

REPRESENT JESUS

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[0 : 00] A young police cadet was taking his final exam at Hendon Police College in North London before he was unleashed upon the British public.

One of the questions in the exam paper in his final exam read like this. You're out on patrol in outer London when an explosion occurs in a gas main in a nearby street.

On investigation you discover that a large hole has been blown in the footpath and a nearby block of flats is on fire with people trying to escape.

Beside the blast site is an overturned van. Inside the van there's a strong smell of marijuana. The occupants of the van, a man and a woman, are half naked and injured.

You notice that the woman in the van is the wife of your divisional inspector who is at present away in the United States. A passing motorist stops to offer assistance and you recognise him as the suspect in an armed robbery case.

[1 : 07] Then suddenly a man runs out of a nearby house shouting that his wife, who was expecting a baby, has gone into labour due to the explosion. Another man who's been blown into the adjacent canal is crying out for help because he can't swim.

By now a crowd of onlookers has formed and there's a risk of a second explosion. Then comes the question. Bearing in mind the provision of the Mental Health Act, describe in a few words what actions you would take.

His answer? I would take off my uniform and mingle with the crowd. I imagine that that's a pretty clever answer, but I imagine that many of us, although we may not know the feeling of being in that exact situation, know what it is to try and take the uniform off and to mingle with the crowd.

You see, the stakes are high when a police officer takes their uniform off and mingles with the crowd, but the stakes, I think, are astronomical when the Christian church loses heart for its mission and purpose, and in fact, loses vision for it, which is why we are doing this series now in Vision Month.

We've seen so far that we exist as a church to know Jesus and to treasure Jesus. And what flows from that is the next part of our mission statement, that is that we represent Jesus.

[2 : 44] Given the infinite value of knowing and being known by Jesus, we exist to represent Jesus. And so I want to look at these few verses in 2 Corinthians 5 and 6, because I think that they will help us not to give up hope and to effectively keep our uniform on as Christians.

To say that we exist to represent Jesus is not well received in our modern context in this country. Religion, and especially Christianity in Australia, is seen as a source of much of the world's problems. Sigmund Freud, the Austrian neurologist and the father of psychoanalysis, believe that all the world's problems come from the repression of deep desires for pleasure.

And so therefore the villains are the repressive moral gatekeepers in society, like the Christian church. That's the mood of our country.

At the moment. We are seen, that is the Christian church, is seen as the problem rather than the solution to the world's problems. And of course, given the church's track record over its history in areas of things like morality and justice, there has been quite a lot of trust eroded.

[4 : 29] And so representing Jesus in a post-Christian culture is often faced with skepticism and even hostility. Unlike Freud, however, the Christian worldview doesn't locate the problem of the world in one part of the world or in one group of the world.

Christianity doesn't blame religion, doesn't blame Muslims, it doesn't blame terrorists, it doesn't blame atheists, it doesn't blame big business, it doesn't blame immigrants.

It says the problem of the world is sin. And it locates the solution to the world's problem in God's grace.

And so what the Christian worldview does, it declares both a universal problem and a universal solution. And so thinking about what it means for us to represent Jesus, I want to look at that universal problem and the universal solution, and in doing that, I'm going to start digging around in some core Christian beliefs which are repulsive in our context.

things like sin, judgment, hell. Sin and divine judgment and the reality is even God's solution to our problem are some of the most offensive elements of the Christian faith today.

[6 : 04] A good number of our society still believe in God. However, the God that they believe in is formed from an opinion that is that I have my own right to choose my God the way I want Him to be.

And so we have every right, every individual has every right to arrive at their own religious belief but independent of all other religious groups. And so the God that we form in our mind is the God of love who supports us no matter what it is that we do or what it is that we believe.

That's the conclusion we come to. Ironically, no, if you look out in the world this week, circumstances of our world, you don't have to look much further than Paris and go, it's hard to believe in a God of love.

If you look through history, history doesn't affirm a God of love. If you look to world religions, the only world religion that says that this world was created because of the love and desire of a merciful God is Christianity.

It is the only world religion that comes to the conclusion that God is love and is essential being. And so to come to the conclusion that God is love, it has to flow ultimately from a biblical Christianity perspective.

[7 : 53] But that same Bible says that God is also a God of justice. But in our society, for Christians to think that there are people who are bound for hell, the conclusion is that we must perceive that such people are unequal in dignity and worth as us.

And therefore, they conclude that that belief leads to exclusion and abuse and division and even violence. And unfortunately, throughout the history of the Christian church, it has. And so let's unpack some of this stuff from 2 Corinthians 5 and see why it is so essential for Christians to keep their uniform on and to keep representing Jesus against that climate.

2 Corinthians 5 verse 10, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and each one must receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

What that's saying there is that God will hold us all accountable for how we live. Notice that the judgment seat of Christ is universal. We must all appear.

That's everyone, no exceptions. Notice too that while it is for everyone, we'll all be judged individually. Each one must give an account.

[9 : 22] Now Romans chapter 2 gives a vivid account of what that day will look like and there are only two outcomes for the final reckoning with the Lord Jesus. Romans 2 verse 7, To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, they will give eternal life.

But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile, but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good.

Now Sigmund Freud suggests that self-seeking is the solution to the world's problem. These verses suggest that self-seeking is the problem.

The Bible calls it sin and sin is the universal problem. Sin is not just doing bad things, this is what we saw last week. Sin is making good things into ultimate things.

Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing instead of God. And so if you love your reputation more than truth, you're likely to lie.

[10 : 39] If you love money more than family, then you are most likely going to neglect your spouse and your children for your career. Sin is where we look to good things like money and career and family and to give us that sense of significance and acceptance.

and security instead of God. It's idolatry. It's an idolatry that leads to drivenness, addictions, severe anxiety, obsessiveness, envy of others, resentment.

That is, idolatry ruins. Sin has the effect of putting us in, like all addictions, putting us into denial about our hostility towards God.

We become trapped and enslaved to our spiritual idols in a way that a person might be addicted to drugs or gambling or alcohol.

We live in denial about how much we are trampling all over God in a way that an addict is in denial about how they're trampling all over their family and their loved ones.

[11:50] sin. And the terrible consequences of a life of sin is what Romans 2 verse 8 calls wrath and anger from God.

I don't know of anyone who has ever overstated the terrors of this wrath and anger. A God who is both a God of love and a God of justice seems like a contradiction.

But is it not true that all loving people are sometimes filled with anger and seek justice? when they do it it's not because of their love sorry when they do it it is because of their love rather than in spite of it.

Think of how we feel when someone we love is ravaged by the wrong actions or by a bad relationship. Do we respond with a benign intolerance?

Far from it. You see anger and justice is not the opposite of love. Hate is the opposite of love.

[13:07] And the final form of hate is indifference. God's justice is not a cranky explosion but his subtle opposition to the cancer that is eating out of the insides of the human race that he loves that he's created God's justice flows from his love and his delight in the creation that he loves with all of his heart.

He is angry at evil and injustice because it is destroying its peace and its integrity. that sits I think with our hearts that sits with us with our inner beings the human impulse to make perpetrators of violence pay for their crimes is almost overwhelming when you look at that and you see the scenes on television about what's happened in Paris do you have a benign intolerance or benign tolerance or is it we pray for perpetrators of such evil to be brought to justice and the best resource to satisfy that innate desire for justice is belief in a God who will finally put all things right and settle all accounts and so in view of this verse 11 since then we know what it is to fear the Lord we try to persuade men you see the judgment of

God leads Christians to pursue reconciliation not vengeance you see anyone who thinks that the Christian response to injustice is to pick up a gun and to fight for the honour of God or to exercise God's justice is a lunatic now the fear of God is a right motivation but it isn't our only motivation to represent Jesus and persuade people of this truth the fear of hell and of God is no proof that you actually treasure Jesus we are told in verse 14 that fear of judgment is not Paul's only motive he says for Christ's love compels us and these verses are rich in the wonder of Christ's love verse 18 God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and again in verse 19 God 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 is to win over from hostility to friendliness and these verses say that it is

God who took the initiative to reconcile us to himself see it there in 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 the purpose of reconciliation all come from God and God does something about sin that has caused this enmity between us and him verse 19 is the preliminary explanation of how the reconciliation is brought about it says God was reconciled the world to himself in Christ not counting men's sins against them and verse 21 describes how it is possible that God doesn't count 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 sins against us and frankly we don't want

God to count our sins against us but the picture here is of an account book 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've treasured verse 21 says that my sin is not put to my account my debt is not put to my account but it's put to Jesus' account instead my account of sin has been put by God to the account of the sinless son and Jesus has taken my place and borne my sins in his body on the cross it means that he's been judged in my place he was made sin he became my substitute not only is my sin put to his account but his perfect unblemished righteousness is put to my account

[18:21] I cannot be condemned because my record reads perfect it's the ultimate exchange in a trivial kind of way it's kind of like the day nearly 18 years ago quick calculation that I married Nat and on that day I said to Nat with all that I am and all that I have I give you and honor you and other stuff like that basically you know it's a bit vague after all these years now which was a massive promise everything that I have all that I am I give to you and now after five years of doing ministry training and being a student that meant that I had a hex debt

I had a small car loan and I even had to borrow two thousand dollars from my father-in-law in order to marry Nat and so when I said with all that I have it's like there we go it's all yours Nat she didn't have any debts but she did the moment that she married me that's a trivial kind of thing it's a trivial kind of exchange understanding now while some of us think that it's unjust of God for Jesus to die in our place this substitutionary sacrifice is not a foreign concept it is in our blood literally in our blood you see when you have an infection you have white blood cells to attack the infection and if you have a wound you will notice this stuff coming out it's called technical term pus I mean I'm assuming there's a more technical term than pus for it the pus is just the corpses of white cells which have died so that you might live it's in your blood you know if a mother bird jumps in the way of a snake and dies to protect their lives of their young birdies and you see it on YouTube you go oh that's oh I'm moved by that and we consider in our culture heroes of those soldiers and others who given their lives to protect their mates and their family and their country that is sacrifice is of the highest principle of virtue in our culture and we admire it no end and so this must surely be something that God does as well otherwise the creature us would be more moral than God and I can't imagine how that would be and God has done this he came to earth in Jesus Christ suffered and died why because Jesus takes our shame and our guilt he does not merely die he dies on a cross the most shameful of deaths he is cast out of the community crucified outside of the city absolutely humiliated though he obeyed and treasured his father and was faithful to his friends and deserved all honour he got shame and rejection why he took the shame and rejection we deserve for our failings to love God to treasure him ultimately so that we could be forgiven and set free in order to treasure him ultimately and it's absolutely essential for our confidence in this work of reconciliation that we see the centrality of Jesus in it all verse 18 it was through Jesus verse 19 it was in Jesus the reconciliation of the world to God happens through the death and resurrection of Jesus it is something that has happened in history it is something it is finished and the word world in verse 19 is staggering it says that what God did in the death of Jesus in history on a hill outside of Jerusalem in AD 33 concerns the reconciliation of the whole world to its maker that's the Christian world view and that is the claim of verses 14 and 15 we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died and he died for all and so Jesus death has universal significance there is no reconciliation with God outside of [23 : 30] Jesus you don't need anything more than Jesus but you cannot have anything less than Jesus and if you are sitting here right now someone who is not trusting in the Lord Jesus then I want to suggest to you the stakes could not be any higher for you right now chapter 6 verse 2 says now is the time of God's favour now is the day of salvation and so I would implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God today through Jesus the message of reconciliation is what God has done and can only do through Christ the ministry of reconciliation on the other hand is what God can only do through us this is what God is calling us to do if you are reconciled with God through Jesus verse 20 says we are therefore

Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us and the main thrust of verses 20 onwards is what Christians that is the ones who have been reconciled to God through Jesus those who treasure Jesus above everything else must do if the message of reconciliation is to be heard that is the message of reconciliation is our ministry of reconciliation to Chatswood and beyond 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 this ministry is given to us it's not given to Christ it's not given to the angels verse 19 and he committed to us the message of reconciliation again given to us not to Christ not to the angels verse 20 we are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his not the angels verse 20 makes our ministry very clear we are Christ's ambassadors and as an ambassador you have a very distinguished job as an ambassador the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ is at stake if you have received the message of reconciliation then you have the responsibility of the ministry of reconciliation see the connection in verse 15 he that's Christ died for all that those who live that is through Christ 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 your whole life is now deployed to the diplomatic service I am to speak and to live in such a way that

Jesus looks magnificent that he is the treasure that we declare him to be as our society is moving deeper and deeper into a post Christian culture that wants to jettison all vestiges of its Christian heritage I think there's a temptation for us to be feeling a little overwhelmed as ambassadors and

wanting to get that uniform off it's a whole lot more comfortable being ambassador for Australia in New Zealand than it would be in Baghdad right now slightly different perspective there's a couple of questions that we want to be thinking about as we move forward one is because the culture shifted so much that we exist in the way we go about our ambassador job is going to be very different than the way things were done 30 years ago number one you've got to understand that

I can nearly guarantee any program that worked 20 to 30 years ago is guaranteed not to work now it shifted that quickly and this is this for me over the last six years or so has been a very rapid relearning of ministry I got trained I got trained who thought in terms of Christendom that is where the Christian church Christian faith influences the morality and the thinking of society that's gone and I had to relearn retrain it's a scary thing it's kind of daunting how to engage as a Christian church in a new society two things are really important for us as we look ahead as a church number one broadly speaking these are two very broad categories number one how do we as a Christian church in Chatswood lead with love in

[28 : 59] Chatswood that's absolute paramount for us to be thinking about lead with love so that everything that we do we don't just have evangelistic programs over here but everything that we do is on mission the whole thing everything we do is thinking mission that's number one number two is the absolute importance for us as a church to be equipping all of our members for their front line ministry of reconciliation which for virtually all of us happens outside the walls of this building how do we equip our people to engage with love and winsomeness with the underlying thinking of our culture that's number two that's the second thing the third thing I want to say is let us not be discouraged keep our uniforms on

I believe the more deeply we feel how undeserved and free the grace of the Lord Jesus is and how he's plucked us from eternal misery into eternal joy the more we will treasure Jesus and the more we treasure Jesus the freer our love will be in representing the Lord Jesus to those who need to experience his mercy they're not three different concepts to know and be known by Jesus is to treasure Jesus and to treasure Jesus above everything means that you represent him well they're all connected I also think that this is a time of unprecedented opportunity it's a time for us as a Christian church to see that it's actually good for Christendom to be over unprecedented opportunity the history of the church tells me that a culture that wants to get rid of

Christianity is never a hindrance for the Christian church to represent Jesus never a hindrance did you know that early Christianity grew explosively 40% a decade for nearly 300 years it grew by 40% a decade for nearly 300 years which is the era prior to Christendom and during that time early Christians did not engage in public preaching because it was too dangerous there were practically no evangelists no missionaries there were no mission boards there was no mission organisations they did not write evangelism courses or write books and after Nero's persecution in the mid first century church services were in fact closed to visitors deacons stood at the doors of churches like bouncers excluding people who were not baptised or who they thought were informers prominent people in society scorned the

Christian church Christians were discriminated against in broader society in petty little ways it was extremely hard to be Christian and yet the church grew why because Christians were attractive what attracted people to the Christian faith was the lives of Christians their concern first of all for the weak and the poor in society their integrity in the face of persecution their financial generosity their sacrificial love even for their enemies and the high quality of their common life together non-believers were first of all attracted to the community and the lives of Christians before they were open to hear the gospel truths that was the source of this kind of life they were impressed by the way

Christians died for their faith and the church grew so I'm convinced that when we know Jesus and we treasure Jesus with all of our lives we will be effective in representing Jesus for his glory and the joy of all people Esc distinct próxima so bye to sure sing one tree come arc and theolla