

Authentic Mission

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[0 : 0 0] The context of these verses is the Apostle Paul defending the authenticity as the true apostle of the Lord Jesus because his gospel is authentic and therefore his ministry is authentic.

He's being challenged consistently by this church of Corinth who are being swayed away to follow a group of people who we will discover in a few weeks as the super apostles. This gives us clarity too on what it means for us to be an authentic follower of the Lord Jesus.

What does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus? And what Paul has written in 2 Corinthians 3, 4 and now 5 is meant to help us to not lose heart as a follower of Christ.

He mentions not losing heart in chapter 4 verse 1, again in verse 16 and he writes about the ministry of the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christian faith that has turned his life inside out and upside down.

And in chapters 4 and 5 are written so that we don't walk into a life of apathy and losing heart.

[1 : 1 4] And see, the stakes are high for us. As we've just heard, the stakes are high for our world when we just decide to cruise, just decide to coast, to lose heart in this mission that God's called us to do and busy ourselves with trivia and irrelevancies.

We get a glimpse of how high the stakes are. This was from last week in chapter 5 verse 10 with Richard Goscombe. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done well in the body, whether good or bad.

That is, what that verse is declaring, is that God will hold everyone accountable for their life.

Every single person will answer for their life. Notice that the judgment seat of Christ is universal.

We must all appear, everyone, no exceptions. We will all give an account to the Lord Jesus as the King of kings, the Lord of all, the ruler of all things, the one who holds eternity in his hands.

[2 : 3 4] Notice too, that while it is for everyone, we'll all be judged individually.

Each one must give an account. Everyone will be held accountable to God for their life. Now, the point of chapter 5 verse 10 is meant to cause us to shudder.

That's the point of that verse. It's meant to cause us to shudder. That is, there is a day of consequences. There is a day of reckoning. Eternal consequences.

And no one will escape it. And so it says in verse 11, Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord.

We try to persuade men. Now, the fear of God, this final judgment, is a good motivation. But it's not the only motivation.

[3 : 51] You see, the fear of God is in no way whatsoever proof that you actually love Jesus. Fear of God by itself moves you into a life of self-confidence, a life of legalism, a life of bare minimum apathy.

That's what fear of God does. In and of itself. If we do not believe in our hearts the awful truth of the enmity there is between us and God and all of its eternal, terrifying consequences, then our love for Christ will in fact be shallow and flawed.

So we need the fear of God, but that's just not enough in itself. Without the fear, love for Christ will be taken for granted. It'll be passionless and entry into all the joys of his presence is just the next thing that I expect to happen because of my life of service.

You see, the horror of final judgment and I don't have time to unpack exactly what the horror of final judgment will look like except that it's meant to result in shuddering on our behalf.

But the horror of final judgment makes the wonder and the awe of God's grace in the Lord Jesus for us are just beautiful and humbling and almost incomprehensible.

[5 : 35] Let us believe and feel the horror of eternal condemnation and flee from it into the loving and the gracious arms of Jesus, the judge of all people, where you will find no condemnation.

In other words, as Exodus 20, 20 says, fear the Lord so that you don't have to fear the Lord. We're told in verse 14, the fear of judgment is not Paul's only motive.

He says, for Christ's love compels us. And then these verses which follow on from here are just the wonder of the love of Christ for us.

Verse 18, God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. Again, verse 19, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. To reconcile is to render two parties to be no longer opposed to each other.

It's to win over from hostility towards friendliness. It is to make two opposites consistent and compatible. And that is what these verses say that God has done for us in Christ.

[6 : 51] Totally opposed. Enmity and hostility and brought together. These verses say that it's God who took the initiative to reconcile us to himself, which is the foundation of the Christian faith.

It's not about us working for God. It is all the work of God on our behalf. See it there. Verse 18, all this is from God.

Verse 19, God was reconciling the world to himself. Verse 21, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. The initiative, the momentum, and purpose of reconciliation are all from God.

God does something about it. God does something about it. God does something about it. God does something about the sin that has caused the enmity, all of our rebellion against him. He does something about it.

Verse 19 is the preliminary explanation of how the reconciliation is brought about. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

[8 : 04] That's the preliminary explanation. In the work of reconciliation, God doesn't count all of our rebellion against him, against us.

He doesn't hold us accountable for it. And verse 21 describes how it's possible that God doesn't count our sins against us.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. So that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.

The end of verse 19 says that God doesn't want to count our sin against us. And frankly, we don't want God to count our sins against us.

The picture here is an account book. And the account book has written in it all that we've said, all that we've done, all that we've thought, all that we are.

[9 : 20] And verse 21 says that my sin is not put to my account. But that account book with my name on it and everything that I have done, everything that I've thought, everything that I've done in rebelling against God has been put into Jesus' account book.

my name has been scratched off the top and Jesus has been put there and I have got Jesus' account book.

my account of sin has been put by God to the account of his sinless son. Jesus has taken my place on the cross.

He bore my sin in his body on the cross. He has been judged in my place. All the horrors of the crucifixion is what I, Steve Jeffrey, deserve for all of eternity without any relief including the hope of physical death from that so that the suffering would end.

No ending for all of eternity is what I deserve for my rebellion against God. And verse 15, sorry, verse 10 says that that's what God will do to everyone who rejects him.

[10 : 49] He was made sin. The sin of the world, that terrible burden, offense to God, all the hostility, the enmity, and the filth that separates us from God and causes us to deserve eternal torment has been placed by God unto his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, that's only half the story. Not only that, but his perfect, unblemished righteousness is put to my account.

I cannot be condemned because my record reads perfect, unblemished righteousness.

The only thing that I contribute to my reconciliation with God is the sins from which I must be redeemed. All I contribute is debt, sin that I can never repay and that only needs to be wiped out.

It's the only hope is for it to be declared wiped out. Now, this is a trivial illustration, but it's kind of like my wedding day. As I exchanged wedding rings with Nat, I said to her, Natalie, with this ring I wed you with all that I am and all that I have I honor you.

[12 : 29] So, in that moment I promised to hand over all that I am to her. of course I had just finished five years of ministry training, had a hex debt, a car loan and needed to borrow \$2,000 from my father-in-law in order to get married and he figured it was a cheap deal longer term.

And so in that moment I'm saying to her there you are it's all yours. It's all yours. And I know it's trivial but that's what happens when you become a Christian you bring all of your sin, you bring all of your moral bankruptcy and you say to him they're yours.

They're all yours. And in his mercy he receives them. Our great God receives them and counts them to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he hands over all of his perfect righteousness to me and accounts them to me forever sealed. Forever sealed. It is to fill us with wonder and gratitude and thankfulness and humility that the death of one man the God-man Jesus Christ could bear the infinite penalty as a substitute for everyone who repents and trusts in him.

As a side point I am greatly distressed that in so much of the church in the western world all we want to do is talk about the love of God and to leave out the crucial central doctrine of the penal substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[14 : 36] You cannot understand the love of God for you in Christ unless you understand that a debt had to be paid. and he bore it for us.

It is essential for our confidence in this work of reconciliation that we see the centrality of Jesus in it. Notice verse 18 through Christ verse 19 in Christ the reconciliation of the world to God happens through the death and the resurrection of Christ.

It is something that's happened in history it is something that is finished and we have no part of it and the word world in verse 19 is staggering staggering staggering.

It says that what God did through the death of his son the Lord Jesus Christ on a hill outside the city walls of Jerusalem around about AD 33 concerns the reconciliation of the entire universe with its creator.

Everyone every culture every tribe every people group every language comes under that statement the world. Whatever background you come from we all worship a guy who was Jewish 2000 years ago who declared that I am God in this world reconciling the world to its maker.

[16 : 20] It's the extraordinary claim of the New Testament. It's the claim verses 14 and 15 we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died and he died for all.

Jesus' death has universal significance. He is the reconciler. There is no reconciliation with God outside of Jesus. You don't need anything more than Jesus but you can't have anything less than Jesus.

This message of reconciliation with God through Christ is our message for the nations and the stakes could not be any higher. God calls us clearly through the Apostle Paul right through 2 Corinthians you give yourself to this matter.

You give attention to this matter. If you are someone right now who's you're not sure whether you're trusting in the Lord Jesus can I say the fact that you're here right now this morning the stakes couldn't be any higher for you.

I implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God through Jesus. So the message of reconciliation is what God has done and it can only do through Christ.

[17 : 44] The ministry of reconciliation on the other hand is what God can only do through us. So this bit is for those who have received the message of reconciliation.

So this bit is for all Christians. This is for all of us. Verse 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.

Now the main thrust of verse 20 onwards is that the message of reconciliation reconciliation is our ministry of reconciliation to the nations.

This is what God does through us. Verse 18 All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

The ministry is given to us, not to Christ or the angels. Verse 19 And he committed to us the message of reconciliation. It's given to us, not to Christ or the angels.

[18 : 48] Verse 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us. He does it through us, not Christ, not the angels.

Verse 20 Makes our ministry very clear. We are Christ's ambassadors. Now an ambassador's role, as we would know, is a distinguished one.

We speak, we behave on behalf of a sovereign power. We represent that sovereignty and the honour of the sovereignty is at stake.

That's an overwhelming thought. In his death, Jesus represents us to God and in his absence, we represent him to the world.

If you have received the message of reconciliation, reconciliation, then you have the responsibility and will be held accountable for the ministry of reconciliation.

[19 : 52] See the connection in verse 15? He, that's talking about Christ, died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.

as a recipient of the message of reconciliation, my whole life is now deployed in diplomatic service. I speak and live in such a way that Jesus looks like the magnificent treasure that he actually is.

And 2 Corinthians 6 verses 3 to 10 gives us a glimpse into the lifestyle and the expectations of an ambassador of the Lord Jesus. It's important for us to see this because this was confusing for the Corinthian church.

This is not a special category of Christians like apostles or missionaries or ministers. This is for everyone. What Paul writes in verses 3 and 4 is key.

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path so that our ministry will not be discredited. We represent the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 10] If the ministry is discredited, the message is discredited. Jesus is discredited. You see, when you see yourself as an ambassador of Jesus in chapter 5 verse 2 and as God's co-workers in chapter 6 verse 1, I actually think there's an inevitable drivenness about the service.

I think this is the thing that captivates our life and drives us with their real great deal of focus and attention. I therefore believe that if you're casual, you're laid back, you're comfortable, you're happy to cruise along, then I would encourage you to take another look at the diplomatic service.

Too many of us are just happy to go to church once or twice a month. Occasional devotional times, give money here, that's not ambassador or service.

Can I, first of all, encourage you that you don't go to church. You belong to one. It is the priority of your life. You belong to a church.

And when you're coasting and cruising, it is one of the sure signs that you have lost confidence, you're losing heart. Look at Paul's lifestyle here. It is in fact a lifestyle that commends the greatness and the glory and the wonder of the Lord Jesus to the world.

[22 : 40] It's a sacrificial service is his lifestyle. Verse 4 again, chapter 6, rather, in other words, rather than being a stumbling block, rather than discrediting the ministry of the Lord Jesus, rather as servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way.

So how does the Apostle Paul commend himself in his service? In great endurance, in troubles, hardship, distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments and riots, in hard work, in sleepless nights and hunger, in purity, in understanding, in patience and kindness, in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love, in truthful speech and in the power of God with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.

world. That's his diplomatic service. Instead of being embittered and frustrated and angry and resentful by all the afflictions and the hardships and the calamities and the labors and the sleepless night, by God's grace, Paul has shown patience and kindness and love and he is continually propelled forward.

His spirit has not been broken by the pain of his ministry. In the Holy Spirit he has found resources to give and to not grumble and to keep focusing on his duty to the Lord Jesus.

To be patient in God's timing rather than pitying himself. To be kind to people rather than taking it out on others. There are six paradoxes, if you like, in verses 8 to 10 of chapter 6, I want to just focus on one because for me, this one sums up all of them.

[24 : 29] Verse 10. This is the one I think. And this, I believe, is what our world needs to see displayed in Christ's ambassadors.

Verse 10. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. What? Sorrowful, and yet always, how do you put those together, Paul?

What this world needs from Christ's fellow workers is an unshakable joy in Jesus in the midst of suffering and sorrow. Not serving him when I feel the joy, when the things are, suffering and sorrow is over, then I'm free to serve him.

When the kids are sore and the marriage, and I've got the work is settled, then I'll serve him. That's not what Paul's saying here. There are countless reasons for our hearts to break in the service of the Lord Jesus.

But in them all, we do not cease to rejoice. One of the great paradoxes of the Christian life, and I believe this is unique to the Christian faith, it displays the wonder of God that we serve, that we can be sorrowful and yet always rejoicing.

[25 : 55] No other religion offers you that. When you have Jesus, you can lose everything else with joy. That's what our world needs to see from Christians.

The grace of God is so infinitely valuable. people. Our vision here at St. Paul's is to unite our diverse community in the good news of the Lord Jesus, which means that he is our joy.

And whatever your cultural background says is your ultimate joy, Jesus trumps it all. Don't care what it is, Jesus says, I'm better. I am your joy. And our community needs to embrace Jesus as their only hope and their deepest joy, and they need to see it in us.

What do you think it says to them when we have a casual, take it or leave it approach to Christ's demands over our lives?

Jesus has given us a job, and Paul pushes the point in chapter 6 verses 1 and 2, as God's co-workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain, for he says, in the time of my favor I heard you, in the day of salvation I helped you, I tell you now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

[27 : 14] Now in those couple of verses, Paul is making both a simple point and a slightly more complex point. In verse 2, Paul quotes from Isaiah 49 verse 8, which was just read out to us, written hundreds of years earlier, and what does he say?

He says, for he says. Paul is actually using the tense in that verse, which means that God is still saying.

What he said hundreds of years earlier, he is still saying now. He is still speaking. That's the really simple point he's making there.

This God who spoke then continues to speak with authority now. He is, however, a slightly more significant, deeper point, complex point.

What God has said throughout history, he's still saying, the slightly more complex point is that in Isaiah 49, God is speaking to his servant who we know now to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 36] God is saying that he has heard his servant. In Isaiah 49, he's heard his servant. He has come to the aid of his servant and he has helped the servant to fulfill his mission.

And that's exactly what Jesus has done throughout his life. in his death and his resurrection and opening the way for humanity to be reconciled with God and given them eternal life.

God has equipped him and helped him for that mission. The day of salvation was the day of the servant, the day of the death of Jesus for the reconciliation of humanity to their God.

And in quoting that verse to the Corinthians in the present tense, Paul is now saying that the day of salvation is continuing in the present through the servants of the servant.

That's the point he's making. First with Paul and then those who embrace the gospel through Paul. God is saying now is the time to embrace the gospel.

[29 : 49] And it falls on every single one of us to listen and to respond unless we ourselves receive the grace of God in vain.

When God speaks to us as he does in the present, it is to take priority over everything in our life. That's Paul's point here.

It is so easy to slip into this Corinthian mindset and just put God on pause. I'll respond to you when I get my life back together. I'll respond to you when everything suits.

way too much of our modern church has bought into this view that God exists for me. He exists to meet my needs, to get me out of trouble when I'm in it and pretty much stay out of my way the rest of the time.

Now, very few of us actually articulate our theology like that, but it is our operational theology because it's the way we live our lives. We come to church when it suits.

[31 : 05] We get involved when my life is in order. And so we embrace the grace of God in vain. Time with God is often the first thing to go when the moments of pressure are on.

Giving, serving stops in crisis moments or just busy times. Why? Because our operational theology is God is there to serve me.

And yet what it says here is the normal Christian life is a life of diplomatic service. All other pursuits serve that pursuit. Our support of them is diplomatic service in and of itself.

And so I want to say to those gathered here now who haven't received Jesus, I urge you to receive God's grace in the Lord Jesus.

Today is the day of salvation. I urge you to receive God's grace. He's calling you to receive him.

[32 : 18] To surrender to him. To stop putting him to one side. To stop operating as if he's there to serve you and to fully serve you. And you may have sat in churches all of your life.

I loved hearing the story I read it this week of a Christian man who had spent his entire life in church involved in a global ministry.

Global ministry. And in his 20s discovered the gospel for the first time. Christ died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for those but for him who died for them and was raised again.

That is for you who've received this message. Give yourself to its service. The ministry of reconciliation is sheer hard work. It's not being ambassador when it feels right or when it seems correct or a positive response is there.

It's guaranteed or when it's convenient to do so. It is to shape your whole life. I loved hearing the story of an elderly Christian man recently dying of cancer. His main concern was to die so well that those around him caring for him, nurses, doctors, family just saw Jesus and the joy of Jesus.

[33 : 47] He hadn't lost heart in the troubles and the distresses and the hardship. He hadn't just given up. So maybe that's you.

Over time there's been a loss of heart. Just happy to cruise along. Happy to kind of just spend your time talking, thinking about theology, Christian huddles, that kind of stuff but not actually giving yourself to the work of God in this world.

Maybe you're trading on past stories. Someone who got converted somehow around you 10, 15, 20 years ago. Maybe you've lost heart.

As recipients of the message of reconciliation you've been called to make this message clear. That is your purpose, it is your calling, it is your ministry.

Give your life to God's global agenda by holding out this message from a heart of love and a life of service. As we've sung this morning and I might add with a little bit of gusto and I hope it's true.

[34 : 57] Christ alone is our ceaseless message. Grace and peace is the overflow of our lives.