

Text: II Corinthians 5:16-21

Title: “The Ultimate Seeker”

INTRODUCTION

Let’s open our Bibles to II Corinthians 5:16-21. Over the next three weeks we’re going to take this passage of Scripture and turn it around and around to view it like the precious gem that it is. There are many facets to this gem and I want you to value the truth that is contained in these amazing verses. And from these verses I want to challenge us about the way we see the people who are all around us every day ... people who are in our circle. Read text.

“REACHING YOUR CIRCLE VIDEO”

I’m praying that God will open your eyes, your heart and your arms to the people in the circle where He has placed you. You are not there by accident. God has placed you there. You may chafe at the fact that there are some people in your circle that you don’t like. Maybe their lifestyle is repulsive to you. Maybe they are so different from you that you really don’t think you have a thing in the world in common with them. You’re just ambivalent towards them, or you just outright despise them. But there they are in your circle. And if you believe that God is sovereign in all the matters of our life, then you have to believe that God has orchestrated your life in such a way as to bring them to you for what He wants to do through you to touch them. It’s no accident that they are in your circle.

A2C groups will officially start back tonight. We’ve made it possible for our A2C groups to focus on “Reaching Your Circle.” For the first three weeks most of the groups will be doing a study called “Becoming a Contagious Christians.” If you’re not in an A2C there’s a brochure at the end of each pew to tell you about that. Or you can register online. Your Sunday Morning Bible Study leaders can help you get connected to a group.

Also, if you’re not connected to an A2C group yet, we’ll provide the same three-week equipping seminar on Sundays at 6pm starting this evening in W201/204. Come sharpen your skills in reaching your circle.

ILLUSTRATION – When I first got right with the Lord as a college freshman I was frustrated that my family didn’t share my excitement about the Lord. I was going to church every Sunday and they weren’t. I was interested in spiritual things, and as far as I knew they weren’t. Slowly I developed a bitterness about that. I felt that they were rejecting me. And I wanted them to change. But I was oblivious to the fact that I was more bothered by their rejecting me than I was that they were missing out on all the great things that God wanted to do in their lives. God slowly began to change my heart. I wanted to change them, but only God could change them. But He would use me in that process, once I got over my own selfishness and prejudice toward people who were far from God.

And that is at the heart of the Scripture we have before us. Notice first...

1. THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE (vv.16-17)

Maybe you look around you and see people who are so far from God, who have no interest in spiritual things, and you wonder if they could ever change. Could they ever be reconciled to God? Could they ever change? That's what vv.16-17 are about.

2 Corinthians 5:16 - So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

You need to know something about the context of this passage. There are two letters in the NT addressed from the Apostle Paul to the church in ancient city of Corinth. Paul had an interesting relationship with the Corinthians. They were a troubled church. They were big on personal appearances ... whether or not someone *appears* to be powerful or charismatic or one with authority. And they were critical of Paul because he didn't seem to measure up to the so-called "super apostles" who came to Corinth from time to time. And Paul writes this letter to defend his ministry before the Corinthians who tended to look at people "from a worldly point of view." That is they looked at outward appearances rather than at the things that matter to God.

So Paul jumps into this matter of how we look at other people. He confessed that there has been a change in his life. He no longer sees people the way he used to see them. A change has happened in his heart because he has seen the possibility that change can happen in the lives of others. Why? Because...

2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

We have to learn to see people from a spiritual perspective. Who they are, or are not, in Christ is what matters more than any other factor about human beings. It's the only thing that matters in eternity ... not how they vote, not the color of their skin, not the clothes they wear, or where they live. As you think about the people in your circle, the one thing that has to matter more than anything else you think about them is this: Are they in Christ? Are they a new creation because they are in Christ?

ILLUSTRATION – I want to challenge you to develop a new habit ... the habit of thinking seriously about every person you come into contact with. As you sit in a restaurant, or in the waiting room of a doctor's office, or in stands at a football game, or in the check-out line at the store, think about where those people are in Christ. Think about the possibility that they could become new people in Christ.

Honestly, have you given up on someone? Have you lost the hope that they could change? Have you even lost the desire that they would change? I tell you, in Christ there is the possibility of change. He can change a person's character and behavior. He can change the whole trajectory of a person's life. Do you believe that? Well that's exactly what II Corinthians 5:17 is about ... the possibility of change.

Maybe you're looking at your own life today and thinking, "Can I ever change? Can I ever overcome this addiction? Can I ever get beyond my past? Maybe you've tried and tried, and you've failed over and over.

I want you to notice the only way a person can change. It is found in the words “in Christ.” If anyone is *in Christ* they are a new creation.” And what does it mean to be “in Christ”? It means to be united and identified with Christ so that what is true of Him is true of me. It means to be so connected to Him that I draw my very existence from being connected to Him. And that happens when a person is saved.

ILLUSTRATION – Suppose you need to get from here to London in a day. It’s impossible for you to walk; there’s a huge ocean between you and your destination. And you can’t swim that far, and if you could it would take forever. So humanly speaking it is impossible for you to get from here to London in a day ... unless you can get in something that will get you there. So you go to the airport and you get on an airplane and in 6-8 hours you land in London. So you are “in the airplane.” And “in the airplane” you can do things that it was impossible for you to do otherwise. It’s the same way with being “in Christ.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

God, through Christ, can take a person who is the most hopeless, helpless, lost person and make them a “new creation.” That word “new” doesn’t just mean “recent,” like “I got a new iPhone.” That is, you got the most recent version of an iPhone. The word used here in v.17 for “new” means something that didn’t exist before. When a person comes to Christ they don’t just get a make-over; they become a whole new person ... a “new creation.”

EXAMPLE: When God created the universe He did so using no existing materials. He created everything new from nothing. And that’s the image of what happens to a person when they get “in Christ.”

2 Corinthians 5:17b - The old has gone, the new has come!

In Christ, all those old things that used to dominate and control your life are gone. The old you is gone. Now you are in Christ.

Romans 8:1 - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Ephesians 1:3 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

All this change happens when we are saved and “in Christ.”

ONSCREEN: This change commences with salvation, continues throughout life and culminates in heaven.

This is the change that you and I have experienced as followers of Jesus Christ. And that radical change is possible for every person you know. But where does this power for change come from? How is this change possible? Well, the next thing we see is...

2. THE POWER FOR CHANGE (v.18)

2 Corinthians 5:18a - All this is from God...

This whole business of reaching our circle doesn't start with us. "All this is from God..." It starts with God. Like the first Creation of the universe, the new Creation of a person in Christ is all from God.

2 Corinthians 5:18 - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

So for this change to happen in our lives we needed first be reconciled to God. And God took the initiative in doing that. We were enemies of God. We had rejected Him. We had sinned against His way and His truth, and so were the objects of His holy wrath.

But God, in love, did something amazing. "He reconciled us to himself through Christ." That means through the coming of Jesus Christ, His death on the Cross and His resurrection from the dead, God made a way for that relationship to change.

And all this is from God!

It's not uncommon to hear people talk about reaching "seekers." That term has been used to describe people who are far from God, but have some interest in spiritual things. But I want you to see that it is God who is the Ultimate Seeker. The big deal in all this is not that a person wants to know God and comes seeking after Him. The big deal in all this is that we are hopelessly lost, and God comes seeking after us. He is the Ultimate Seeker.

Remember the account in Genesis where Adam and Eve had sinned against God?

Genesis 3:8 - Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Genesis 3:9 - But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

God went looking for the two who had sinned against Him. And since that day He has been the Ultimate Seeker.

The Gospels tell us the story of a crooked man by the name of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was coming to his town. He climbed up in a tree to seek Jesus, but what we learn is that really Jesus was coming to town to seek Zacchaeus. And Jesus saw Zacchaeus and said, "Zacchaeus, you come down, for I'm going to your house to today, for I'm going to your house today." Now some of the religious leaders were critical of Jesus for spending time with people like Zacchaeus. And Jesus answered them:

Luke 19:10 - For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

Here’s what I want you to remember about this:

ONSCREEN - No one seeks God who isn’t first sought by God.

We never seek after anyone who hasn’t first been sought after by God.

Now reconciliation does two great things. First, it changes the relationship between God and man because God’s holy wrath against sin is satisfied through the work of Christ on the Cross. Through the work of the Cross, Jesus Christ has brought man and God together again. God has been reconciled and has turned His face in love toward the lost world.

The second thing reconciliation is that it changes the person. It doesn’t just change the relationship we have with God ... it changes us. When we are reconciled to God He changes our heart to where we no longer see ourselves as enemies of God.

Romans 5:10 - For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

CONCLUSION

So there’s the possibility of change and the power for change through what God did in reconciling us to Himself. But then there’s an interesting twist here.

2 Corinthians 5:18 - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

And the Bible says that God gave us the ministry of reconciliation. The word for “give” means to give something of value to someone else. God has entrusted this precious ministry to us. In His grace, God, the Ultimate Seeker, desires and designs to use us in the process of reconciling the world to Himself.

ILLUSTRATION – Think of it in these terms. In baseball RBI means a “Run Batted In,” and it’s one of the most important statistics in baseball. When a player’s stats are given it will most often include how many RBI’s he has. An RBI is when one player does something that moves another player around the bases to score a run. Obviously, a home run with others on base is the quickest way to move them around the bases. They can just easily trot home. The same is true with a triple or even a double. But sometimes just a single will drive home a run. You can even fly out, and drive in a run. It is called a "sacrifice" fly because the batter intends to help a teammate score a run, while sacrificing his own ability to do so.

Maybe you and I can think about RBI’s, not as “Runs Batted In,” but as “Rebels Brought In.” That’s the ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us.