer, that prescription gives me clarity.

[19:56] When I'm out driving my car, looking at a distance at night, again, a different part of that lens gives me clarity when looking. And what I want us to see is this, that the gospel of Jesus Christ, this idea when it comes into our life, when we are transformed by the gospel, forgiven for our sin, that everything in every depth of field of our life looks different.

It comes into crystal clarity. We now see God as our merciful Savior. We now see others as people made in the image of God, broken by sin and in need of mercy and grace of the gospel.

We see our motivations and our suffering and our purposes in life through a different lens. And it's this shift of perspective that Paul is wanting us to see.

And so it leads to the question, in what ways has the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, challenged the way in which you see the world, in which you see Jesus and others?

as you begin to look now through the eyes of a gospel that has saved and transformed you by grace. When you think of your Savior, does it stir your heart in love and worship?

[21:27] When you think of a brother or sister in faith, do you see them as eternal family, as brothers and sisters, as fellow children of God who have been adopted into his family?

When you think of your coworkers, friends and neighbors who are not following Christ, do you love them as people made in the image of God? Do you weep for them, longing for them to know the same transformation that has remade your life?

Do you adopt the attitude of Jesus as he was in Jerusalem in Luke 19 and he wept over the city, longing for them to know the peace and life that he could offer them?

Now we're going to continue to think through this and what this means for us now in the next section. So we've seen in verse 21 that the gospel, it gives us this new identity as ones who have been forgiven as our sin upon Christ and his righteousness for us.

We've seen in verses 16 and 17 that this gospel, it gives us a new way of seeing, a new perspective. And now we'll see number three that through the gospel we're given a new role.

[22 : 39] Let's look at verses 18 and 19 there in 2 Corinthians 5. It says this, All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

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.

Now, this word reconciliation, of course, it implies something. It implies that we were once alienated, far from God, broken in our relationship, and of course, as we discussed earlier, what alienated us was this problem of sin.

And so, according to verse 18, as we came to Christ and the benefits therein, we were reconciled.

And at that moment, something was given to us, okay?

You were reconciled, and now you were given a new ministry. It's like this idea of a relay on the track. If you've ever seen a track meet, maybe a 4x400 relay, what happens is the runners, they're holding this baton, and as one runner completes the lap, they hand that baton to another runner who then takes the race forward.

[24 : 02] forward. And this is the picture of what Christ did for us when he saved us from our sin and reconciled us to himself. What he was doing was giving us the baton, the ministry of reconciliation.

And it's now our responsibility to take the race forward in his strength and by his power and the power of the Holy Spirit. We are now messengers of reconciliation, carrying that ministry on to others.

So according to verse 18 and 19, this message bearing responsibility is part of our new role. Roles as ambassadors for Christ.

And we're going to see this more clearly in verse 20. Look with me there. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. So according to Paul, we are now bearers of this message of reconciliation.

[25 : 08] We're assuming an actual role, a specific role as ambassadors for Christ. You are an ambassador for Christ.

Now during World War I, on the western front of that war, there was a method of warfare called trench warfare. And this was where large trenches were dug on both sides of a field of battle.

And these trenches were what would protect soldiers from small arms fire. And it was a brutal form of war. Many casualties were produced because the only way to advance the front was to come out of the trench, leaving yourself vulnerable to injury and to death.

Now because radio technology was not secure in those days, the only way to communicate from the back of the lines to the front of those entrenched troops was through a specific role.

And that was the role of runner. Runners were the ones who took communication from the commanding officer to the soldiers at the front line.

[26 : 25] Now to be a runner in trench warfare was to assume an immensely important job that was also extremely dangerous.

Now one of the interesting realities for runners was that no one questioned their instructions. Now why is this? It's because they were carrying the message of the commanding officer.

They spoke with the authority of another. another. And they did so at a great risk to their own life.

Now what I want us to see is that this role of runner it has certain parallels with this idea of ambassador for Christ.

You see like a runner we go and tell with the authority of the one who sent us. Matthew 28 18 and 19 says and Jesus came up and spoke to them saying all authority has been given to me in heaven

and on earth go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

So we go with the authority of the one who sent us. Like a runner we are carrying an important message. Verse 20 tells us that message is be reconciled to God.

[27 : 44] And like a runner we know we are vulnerable to injury. In chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians the chapter before this one Paul details all sorts of afflictions and persecutions that he has endured because of his calling as ambassador for Christ.

And so like a runner we are called to go. So to review we've been changed by the gospel and we've been given a new way of seeing the world and this good news of our reconciliation with God it changes us forever and in light of this we now have a new responsibility we are ambassadors for Christ.

And so the question for you to consider in light of this is how is your role as ambassador for Christ changing the way you live.

John Stott he said that every Christian is a missionary cleverly disguised as a mechanic or teacher or project manager.

Do you see yourself that way? If you're a follower of Christ do you see that your primary role in life is ambassador for Christ?

[29 : 15] Even more than teacher even more than student even more than project manager even more than father and mother you are ambassador for Christ.

And so how does that change the way you live? As you consider this as a church what does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ in Kenosha in this community?

How are you as a congregation intentionally engaging the needs of the city in order to demonstrate faith and to build bridges of trust by which you proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ that those who are lost and lonely and far from God would meet him would call him savior.

Years ago Rick Richardson at the Billy Graham Institute of Wheaton College he did this research study of churches who were growing by 10% through conversion through those who are lost being found in Christ and what he found was that for these churches that were growing through evangelism that evangelism was a top three priority of the church it was a priority to them and as they made much of their role as ambassadors for Christ God was faithful to work through them in order to see more and more people come to faith in him and so this is an important question for you to grapple with as a church what does it look like what does it mean for you to be as a community of ambassadors for Christ in terms of how you evangelize the lost and the priority you give to that end is it one of the core values of your church and how are you living that out so we've seen that in the gospel and in

Christ we get this new identity we get a new perspective and we get a new role as ambassadors for Christ now before we wrap up I want to remind you of something this letter is not written to unbelievers it's written to the church right so all this talk of the gospel being emphasized to saved and redeemed people is what Paul is doing here this suggests that for those of us who are Christians for the church that when mission lags when we are failing or losing sight of our responsibility and role to be ambassadors for Christ no matter how long we've called ourselves Christians we've drifted because we've lost sight of the gospel in all its beauty you see when mission lags Paul doesn't appeal to a guilty conscience he doesn't write a new training program he simply points us back to the beauty of the gospel which gives us a new perspective which forms a new identity so this suggests that when mission drifts we have to start with our hearts because the more we embrace our identity and the new perspective it forms the more faithful we become in mission as messengers of reconciliation you see our worship fuels our witness and this points back to my statement at the beginning of this message the more thankful and grateful we are for the gift of

[32 : 59] God in Christ and how that gift has changed us the more likely we will be to faithfully share that gift with others so we've seen today that through the gospel of Jesus Christ we're given a new identity we're given a new perspective and we're given a new role I don't know how many of you have seen this old movie called Castaway but it was based on a Daniel Defoe classic adventure novel Robert Robinson Crusoe and in the movie the actor Tom Hanks he's playing this Federal Express employee whose company plane went down stranding him on this desert island for five years and in doing so dealing with all of the trials of food and heat and a lack of good water now during

Super Bowl 37 the shipping company Federal Express they ran this commercial that spoofed the movie and in the commercial what we saw was this character looking like Tom Hanks he was disheveled he was unshaven and tattered clothing and he is holding this FedEx box and he goes up to this door of a suburban home with this weathered package in his hand and when the owner comes to the door he explains that he survived five years on a desert island and during that whole time he kept this package in order to deliver it to her now in response to this she simply said thank you and then took the package and went to shut the door and of course this weathered delivery man was not satisfied with a simple thank you and so he asked the woman if I may ask what was in that package after all so she opened it and she showed him the content saying oh nothing really just a satellite telephone a global positioning device a compass a water purifier and some seeds now in this humorous commercial we get this profound picture of what it means to be a Christian in this life you see so many of us live as functional castaways unaware that all we have for life and joy and satisfaction and mission it's right beside us the whole time it's right there and so for those of you who are living as functional castaways what Jesus wants you to see today is that you've been saved by grace and this salvation it's not just a get out of jail free card it's actually an invitation to a new way of living to a new identity which transforms you from castaway to insider from an enemy to a friend from impaired to empowered from recluse to a runner from shame to unashamed from aimless to ambassador for Christ you are an ambassador for Christ and so in light of this truth in the words of Paul I challenge you now to live as his ambassador knowing that God is making his appeal to the world through you to live your life and to speak your words in such a way as to proclaim to those around you be reconciled to God let's pray father we thank you for the beauty of the gospel which saves us father I pray that by your grace through the work of your spirit you might land upon us anew the significance of what it is that you did when you took our sin and gave us your righteousness it is truly unfathomable such beauty and sacrifice and yet we pray father that it would land upon us in a new way I pray for those who for whom this whole message is new today father may today be their day in which they step through into this new relationship with you becoming a son and daughter adopted child of God and I pray for all of us that as we dwell in this reality that it may inspire us once again to this role this job description which at the very top says ambassador for Christ and that whatever we do in life whether it's parenting or working or studying that everything we do might be done as a vehicle through which we better embody this identity as one who's been saved and has been called into a new way of living as an ambassador to those around us and so I pray today that you might use these words and these thoughts to advance the mission of Christ the King Church for your glory and for the benefit of this city and those who are far from you we pray in Jesus name Amen