

The Gospel Of Reconciliation

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[0 : 00] We're going to be talking about the gospel of reconciliation out of the scripture that was read earlier. I want to introduce you to Lieutenant Onoda.

Lieutenant Onoda is someone that is a great story of forgiveness and its byproduct, reconciliation. He's there on the screen giving his sword in surrender to Ferdinand Marcos, who at that time was the leader over the Philippines.

Now, the Japanese war, the World War II, and our engagement with Japanese ended August of 1945.

But for the next 29 years, Lieutenant Onoda, under orders to both not surrender, but don't take your life, maintained his post on an island in the Philippines.

[1 : 21] For 29 years, initially he had two other men with him, and these three would make forays.

And their primary mission assignment was to disrupt the boat landings and the airstrips.

And so they would go and they would burn them, or they would throw hand grenades onto them, and from time to time they would shoot a farmer and kill someone.

And so he was carrying out his mission. For 29 years, he did not know that the war was over.

Leaflets fell onto the island because people were getting killed.

They knew that there was, in time, his two mates died. But they're in the jungle, learning how to survive in the jungle, hidden.

[2 : 28] Lieutenant Onoda was a presence. But they couldn't get to him, they couldn't reach him. So they sent out leaflets. And unfortunately, the Japanese, the language that they used, had some misspellings.

And he said, it's a, I don't believe them. The war's not over. It's a trick. Because he would see planes go overhead, or he would see on the horizon, on the ocean, and he would see battleships going back and forth, not knowing that they were simply being relocated now that the war was over. He was certain that the war was going on, so his mission stood. It was communicated to the Japanese authorities.

And they said, what can we do to get this guy to lay down his sword? What can we do to get this guy, get word to this guy that his mission is over?

What can we do to be reconciled to this guy and make peace in him with us? And there was a voice, an answer.

[3 : 54] It was a colonel in the Japanese army. Now we're at peace with Japan. But 29 years later, the colonel said, if you can find him, you can tell him that I relieve him of his duties.

Because I'm the one that put him on that mission. And it will be necessary for me to go to see him face to face and communicate, the war's over.

Stop fighting. America and its allies are not the enemy anymore. You have no enemies. Be reconciled.

Well, there's an interesting little story of how he was found.

In 1974, there was a Japanese by the name of Norio Suzuki. And Norio Suzuki, in 1974, was on a quest.

[5 : 18] And he said, I am going to go and travel the world. And I want to find three things.

I want to find Lieutenant Onoda. And I want to find and see a panda. And I want to find and see the abominable snowman.

In that order. Well, he was successful. And he told Lieutenant Onoda, he said, I've got word from your superior officer that the war is over and be reconciled now to your enemy.

And he said, if you'll send him, that I can meet with him face to face and hear those orders with my own ears, I will surrender.

I will forgive and I will be reconciled. And that's what took place at this ceremony. Many, many years later, because he lived to be...

[6 : 37] He's an older man here, but he lives to be a very old man. He initially went from the Philippines to Brazil, where he took up farming.

But there was such an urging, such an urging from the Japanese. Because they knew that for 29 years, he had fought this war and wasn't reconciled.

They wanted him back in Japan. And so he eventually came back to Japan. And the prime minister, who had died before Lieutenant Onoda, said on his deathbed, you know, he was interviewed, and he said, you know, the war really wasn't over for most Japanese until that lone soldier surrendered and was reconciled.

The war never was. The collective war, it had been over for years, but not in the mind of the Japanese because there were still people, if only one, that was not reconciled.

What you're going to hear tonight is a very, very practical sermon. And what I want to do is I want to show you, in just a few minutes, another story of reconciliation.

[8 : 19] It's a story of reconciliation that is told in Genesis 33. A historic account of two brothers who had been separated, not 29 years, but 20 years, not knowing how they would find one another, but the last time that they were together, physically, one was running away from a conflict.

They were separated. Reconciliation, defined by Ken Sandy in his wonderful, wonderful book, the peacemaker, says, reconciliation is when we replace hostility and separation with peace and friendship.

That's a Christian definition, but if you look up in any dictionary, it's going to say, reconciliation is the restoration of a friendship.

But it'll also give an accompanying definition, it says, reconciliation is also where you have incompatibility in two beliefs or ideas and they're reconciled.

And they're reconciled. Not like that. But the reason that this is important is because I'm not working here, Mitch.

[10 : 01] we may have to do that. Sorry, guys. It's because now that we as Christians, and this is a Christian message, because I'm now reconciled to God, I'm moved.

I questioned that word when I was writing this. I thought, is reconciliation a command? No.

I can't find in Scripture where we're commanded. We are commanded to forgive one another. That's a command. But reconciliation is a byproduct of forgiveness.

Doesn't always happen. So I am reconciled now to God and I'm moved. I'm motivated. I'm energized to reconcile now with my brothers.

And that's code for brothers and sisters. Or brothers. It could be a church or a community. I'm to live now as a life that is a reconciled life before God.

[11 : 24] And so I'm to live that life out in reconciliation with my brothers. That's what moves me though is I keep coming back to the fact that if I'm reconciled to God when I'm in conflict what is it that is keeping me?

What is it that is not moving me? Or what's the obstacle because it is God's design that we be reconciled?

I wish that I had this message and had heard this very practical message when I was a younger person. My typical approach to conflict in relationships was Newcomb.

I would separate. I would think that that was the best way to keep the peace is just never talk to you, never see you, never be around you.

And that was as a young Christian. But then later I began to see, particularly as I began to read through the New Testament, but then as I learned from friendships and even Christian counselors, the process of reconciliation.

[13 : 02] Using James 1, in James 1 in verses 22 through 25, and I'm not going to turn there, James makes a big deal out of not being hearers of the word and not doers of the word.

And he says, it takes two wings of the airplane to fly as a Christian. Christian airlines, you've got to be a hearer, grow in knowledge, that's called orthodoxy.

But you also have to be a doer, not only a hearer. That's a hypocrite. You have to have what's called orthopraxy, or the practice of what you know to be true, as we've learned in the scripture.

So I have two points in my outline, and the first point is what we hear from Jacob. Now I've got five sub-points, so I've got to be quicker and diligent.

But this is an example, it's an example of how two men are reconciled in the scripture.

[14:30] And it's probably the greatest example in the scripture. Some scholars believe that it was the story of Jacob and Esau that Christ had in his mind when he told the parable of the prodigal son.

But those two brothers were not reconciled in the end as far as we know. One was at home with the father and one was still standing out in the field.

But these two, success. So what do we hear? What do we hear from God's word that in just a few minutes I'm going to challenge us to do?

First of all, look at verses 1 and 2. Jacob lifted up his eyes. Now I'd love to go off and speculate, was he praying?

Or was he just waking up from a night of wrestling? You know, maybe slept in a little bit and he's just kind of stretching. He's like, oh, there's Esau and 400 men riding up.

[15:46] What was he doing? But we find that in verses 1 and 2 he gets busy and he begins to divide the family.

Now we saw this earlier in chapter 32 as one of the tricky, clever, cunning strategies of Jacob to solve a problem in the flesh.

one of his ways. But that's not this here. This is not a defensive move. This is a display of God's glory.

It's not him protecting his glory. Now remember, Jacob is able to walk, but boy is he sore. he's walking now with a lifelong injury. He's walking with a limp. But I want to tell you as a fellow in my very urban congregation back in Charleston used to say, he used to say, preacher, that boy's changed.

[17:08] He's walking with Pep in his step. He's more confident. He doesn't fear an attack. He doesn't put the family out there in front and he's in the behind.

We read that he gets all of his family, he divides them up in appropriate family order and then he's out front. So what he's doing is he's saying, this is what the Lord has done for me.

And I'm dependent from all my provisions, including my family. It's not my skill, it's not my strength, it's the Lord's graciousness to me.

Secondly, we see in verse 3 and 14 by his language, in verse 3 it says that he bowed himself to the ground seven times until he came near and then when he comes near and he finally begins to address Esau, he begins to say such as in verse 8, to find favor in the sight of my Lord.

Or verse 14, until I come to my Lord in Seir. He's not worshiping him, he's showing respect.

[18:36] So here he is, he's approaching a man, he doesn't know what his intent is yet, but he's approaching him humbly and with respect. Now remember, going way back to when Esau was born, his very name means red and hairy.

And when Jacob disguised himself, he had to do so with lamb's wool because it says that Jacob was a smooth skin boy.

He's not humbled because he's weak. It's actually a show of strength. He's saying, I can approach you and I can afford to show you respect.

I've just had an encounter with the living God and I have his approval. I no longer have to have. I want it but I don't have to have.

Esau, even your acceptance or approval because I have it now from God. And therefore, I can be humble before men and I can show respect.

[20:02] In verse 4, we observe their visual body language. Verse 4 is very interesting to me. I wish that we had had a camera and we could record Jacob's look.

Like, huh? That's the way I imagine it. Esau's not running at him at the lead of 400 men with a sword.

He's running to him with open arms. This is the image that Christ uses for the prodigal father, the prodigal son's father.

That he pulls up his garments so he can run. And then he falls on his son's neck. And he says, I thought you were dead, but you're alive.

This is Esau. And I'm sure that everyone around saw that. And they said, wow, Esau's not mad anymore.

[21:17] Wow. Fourthly, in verses 8 and 11, I want you to hear from Jacob that there is a cost. A lot of times we forget this, but reconciliation takes a lot of different forms.

I think more in terms of ministry because that's my calling, my vocation. But I have counseled loads of men seeking to be reconciled with a business partner who robbed from them, stole from them. I have been in counseling sessions to numerous to count for a husband and a wife after an affair or a calamitous break in the relationship such that reconciliation now is being sought. And one thing that we always have to include is restitution. the cost. And we see that in verses 8 through 11.

Now you don't see the specifics here. You'd have to go back to chapter 32. But it was a big drove that went ahead of this meeting of cattle, of sheep, and donkeys.

[22 : 57] and initially Esau says, you know what? I've got enough. I don't need this.

I don't need topping off. But Jacob says, please accept my blessing. Now he's just earlier in chapter 32 received a blessing from God.

God. And here he's saying, that blessing comes from a gracious God. I don't simply have enough. I've got more than enough. And it's not equated in possessions. And that's driving him to be reconciled to his brother. He's saying, to be reconciled to my brother is more than the cost to settle it.

And verse 11 says, he urged him and he took it. And now whenever those cows move, whenever those sheep bleat, whenever those donkeys bray, it's a reminder to Esau that peace has been made with your brother.

[24 : 20] Sometimes restitution Christian is very much in order. And then finally in verses 16 through 20, here's what I want you to hear.

They set geographic boundaries, or Jacob did. There's a great book, it's a classic in Christian counseling called Boundaries. It's by Townsend and Cloud, Henry Cloud.

I met Henry Cloud at a Bible study that he was attending. It was at a friend's house and a friend had a relationship with Henry.

And I asked him about that book and he says, you know, that's a bestseller. He said, really, when we wrote it, we weren't realizing the need that people had in relationships to set boundaries if they wanted to maintain peace.

So sometimes and many times, boundaries. Esau would go to Seir, but at peace with Jacob. Jacob would go to Sukkot, then Shechem, but at peace with Esau.

[25 : 36] And we don't read that they ever got together for another family reunion or family gathering or Sunday roast again. Maybe they did, maybe they didn't, but they are reconciled.

In Matthew chapter 5, we read in verses 23 through 24. So, now, in the screen, I intentionally put these words in red, because you know, the words in red mean more than the words in black, right? Just kidding. If you're online watching this, no, it doesn't. But the words in red, of course, indicate that this is what Jesus said. And these are rather weighty words.

He says, so if you're offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. Now, he's not talking, I believe here, he's not talking about physical brothers as much as he's talking about spiritual brothers. Brothers in your fellowship, in your faith. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

[26 : 54] if you were to read that, if you were to read that conversely, then it would be, if you are not reconciled to your brother, and it's on your mind, it's going to be disruptive to your prayer life.

You probably, if their name is ever on your lips, you're not blessing them as we're called to do by Peter.

We are blessed to be a blessing, you're probably cursing them. It's going to impact your vertical relationship if you're not in a good horizontal relationship.

The great command is one, love God and love your neighbor. God is going to do. So what do we do?

This is the second part of James' admonition. Be hearers. And now we've heard. We've heard by seeing Jacob and Esau.

[28 : 16] So what do we do? Here's the very, very practical point of the sermon. First of all, in your mind, I want you to think about as we get into this, think about a person.

And it could be a couple, could be a whole family, maybe it's another community or church, maybe it's a work team, maybe it's a whole neighborhood, a race.

But try to be specific. I really would like for you to think about one. One person that you are not reconciled. And let's say that they are a Christian.

I try to narrow it down because I don't have enough time to talk about what reconciliation looks like to the world and what reconciliation looks like on steroids to our enemies.

This is reconciliation to fellow brothers and sisters. Try to think of a name, try to think of a face. Perhaps you can ask some simple questions about a relationship right now that is actually very satisfactory.

[29 : 35] For those of you that are married, I ask the questions of myself in my relationship with Wendy. Have I ever felt misunderstood by Wendy?

Have I ever been hurt by what she said? Have I ever felt like I haven't been heard? Have I ever been betrayed?

Have I ever had to work through a misunderstanding what did that look like? Have I ever disagreed on a decision? Have I ever held a grudge against her?

Has she ever let me down? Have I ever doubted her love? Have I ever struggled to resolve a conflict with them? Have I ever felt used?

have I ever thought, have I ever thought, well now I know? And that's about a relationship that is satisfactory.

[30 : 45] Those questions bring out the nasties. It brings out the nasties because I see that instead of taking, when I'm out of relationship, taking it as an assignment from God to be reconciled with my wife and my sister in the faith, I look at it more as, I wish that hadn't happened.

This is an accident, right? This is not a part of God's plan. And, so what do we do?

What do we do when we're in conflict, but now God has begun to trouble us? Some would call it the Holy Spirit's nudge toward reconciliation.

Five things, and I'm done. Number one, explore the probability of reconciliation when it's considered.

I know this is not always good English. I'm trying to use all Ps. I'm taking a cue from Colin.

Probability, reconciliation, forgiveness is commanded.

[32 : 10] I urge you, Jesus urges you, even to the degree that you would put aside and put on hold your worship to be reconciled to a family member, but you've got to think, is it likely that I can be at this time with this person reconciled?

What is the probability because reconciliation is not always possible? It's very possible to forgive someone.

to forgive them sincerely and truly in your heart and yet not be reconciled, but make sure that the hold up is not that person because it does take two people to be reconciled.

One can't do it. One can initiate it like Jacob, but it takes two to participate. But you might want to explore any obstacles.

Number two, prepare. Prepare for a face-to-face meeting. No text, no email, not really a phone call.

[33 : 33] I like to think of put yourself in a position so that they can see maybe the snot and the tears of your apology or of your desire that the relationship is more important than the problem or the issue.

But every person, every group, every book on reconciliation that you will read about says that the chief characteristic is humility.

If you go in full of pride, pride burns down. It does not rebuild a relationship. Pride ruins. It doesn't restore.

Corrie Tim Boone tells a story about her first face-to-face with someone that she knew she was called to be reconciled with.

She was speaking at a church service in Munich. Now, she had been given a number of church services, speaking to a number of church services in that area. But she was sharing her testimony.

[34 : 54] And at the end of the, she saw him in the audience, but at the end, he was the first one to come and speak to her. He was a former German SS man that had worked in the camp, the concentration camp that she and Betsy were assigned to, Ravensbrook.

And she said, that man was one of the men that just stood there when we had to be undressed and humiliated. That man just stood there as we saw our possessions just tossed in a pile.

That man did nothing. That man. And she was thinking of these things, but then he came up.

And he said, nice message for all on. I greet you as a brother who has been forgiven of all of his sins in Jesus Christ. And he held out his hand.

She said, I could forgive him, but I couldn't, I couldn't shake his hand. She said, it was like my arm was made out of lead.

[36 : 15] I couldn't, I couldn't get, I tried. I said, I'll just go through the motion, but she couldn't do it. And she prayed, Lord, may I forgive as you have forgiven me.

May I be reconciled to this brother as I am reconciled with my brother Jesus. and her hand comes up a little bit, but not ready to shake.

And he's there still holding out his hand. And she prays again. And she said, it was like a wave came over me. A wave of power.

Every limb had freedom. And it was as if my arm just floated up and grasped his hand. And I was reconciled. And talking about this, she would share this.

She said, I was reconciled not because I was a good person.

[37 : 24] And I was reconciled and I reconciled with this man not because I was simply doing the right thing. I was reconciled because the very power of Jesus reconciliation at work in my life moved me to be reconciled.

And what Jesus commands, Jesus empowers by his love. Quote Corrie Ten Boom. Thirdly, problem addressed and owned by both.

Now what we know is that every situation to be resolved has got two ingredients. It's got a person, two people normally, and it's got a problem.

Our tendency too often is just to address the problem and never address the person. Or if we address the person, we're saying you're the problem.

But as we say in the Stogner family, it always takes two. It takes two to Tango. Own. Own your part of it.

[38 : 38] Fourthly, potentially or potential creative restitution or restitutions agreed. Now this may not look like finances.

When two brothers or two sisters have separated and they're no longer friends because of a conflict, it may be praying for that person.

It may be standing up and repenting before other people. people. It may be seeking some way to serve that person, but just to shore up and to say, I really meant it.

And I really want it to be real and to last, not just going through the motions. And then finally, a promise to no longer dwell or talk about it.

A promise to no longer dwell or talk about it. It's called replacement theory. So that if I've been cursing a person, gossiping, you know, that's slandering them without them present, if I've been praying for their demise, if I've been secretly just saying, I can't wait for them, they're going to get in trouble again and they're going to fall and I'm going to savor that.

[40 : 26] If I replace it as I'm reconciled, instead of a curse, bless, speak positive about the person.

that's the kind of reconciliation that brings great, great glory to our Father because it's the gospel.

We have not only been forgiven by Jesus, but Jesus as our substitute on the cross was an acceptable, acceptable cost.

It was an acceptable restitution such that God not only forgives us, but now peace is made with God because of Jesus. Forgiveness and reconciliation.

And how does he speak of us? As his dear children, as his beauties, as the ones that he loves.

Well, I hope you do have someone to mind.

If you don't, I hope you'll remember a number of these things, but it's God's desire, not simply for the harmony and the oil and the friction of church community that arises, but it's our call.

[41 : 57] The very gospel that reconciles us to God has now called us to this ministry of reconciliation. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do ask that you would now as you have taught us and we have heard that you would equip us even by your example, by our being reconciled with you and by that, by your love, you would empower us to do.

And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.