

Global Success

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[0 : 00] Gracious Lord, I pray that you would help us through your word tonight and by your spirit, give us a glimpse of not just our present life, but our future. And I pray that we would walk out of here transformed, changed, and deeply in love with the Lord Jesus.

And we ask it for your glory. Amen. Keep your fingers in 2 Corinthians 5. And also, if you can flip back a couple of books into Romans 2, that would be really helpful.

A young police cadet was taking his final exam at Hendon Police College in North London before being unleashed on the British public.

And one of the questions in this exam paper was, you're out on a patrol in outer London when an explosion occurs in a gas main in a nearby street.

Upon 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.

[1 : 04] Inside the van, there is a strong smell of marijuana. The occupants of the van, a man and a woman, are half naked and injured. You'd notice that the woman is the wife of your divisional inspector who happens to be away at the moment in the United States.

A passing motorist stops to offer assistance and you recognise him as a suspect in an armed robbery case. 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. And 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. The officer thought for a moment and then picked up his pen and wrote, I would take off my uniform and mingle with the crowd.

Let me just get a little bit serious with you just for a moment. 2 Corinthians 4 and 5, which we've been looking at in our mission month over the last three weeks and today the fourth week, is designed by the Apostle Paul through God for us Christians not to take off our uniform and mingle with the crowd.

[2 : 33] He doesn't want us to lose heart. That's the purpose of 2 Corinthians 4 and 5. You see there, you can imagine it, the stakes are pretty high when in a moment like that, a police officer takes off their uniform and decides to mingle with the crowd.

And I think what the Apostle Paul has been trying to tell us in 2 Corinthians 4 and 5 is the stakes are astronomical if the Christian takes off their uniform and decides to mingle with the crowd. That is, if we lose heart.

We got a glimpse of exactly how high the stakes were last week. We only looked at it very quickly in chapter 5, verse 10. And I've included it again this week. And I want to dig a little bit deeper because the stakes are enormous when you look at this verse.

So if you've got your Bibles open, have a look at it there. 2 Corinthians 5, verse 10. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

That's how high the stakes are. It's saying there that God will hold us accountable for how we've lived. Notice that the judgment seat of Christ is universal. It says, we must all appear.

[3 : 43] That is, everyone. No exceptions. We will all give an account to the Lord Jesus for our lives. And notice too that while it is everyone, we'll all be judged individually.

Notice that each one must give an account. That is, it won't be me sort of being able to hide in the crowd at that point. It will be me and God, no one else giving an account for my life.

All of my life will be brought to bear. And you won't be there to say, stand with me in that moment and sort of prop me up and put an arm and say, look, he wasn't such a bad bloke after all. Romans 2, if you've got your finger in that, just flick over there because I think it gives a vivid account of what that day will look like. A little bit clearer than verses, chapter 5 and 10 here. It says in verse 5 to 11, because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you were storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

[4 : 47] God will give to each person according to what he has done. There's the connection with 2 Corinthians 5 and 10. And then we read that there are only two outcomes for the final reckoning with the Lord Jesus.

Verse 7, To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he 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, honor, and peace for everyone who does good. I see the description there.

It says, Stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, self-seeking, who reject the truth and follow evil. And that is, I think, a really helpful description of what the Bible calls sin.

Sin is a universal problem. It's not just, if you like, for the so-called bad people. It is a problem for everyone, even us clean, middle-class people who are deeply committed to nice boy, good girl, wickedness, of pride and unbelief and indifference and ingratitude and impurity of mind and personal ambition.

[6 : 02] God will hold us accountable for that. And that is why Romans 3 says that everyone has sinned and fallen short of what God requires. No one has lived a perfect life except Jesus.

And the terrible consequence of a life of sin is what Romans 2, 8 calls wrath and anger from God. And that is referring there to eternal punishment. And in all the reading that I have done, let me say that no one has overstated the terrors of what wrath and anger from God actually mean.

Last week, the Apostle Paul painted a picture from early in 2 Corinthians 5 painted a picture of eternal life. Eternal life is infinitely wonderful to imagine.

Eternal life in the presence of Jesus is infinitely beautiful to contemplate. And it's hard for us to get a glimpse of it, but think of a moment in your life when you were bursting because you were so happy. Think of a moment. Surely there's at least one. And multiply that a thousand times and let it increase continually for all of eternity and you got just some sort of a notion of what eternal life with Jesus would be like.

[7 : 34] And so if eternal life with God is the most glorious reality that we could even hope to imagine, eternity without God is the most appalling reality that you could possibly imagine.

If heaven means that I'm raised with a body fit for life of joy and peace and painlessness and beauty that will never end in the presence of God, then hell means that I'm raised with a body fit for eternity of torment away from God.

The suffering will never kill the body. It will just go on and on and on and on and no horror of suffering in human history will be compared with it at all.

That's as close as I can get to it, what it will mean. Revelation 14.11 is probably the most graphic New Testament judgment, a statement, sorry, of the eternal suffering of those who are unrepentant sinners.

It says, The smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest, day or night. The point of all this is that when we read 2 Corinthians 5.10, we're not just meant to sort of skim over it.

[8 : 50] We're actually meant to feel something and we're meant to shudder is really what we're meant to do. To paraphrase a quote from John Piper, he says, we need to feel that we were once as close to hell as we are in the seats that we're now sitting on even closer.

Its darkness like vapor had entered the soul and was luring us down. We must believe and feel that just like a rock climber who has slipped and perilously hangs on the edge of a cliff with his fingertips, so we used to hang over hell a mere heartbeat from eternal torment.

The Bible says, it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God and for the first 22 years of my life, I was but a heartbeat from that. For half of my life, I was a heartbeat from that.

And so it says in verse 11, since then we know what it is to fear the Lord. He's speaking to people who are Christians here. He says, we try to persuade men. The fear of God is a right motivation, but

it isn't our only motivation.

The fear of hell and God is no proof that you actually love Christ. But if we do not believe in our hearts the awful truth of the enmity that is between God and us and all the terrifying consequences that go along with that, then our love for Christ will be shallow and it will be flawed.

[10:21] Without the fear my love for Christ will be taken for granted. It will be passionless. And all those joys that I spoke about last week of the eternal kingdom in the presence of God, I'll just come to expect it to be the next thing.

It's kind of a given that that's the next thing that I'm going to get. And so let us believe and feel the horror of eternal condemnation and flee from it into the loving arms of Jesus where there is no condemnation.

We are told in verse 14 that fear of judgment is not Paul's only motive. He says, because Christ's love compels us. And these verses that flow on from that are just rich with the wonder of the love of Christ for us.

Verse 18, have a look at it. God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. And again in verse 19, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. To reconcile is to render two parties to be no longer opposed to one another.

It is to win over from hostility and enmity into friendship is to make two opposites consistent and compatible. And these verses say that God took the initiative so that we would not be rendered separated from one another for all of eternity.

[11:47] God took the initiative to reconcile us to himself. It is all the work of God. See it there in verse 18. All this is from God. See it in verse 19.

God was reconciling the world to himself. Again in verse 21, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. What it's saying there is that we are opposed to God living a life of sin, living for ourselves and God took the initiative.

It was the initiative, the momentum, the purpose of reconciliation are all from God. God does something about the sin that has caused the enmity between us and him.

Verse 19 is the preliminary explanation of how this reconciliation is brought about. Have a look at it. God was reconciling 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 our sins against us. It says, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[12:57] The end of verse 19 says that God doesn't want to count our sins against us. Frankly, we don't want God to count our sins against us.

And so picture here if you like an account book. The account book has written in it everything that I've said, everything that I've done, everything that I've thought, all that I am, everything.

That's a pretty frightening thought really. And verse 21 says that my sin is not put into my account book but it's put into Jesus' account book instead.

My account of sin has been put by God to the account of his sinless son. Jesus has taken my place and he's borne my sin in his body on the cross.

It means that Jesus has been judged for my error, for my sin. He was made sin, the sin of the world, that terrible burden and offence to God, all the hostility and enmity and filth that separates me from God and for all of us from God.

[14:16] Everything that is the reason that I deserve eternal punishment has been placed by God onto his son the Lord Jesus and the Lord Jesus willingly accepts all that wrath and anger from God.

He is judged for my and for our sin. On the cross he suffered the torment and cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me so that I might not never have to utter those words for all of eternity?

but not only is my sin put into his account but his perfect unblemished righteousness is put into my account.

I can't be condemned if I trust in Jesus because there is no proof. There is no debt, there is no badness and sin written up in my book.

I open the book on the day of judgment and it reads perfect righteousness. No wrong. The only thing that I contribute to my reconciliation with God is the sins for which I must be redeemed.

[15:35] In a trivial way, it's kind of like the day I married Nat, not that that was trivial. As I exchanged rings with Nat, I got a ring and I put the ring on her finger and I said, Natalie, with this

ring I wed you.

With all that I am and all that I have, I honour you. What I'm saying there in that moment is that everything that's mine is now yours.

The problem with that was after five years as a student, that included a hex debt, a car loan and \$2,000 that I had to borrow from my father-in-law in order to have a honeymoon.

And I said to Nat, it's now all yours. All that I have, all that debt is now yours. That's a trivial way of putting it, if you like.

That's what happens when you become a Christian or another moral, realistic way of putting it, it's like getting Nathan Tinkler's bank account and changing the name at the top of it with Bill Gates and getting Bill Gates' bank account and putting Nathan Tinkler's name at the top of it, a big swap has happened.

[16:59] All the debt and the bankruptcies, nearly there, has been swapped. So that Bill Gates takes the bankruptcy and Nathan Tinkler gets the bank account and the richest man in the world.

That's what happens when you become a Christian. You bring all your sin and moral bankruptcy to him and he receives it and he counts them, God counts all of that stuff to the Lord Jesus and Jesus' perfect record is given to me.

And my friends, if you're a Christian, it is to fill you with the wonder and the gratitude and the thankfulness and the humility that the death of one man, the God-man, Jesus Christ, would bear the infinite penalty as a substitute for everyone who repents and trusts in him.

and it is essential for your confidence in his finished work of reconciliation that we see the centrality of the Lord Jesus in it all.

Notice in verse 18, it is all through Christ. Verse 19, it is in Christ. The reconciliation of the world to God happens through the death and resurrection of Christ.

[18:12] It is something that has 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.

It says that what God did through the death of the Lord Jesus on a hill outside the city walls of Jerusalem in around 30 AD concerns the reconciliation of the entire human race to its maker. It is the extraordinary claim of the New Testament. It is the claim of verses 14 and 15 in 2 Corinthians 5.

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.

[19:17] And this message of reconciliation with God through the Lord Jesus Christ is our message for the city of Chatswood and beyond. That's what mission month is all about. The stakes couldn't be high my friends.

Separation from God for all of eternity and torment or coming to Christ and living for him. Eternal life in his presence and he calls us with a real sense of urgency in 2 Corinthians 5 and 6 to attend to this matter.

If you're not someone who trusts in the Lord Jesus then I want to say with all humility and with gentleness but with deliberateness the stakes could not be higher for you right now.

As chapter 2 verse chapter 6 verse 2 says now is the time of God's favour now is the day of salvation and I implore you as the Apostle Paul does for us in these verses to be reconciled with God.

If he has at all twinged your heart tonight do not ignore it. Come and speak to me or speak to Sam or Rob or a friend who's brought you here tonight.

[20:32] Attend to the matter right now. So the message of reconciliation of 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.

And so this bit is for those who receive the message of reconciliation. This is what God is calling you to. The message doesn't just shape our future it actually shapes our present as well.

So verse 20 we are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us. The main thrust of verse 20 and onwards is that what Christians the ones who have been reconciled must do if the message of reconciliation is to be heard.

That is the message of reconciliation is our ministry of reconciliation to the city of 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.

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

[21 : 54] 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. Then again in chapter 6 verse 1 As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

We do the urging not God yes God does it through the Holy Spirit but it is our responsibility it is our task it is our voice it is our tongue. Verse 20 makes our ministry very clear we are Christ's ambassadors.

And as an ambassador that job is quite distinguished as an ambassador the honour of the Lord Jesus is at stake that is an overwhelming thought.

In his death Jesus represents us and in his absence we represent him. And so if you have received the message of reconciliation then the ministry of reconciliation is yours.

It's not just reserved for people like me. It's yours. Everyone who's received the message of reconciliation has been given the ministry of reconciliation.

[23 : 14] See the connection in verse 15? He 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 has now been redeployed for diplomatic service. I speak and I live in such a way that makes Jesus look like the treasure that he actually is.

And Paul shows us in chapter 6 verses 3 to 10 that being an ambassador is hard work. So when I talk about diplomatic service don't think of High Commissioner in New Zealand for instance. Think of being sent to a hostile foreign country to speak on behalf of your sovereign government.

Let's have a look at it there in verses 3 and 4. We put no stumbling block in anyone's path so that our ministry will not be discredited. Remember we represent the Lord Jesus.

Our lifestyle and our message are to be consistent with each other. It is absolutely essential because if the ministry is discredited the message is discredited which means that the Lord Jesus is discredited.

[24 : 26] That's an overwhelming thought. Verse 4 rather that is rather than being a stumbling block and discrediting the ministry and discrediting the Lord Jesus as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way and how does he commend himself in his service?

By taking off his uniform and mingling with the crowd? Have a look in great endurance in troubles hardship and distresses etc. etc.

etc. As one former minister or current minister actually said the ministry of reconciliation is sheer hard work.

Claypot expectations from earlier on. Sheer hard work. It's not being an ambassador for the Lord Jesus when it feels right or when it seems like the correct time or when you think people are going to receive what you're going to say favourably or when a positive response is guaranteed or when it's convenient it shapes your whole life.

I loved hearing the story recently of an elderly Christian man who was dying of cancer and his main concern was to die so well around his carers and his nurses and his doctors and his families that Jesus looked great to them.

[25 : 51] That's what shaped his life. An ambassador of the Lord Jesus right to the end. He hadn't lost heart in the troubles and distresses and hardships of life.

He hadn't taken off his uniform and mingled with the crowd. And so friends St. Paul's I want to ask you do the ministries and particularly this is for you if you're in leadership in any capacity at St. Paul's do the ministries of this church make clear the need and the message of reconciliation.

I'm not asking did they start with the purpose of the ministry being clear I'm asking has it continued or has there been a loss of heart along the way maybe the relationship connection has become central rather than the message of reconciliation or maybe the maintenance of the ministry structure has in fact consumed the focus.

I can tell you that for me one of the sure signs that I'm starting to disrobe my uniform is when I go about activities of ministry and I don't shed a tear for those who are lost Christ.

Or it's possible to year in and year out just keep the clogs moving balancing the budgets making sure people are turning up running out the programs week in week out week in week out and we do it to make ourselves comfortable rather than do it for those who need to hear Christ.

[27 : 53] Where we can be more concerned about the look of this thing and the fact that it's probably got three tons of water in it on a wooden structure and will it possibly stand up and put a hole in the building than what it's actually here for and celebrating what happened tonight.

friends our mission statements written on the back wall of our church there tells us that we exist for this message and for this ministry.

St. Paul's exists to know Jesus, to treasure Jesus and represent Jesus and it is not just meant to be written on the walls, it's meant to be written in our hearts and to be shaping our lives.

I believe the more deeply we feel how undeserved and free was the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that plucked someone like me at the age of 23 from the flames of eternal misery the more we will treasure the Lord Jesus and the gift of grace that we have in him.

And the more that we treasure the Lord Jesus I believe the harder we'll work, the less we'll regard everyone from a worldly point of view, we will see them as people in need of Christ and the freer our love will be in representing the Lord Jesus to those who need to experience his mercy.

[29 : 17] Let's pray. Gracious Father I pray that you would reshape our priorities as we have gone through 2 Corinthians 4 and 5 over this month of refocusing again on your global agenda and your plans, the mission that you've entrusted to us.

Lord if we have been tempted either individually or corporately to take off our uniform and mingle with the crowd, encourage us in heart I pray as again we hear the message of reconciliation.

Help us Lord to be humbled, to see that we've contributed nothing. There's no good and better people but that we're all in deep need of reconciliation with you and we thank you for what you've done for us in the Lord Jesus.

May it shape our lives we pray day by day. Amen.