

The Ministry of Reconciliation

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and reading at verse 20. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and at verse 20.

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

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. Paul is really on fire as he writes this letter, this second epistle to the church in Corinth.

And Paul lived really to tell people about Jesus. He had this incredible drive, this passion to tell people the great news about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul longed to get to heaven. In fact, he longed, he tells us that. And say for an instance in Philippians when he's writing, he said he's in a dilemma.

[1 : 06] Part of him wants to stay here because he knew it was good for the church. But there was an even greater desire to depart, to be with Christ, which was far better. And again, Paul, in the earlier part of this chapter, is talking about getting old.

And he terms death as being unclothed, where we leave our body behind. And he looks forward to being clothed again, where we will have our body given back to us.

When our body will be raised glorious and raised in all the resembling, the full resemblance of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, Paul is very clear on that. Although he has a desire to be away and get home to be with Christ, he has this burning passion of telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in this section, in the earlier section, he's talking about living this life. And then he highlights the fact that we are all to appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

[2 : 17] And that we will all receive in our body what we have done, good or bad. And for the apostle, he makes it very clear that so does the Lord and so does, we find it, for instance, in the book of Revelation, that for the believer, the reward is based upon what we are here.

Our salvation, our getting to heaven is based purely and simply upon the Lord Jesus Christ, not upon ourselves. There is nothing of ourselves that merits our getting to heaven.

There is nothing that we can do, supposing we give our body to be burdened, that would merit our getting to heaven. But it's very obvious from Scripture that the reward in glory, the fullness of that reward, is in many ways, is based upon the faithfulness and the service and the Christ-likeness of people in this world.

For instance, in Jesus' parable of the talents. And again, we're told in Revelation, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord and their works do follow them.

So that there's a very obvious link between what we are here as believers and what we will be in glory. Everybody will be full to capacity and glory, but we believe there will be different capacities on the basis of many ways of what we are here.

[3 : 49] But make sure we are not in any way ever making out that what we are has any basis upon our getting to heaven. That the whole basis of that is purely and simply upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the judgment seat is where Christ will rule and reign, and he will deal with each with unerring accuracy. There will be no false witnesses.

There will be no false judgments. Everything will be done absolutely perfectly. And following on from that, the apostle then says, and following on from this about the judgment seat, he says in verse 11, therefore knowing the fear of the Lord.

Sometimes that's translated knowing the terror of the Lord. Here it is knowing the fear of the Lord. And that fear is where we have a sense of awe, a sense of reverence, a sense of the glory, the majesty, the justice, the judgment of God.

All these things. And that is at the very heart of evangelism. The apostle Paul makes it very, very clear that our knowledge of God is really at the very heartbeat of whether we will be evangelists or not.

[5 : 08] Because if we don't know God, if we don't have the fear of God, if we don't have a proper understanding of who God is, then we're not going to tell anybody. We're not going to have that sense of urgency.

If we do not lay hold upon the scripture and believe the scripture implicitly, then we're not going to have this burning heart that the apostle has. The apostle is somebody who was on fire for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that fire came about through his fear of the Lord, his knowing God. The apostle knew the one in whom he believed.

He says that. I know, he says, in whom I have believed. There was this great assurance, not only an assurance, but knowledge of the one.

And that, I believe, is at the very key to true evangelism. And so we find that this is what the apostle is talking about here.

[6 : 11] Because the apostle is very aware that people are dying and people are being lost all the time. And it's very clear from this that the Lord has entrusted the message of the gospel to us.

Isn't that an extraordinary thing? The Lord hasn't entrusted the message of the gospel to angels from heaven. God doesn't send down angels from heaven to go and visit people and to speak to them about salvation.

He has given that to us. He has entrusted this to us. And it's only in this lifetime that we have the opportunity to tell people about Jesus.

It's, I'll tell you, that's an activity that won't be in heaven. There's no evangelism in heaven. We will never be witnessing in heaven. We will never be going around to tell anybody, commending Jesus to anybody.

Evangelism belongs to this world. It is only now. This is our day. This is our opportunity. There is no other opportunity. And it's really a challenging thing because it's one of the things the Lord will require of us.

[7 : 24] What have you done with what you were given? Because one of the things that we are required to do is to share the gospel with others.

I know sometimes it's difficult. And I know different people have different abilities. Some people are gifted in this way. But every believer has his or her own gifts and their own ways of sharing, of witnessing, of living the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the apostle has this passion. And one of the things he highlights is the sincerity with which he does labor for the Lord.

And he says that knowing that we persuade others and we are not commending ourselves to you again and such like. And he's making it so clear in this that it is all based upon the truth.

And then he says, for if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. And as the apostle is preaching and ministering and evangelizing, that's obviously one of the accusations that was leveled against him.

[8 : 41] We read about that. And they say, Paul, who was it? One of the rulers said to him, much learning has made you mad. And it was one of the accusations that was leveled against the apostle.

They said, you're mad. You really, you've lost the plot. They do, you're a madman. And Paul says, well, so be it. If that's the way what people think.

I'm prepared that people will think I am mad in order that I will bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to people. And I'm sure that there are many people who think you and I are mad.

Because they say, how come you live your life, basing your life, basing your future on someone you can't see?

And, you know, there's so many people who say, I'm just not prepared to accept that life is all about somebody I can't see.

[9 : 42] You can read about them and all that. But do you mean to say that you're basing your whole life, you're governing, you're ruling your life, your life is being dictated to by someone you can't see?

And they'll say, you're mad. You're mad to try and live by faith. This is a practical world. It's a scientific world. You live your life based upon all these things that are tangible, these things that you

can see and feel and work with.

Not upon something that you can't see. And so people will accuse us of being mad in the same way. And, you know, sometimes Satan will come along and he'll whisper to you as well.

Can all these people be wrong and you right? Do you really? You know, in a dark moment, Satan will whisper to you.

And he'll try just, and let us not beat about the bush or try and think it doesn't happen because it does. And he'll say to you, do you really believe all that?

[10:53] He's a tempter. That's what he did in Eden. Do you? Did? All is coming with a question. And so we've got to be aware of his wiles, of his attacks, of his subtlety.

And so this accusation was leveled against Paul that he was mad. But Paul is talking here. Then he moves on and he says, For the love of Christ controls us.

That can also be translated, It constrains us. And that's what Paul is saying. Look, you might think I'm mad, But I'll tell you, it's the love of Christ in my heart.

The love of Christ is so burning in my heart that it's reaching out to you. And I am imploring you, I want you to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. That's really what he's saying here.

And then in verses 14 and 15, Paul is really emphasizing how Christ died and rose again. And you can see that part of the message, the Christian faith, is not so much what God is asking us to do as reminding us of what God has actually done for us.

[12:06] And I think that's important for us also to remember. That at the very center of it all is what God has done for us. And then Paul talks there about in verse 16, From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh, even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh.

See, Paul had lived at the same time as Jesus. Paul was alive when Jesus was in this world. Paul knew about Jesus as a man. And the knowledge that Paul had then of Jesus was not good.

In fact, he hated the Lord Jesus. And he hated everything about him. And there's no doubt that as he was then Saul, he would have been one of the people who would have rejoiced at the death of Jesus.

Because Paul, or Saul, he was part of the instigator. He was involved in the first martyrdom of Stephen. The men who stoned Stephen to death, they laid their clothes at the feet of Saul.

Saul was party to this. He was involved. And what he witnessed on that day in the death of Stephen, rather than being impressed by the saintly submission of Stephen before his accusers, of Stephen actually saying that he was seeing into heaven and seeing Jesus, the blood of Stephen actually fired Saul up, so that Saul became the main persecutor.

[13:43] It seemed to have spurred him on and galvanized all the hatred that was down in Saul's heart to hate Jesus and the cause of Jesus. But we know the Lord didn't leave Saul in that way.

And Jesus meant, we mentioned that this morning, that there's only one of two ways that God deals with his enemies. He will either deal with them in judgment, and he will trample his enemies into the dust.

There will come a day when God will display his authority and his power, and he will make all his enemies his footstool. All those who today are railing upon God and laughing against God, mocking him, that's what he, it's one, he'll either do that, or he will come and meet them and turn them around as he did with Saul.

And that's one of the wonderful things. And that's what goes on, because verse 17, the apostle says, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. And I think that's one of the wonderful things we have to lay hold upon. We're a new creation.

[14:56] Because, you know, this again is very essential in the whole sphere of evangelism. The apostle Paul, as he went out, He went into Corinth, and Corinth was the darkest city.

Whatever you wanted to do, you could do in Corinth. There were no bounds. There were no restraints. And as Paul looked around that city, there must have been a sense of helplessness. But God came to him and said, You know, Paul, I have many souls in this city. What a boost that must have been to the apostle. And so Paul preached and Paul labored.

And the Lord worked. And the point is this, that it's the same Lord, and he makes people a new creation.

Because we have a habit of looking at people and saying, Oh, you know, they could never become a Christian. Have you ever done that? You've looked at somebody and you've said, Ah, that person

could never become a Christian.

[15 : 59] And what we're doing is, we're making an assessment and a judgment about that person because of the kind of person they are. We might say, Ah, he's a hard man. He's somebody who's had no church background, no church influence.

There's no point in speaking to him or to her because they won't understand. Well, the point is this, that salvation is not something we conjure up ourselves.

It's not something that we decide to do. If it was, then, we wouldn't have much hope. Salvation is God's work.

And God is the one who, who, through, this is the amazing thing, through his own word that we share, through the influence of people, this is how extraordinary it is that God uses us to bring the word, to share the word, to live the word.

And he makes people a new creation. So never, ever, ever look at anybody and say, write off.

Impossible. No point. The history of the church is full of people who would very easily have been written off.

[17 : 24] There are many, many great saints today who were once great, great, great sinners. And the Lord loves changing sinners into saints.

He has continued to, he's done it all through the past and he's still doing it today. So that is what we are to do. We're to go forward looking to the Lord. Not looking at people as impossibilities, but looking at them as possibilities for the Lord to change hearts.

It's a new creation. Just like in the, at the very beginning. Into the nothingness. Into the emptiness. darkness. God spoke. And he brought into being what had never been before. Into the darkness. God said, let there be light and there was light.

A creation. Marvelous. And that's exactly what he's doing within souls. Into the darkness. God is speaking. Let there be light and there is light.

[18 : 29] That's what's happened to so many of you in here. That the light of the gospel entered into your heart. You saw. You accepted.

You believed. And so this is part of the great spur to the apostle where he is, where he is seeing all the possibilities and all the potential. And then we see that Paul is so aware that this ministry that he has is one of reconciliation.

It's a beautiful word. To reconcile. I suppose it's part of the problem in society is that there's so much in the way of breakup.

Breakup in relationships, in homes, in families, in communities, in the church, at work. You take it on to a grander scale internationally. The breakup of relationships between countries.

That's why there's wars. And that is why God sent his son into this world. Because our relationship to him was broken. And we couldn't find our way back.

[19 : 36] And so Jesus came to reconcile us to God. And this is what Paul is all about. He says, this is the ministry of reconciliation.

And you know that when we think about that, that's what people want. You know there are a lot of people and they don't know what they want. But this is what they want. They want to be reconciled to God. They don't know they want to be reconciled to God.

But there's something missing in their lives. They don't know what it is. This is what it is. And that is why it is so important to bring this message of reconciliation.

Because it's the only way for people's lives that are broken to be healed. And so the apostle is saying, this is the great work.

And so then he says, therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. And an ambassador is somebody who represents another, represents a country, represents a kingdom.

[20 : 35] The ambassador, I suppose you could say it's in, sometimes you could look at it in two ways. There's a negative message about it and there's a positive message. The negative is, if we're to say they're not, the ambassador is not to give his own message.

If you were an ambassador, if you were set as an ambassador for this country to another country, you wouldn't go there and sort of meet up with the, who's ever in control and power and sort of give your own message and tell them what you think.

You're there to represent the country, represent the queen. You would go there and you'd say, well, this is the message I have been given. And so the apostle is saying, that's what we're about.

We are not to bring our own message. And again, the ambassador is not to think lightly of the message that he brings because you're there represents a great honor to represent your own country.

And we are not to think lightly of the message. Some people do. Some people water down this message. You know, there are people who think that the gospel is part of the Bible and they say, you know, it's too harsh.

[21 : 55] Really? This is God's word. We do not have the right ever to say, I'm going to change this. I want to make it more palatable.

I want to make it such that this might cause offense. Yes, the gospel does cause offense. This is the word of God. And so we are not to treat it lightly.

And we will never treat it lightly if the fear of God is within our heart. It goes back to what the apostle is saying. That's the key. Verse 11. Therefore, knowing the fear or the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

We persuade people. It is because we know the Lord. And so we will never treat this message lightly. Again, the ambassador must never seek to detract from the message.

In other words, when the ambassador goes there, he doesn't try to steal the show. The ambassador doesn't want to be the sort of the main focus. That's not his role or her role.

[22 : 59] it is to represent the one who has been sent, who has sent them. And so it is for ourselves. We are not in this for ourselves.

If ever you are evangelizing or seeking to bring or to share the gospel, it is not for you. It is not so that if somebody is converted or somebody begins to show interest that you sort of said, oh, you know, that was me.

I did this and I did that and I did. No, it is not about us. We are never to get in the way. But we are there seeking to honor and to glorify the Lord.

And so the ambassador is somebody who has to go positively wherever he or she is sent. And that is what we have always got to be saying to the Lord.

Lord, what will you have me to do? Where will you have me to go? Remember what the Lord said to Jeremiah when he was a young man? He said to Jeremiah, you shall go to all that I shall send you and whatever I command you, that is what you will speak.

[24 : 16] Again, an ambassador is somebody who is always seeking to defend the honor of the king or queen or whoever it is that sends them. And so it is for us.

The honor of our God is important to us. We love him. And I think it's always an evidence, a mark of a believer is when you hear people putting down on God, it hurts, doesn't it?

If you love the Lord, if you love somebody, you don't like hearing that person being criticized. and when you love the Lord, it goes like a knife into your heart.

When you hear people mocking or making fun of God, these are evidences of your love for him. And so there is this where you're seeking to uphold the honor of the one that you represent.

And so the apostle is saying, we are, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us. Is that not humbling? That God is making his appeal to people through us?

[25 : 28] And so he then says, we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Here is one of the great beseeching notes in the apostles' appeal.

He's saying, we implore you. You know, he couldn't put it any more strongly than that. He's really saying, with all my heart, with everything that I have within my being, I am pleading with you, be reconciled to God.

And you can only be reconciled to God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. Well, will you tonight?

Or are you going to just turn away? It's a solemn thing, because there is no other way.

Let us pray. O Lord, we pray that this great gospel that we're so used to hearing, this message that we're so familiar with, we pray that the familiarity that we have of it will not be lost upon us.

[26 : 49] Help us to remember that the gospel is either softening or hardening. it's a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. And we pray that it might be life for every single one of us.

O Lord, we pray that nobody here will be lost. We pray that we might all find safety in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, bless our homes and our families and all whom we love. Watch over us and keep us, we pray, take away all our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. The concluding psalm is Psalm 130.

Psalm 130 and it's the Scottish Psalter. And the tune is Martyrdom.

We sing the whole psalm. It's on page 421. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried my voice, Lord, do thou hear, and to my supplication's voice, give an attentive ear.

[28 : 01] Lord, who shall stand if thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, but yet with thee forgivenesses that feared thou mayest be. Down to the last version, plenteous redemption is ever found with him, and from all his iniquities he Israel shall redeem.

130, the whole psalm, Lord, from the depths. Lord, from the depths to thee I cry, my voice, Lord, you'll hear, hear, unto my supplication's voice, give an attentive ear.

Lord, who shall stand if thou, O Lord, choose mark iniquity, but yet with thee forgivenesses that fear thou mayest be.

I wait for God, my soul doth wait, my hope is in his word, more than they lot for morning watch, my soul wait for the Lord.

I say more than they that to watch, the morning light to see.

[30 : 34] Let Israel open the Lord, for with him mercies be.

mercies me. And plentious redemption is ever found with him and from all his iniquities in Israel shall reign him.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.