

MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION

2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2 - Series: Ministers of a New Covenant
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 3/15/20, Matt Heerema

Good morning! Please open your bible with me and turn to 2 Corinthians, chapter 5.

Last week we opened with a question: What does it mean to be a Christian? And I'd like to start there again this week. I hope those of you who joined us last week have been able to give that some further thought. What does it mean to be a Christian? Are you one? How do you know? If you know you aren't one, what is it that you think that you aren't?

Our passage last week, which we're going over again today, deals with this. Have that question in your mind as we read it.

2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2 (ESV)

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

18 All this is from God, who **through Christ** reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, **in Christ** God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that **in him** we might become the righteousness of God.

6:1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day salvation.

A Christian is someone who has been reconciled to God through Christ, and has been given a ministry of reconciliation.

Verse 18 says that God is up to two things in dealing with us, these things are inextricably related, and last week we focused on the first part: that God is reconciling us to himself, and this week we are focusing on the second: that along with this gift of reconciliation, he is giving us a ministry, a work to do, the ministry of reconciliation. He is saving us for a purpose.

Let's first review what it means that God has reconciled us to himself.

REVIEW: THE GREAT EXCHANGE

See verses 19 and 21. These verses spell out an important part of a larger thought that has been called "The Great Exchange." A phrase that was coined in the second century of the church. Last week we said that this idea of "exchange" comes from this word "reconciliation". It is an accounting term. It has to do with the clearing of debt.

Look at verses 19 and 21, what is God doing for us: "Not counting their trespasses against them." And making "him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God".

We talked about the two sides of the ledger, that on our side we have our sin and trespass against God: failure to obey his commands and more fundamentally, unbelief, lack of trust in him as our creator.

Christ's side is just the opposite, obedience to God's commands, full trust in the Father, and additionally, sacrificial payment/atonement for the sins of the world.

And the amazing news of this great exchange, the amazing reconciliation that God is doing: is exchanging our sin and trespass for his righteousness. When we sing about Amazing Grace, this is what we're singing about!

Today we're going to dive into the second statement in verse 18, God has given us a ministry of reconciliation.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

The word ministry is one of those nice “churchy” words and needs a little unpacking, and if you’ve been with us in previous weeks you’ve heard us say that ministry basically just means “task” or a way you “serve”. It’s the same word as the word for “deacon” and it means service or a servant. Basically it is saying that God has given us a task in his work of reconciliation. What is that task?

The way Paul describes it here is primarily through the illustration of being an ambassador.

Ambassadors

So I know that there are kids in the room with some of you this morning. So kids, when I was talking about this sermon with my family on Friday my five year old asked “what is an ambassador?” Good question! An ambassador is an official representative of a king or a kingdom or a country. For example, the United States has ambassadors all around the world. And other countries have ambassadors to our country. An ambassador is someone from one country, who lives in another country, to be someone who communicates with that other country.

And Paul says, this is what we are like. Christians are from a foreign kingdom, the kingdom of God, and they happen to live in a different kingdom, the kingdom of the world... and a Christian’s job is to represent the Kingdom of God to the rest of the world.

Embassy

Now, where does an ambassador live, in that other country? In an embassy. An embassy is a special place. Because an embassy is a part of the foreign country that is carved out specially and said, when you come in here, you are no longer in that foreign country, you are now in the country that embassy belongs to. So, if you are traveling overseas as an American, and you get in trouble, you can go to the American embassy, and if you go inside, you are no longer in that foreign country, you are now in America.

And this is an important part of this metaphor, in Paul’s mind. Ambassadors live in an embassy. They hang out in an embassy. That embassy is the church. When you are together with the church, the people, you are on the turf of the Kingdom of God.

This is why we value meeting together in person so much. And why this time is so unusual for us. When we are together with God's people, we are in the embassy of the kingdom of God. And we remind ourselves of which kingdom we are actually citizens.

Resident Aliens

But ambassadors don't spend all their time in the safe zone of the embassy. Their job is to go out of the embassy and interact with the foreign country they are sent to! This is maybe the most crucial part of this metaphor, at least in this passage. We are to interact with the world as resident aliens.

When ambassadors go out into the foreign country they are sent to, they stick out. It is obvious that they are not from around here! They look funny in their country's clothing. They have funny ways of talking with their foreign accent. They might even smell funny with different hygiene habits, different foods they eat and different types of perfumes and colognes.

All of these images are in Paul's mind. We look funny. Last week we read in Isaiah 61, the image of us being clothed in robes of righteousness. We smell funny: we are the aroma of Christ everywhere we go. And we talk funny: we speak about God's message of reconciliation.

How does an ambassador conduct themselves in that foreign country? They strive to represent their king and kingdom well. They strive to communicate the ideals and values of their king.

Ambassadorial Conduct

People know a Christ-follower by the way they act and the way they talk, that "you ain't from around here, are you?" By the way we treat each other and by the way we interact with the world, in self-sacrificial, loving, service.

Paul says in this passage that an ambassador for Christ operates like this:

"We regard no one according to the flesh." - We see people as God sees them. Not as objects to be used, not as rivals or competition, or somehow in our way, but rather as

fellow creatures in need of a relationship with their creator. We seek to serve them, love them, and tell them or remind them of the good news that their creator God loves them and seeks to reconcile with them through his son, Jesus.

They realize that **God is making his appeal to the world through us**. Christians bear a message from God! Ambassadors know they have a task. Christians know they have a ministry. We are to be imploring people through our actions and words, to see who God is, and to know him, and to trust him.

Christians, every single one of us, are ambassadors for Christ. God is making his appeal to the world through us. We are to implore those we come into contact with to be reconciled to God. We have a mission, and we have a message.

How does this look practically?

An important aspect of this illustration that often gets lost in churches like ours in this past century, comes into play when Paul says “we” and “us” in this passage. **He has a team in mind**. Each team member with a role to play.

Jesus says we will be fishers of men. Kids in the room, what kinds of things do you need to go fishing? Tell someone in the room there with you. Now for your fishing fans in the room, you probably have something in your head that looks a little like this, right? (Show slide of fishing.) - But the disciples were professionals, and we know from the narrative accounts in the Gospels that they ran a fishing business, they were industrial fishermen. Fishing was a group activity for them! They each had a role to play. Someone steered the boat, others tended the sails, others worked together to haul in the nets, etc.

And Paul had his apostolic team, each with their own role to play. Not all of them were preaching, and not all of them writing scripture! Some of them handled more of the logistics. We don't know all the specifics, but we do know he wrote extensively on the variety of gifts for the building of the body. And this is true of us in the church. More on that in a minute.

The reality is that the day to day life of an ambassador is not filled with miraculous moments or constant proclamation of the gospel door to door, or on campus handing

out pamphlets. The day to day looks a lot more like trips to Aldi. Cleaning toilets. Working a job. Filling the car with gas.

The question is, when you walk into Aldi, when you put your quarter in the shopping cart, and walk around the isles looking for toilet paper, what do other people you interact with (and are you interacting with people?) see? Do they see someone who looks different, talks different, and smells different? Or do they not notice you because they are just like the rest of world?

APPLICATION

- Now is the day! Be reconciled!
- And be part of the plan! Be part of the embassy, be an ambassador.
 - Context shifts to put you in context
 - Relationship building
 - One person per year?
 - Group fishing as a community group (Saturate)
 - One another ministry with a community group
- Sorrow and Conviction, but hope not guilt