

Text: II Corinthians 5:16-21

Title: “Christ’s Ambassadors”

Let’s open our Bibles once again to II Corinthians 5:16. During these days we’re focusing on and equipping for “Reaching Your Circle.” Many of our A2C groups are focusing on this, as well as a class on Sunday nights at 6pm. I encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities to sharpen your tools for sharing Jesus Christ with others. To keep it before us visually we’re also providing you with a simple circle to keep in your wallet or purse or Bible. It will help you pray and think about those in your circle of relationships that God wants to reach through you. Read text.

As I said last week, we’re spending some extended time in this passage. I aim to awaken you to the reality of something that is going on all around us that we are often blind to. I aim to awaken you to what God is doing all around you every day ... something He is doing in the life of every person you see (in the car next to you on the freeway, in the aisle at Wal-Mart, in the hallway at school) ... everybody. I aim to awaken you to something that God is doing this very moment, not just here in Tarrant County, but in the jungles of Africa, in the mega-cities of India, and in the villages of Great Britain. What is this reality? It is that God is actively working to reconcile His enemies to Himself. And He’s doing it through you and through me.

Last week we talked about the tremendous possibility and power for change in a person’s life and so we no longer see people the way we used to see them.

2 Corinthians 5:16a - So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

Why see people differently because of the amazing possibility for change that is seen in v.17.

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

And this change is possible because...

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

I want to focus on that “ministry of reconciliation” that God has given and entrusted to us. Now jump to v.20 where Paul describes the ministry of reconciliation that God started by sending His Son, and that God is continuing through us.

2 Corinthians 5:20 - We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

ILLUSTRATION – Historians tell us that in the ancient Roman Empire during which the NT was written there were two kinds of provinces: senatorial provinces and imperial provinces. Senatorial provinces were made up of people who were at peace with Rome, and thus they were easily ruled. There were no troops stationed in these provinces. They were called senatorial provinces because the Roman Senate had responsibility for governing them. Imperial provinces were different. They

were provinces which were turbulent, even dangerous, and therefore had Roman troops stationed in them. The man who was responsible for governing these provinces was given the title that is translated in English as “ambassador.” He was the Emperor’s direct and personal representative to this hostile region. The ambassador represented the will of the Emperor to the people in this province, and he also represented the needs of the people to the Emperor.

ILLUSTRATION – Just this past week we had an international incident that involved our US ambassador to Libya. In a violent attack on the embassy there U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens was killed. He was there representing the policies and the interests of the United States of America. News reports told of how angry mobs stormed the embassy and killed our ambassador and three others.

And the Bible uses this imagery to describe who we are as the people of God. We are Christ’s ambassadors to this world that is hostile to the will of God. We are citizens of heaven, but we are set in this world to be the personal representatives of our eternal King. Just like Christopher Stevens we live in a world that speaks a different language and doesn’t understand the ways of our King. And we are here as Christ’s ambassadors to plead with them to be reconciled to God. And just as Christopher Stevens laid down his life for that cause, we are called to lay down our lives for a far greater cause.

So God has done something *for* us ... reconciled us to Himself. He’s done something *in* us ... made us a new creation. And He’s doing something *through* us ... we are Christ’s ambassadors. So what does that mean for you as you go about “reaching your circle”?

1. AN AMBASSADOR HAS A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE KING (v.18).

2 Corinthians 5:18a - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...

The “us” who are reconciled are the “we” who are Christ’s ambassadors. This work isn’t just for the NT apostles, like Paul. It is for all who have a relationship with King Jesus.

ILLUSTRATION – In our men’s study on Wednesday night we were talking about courageously leading our families. And the statement we came back to over and over was “you can’t be right with *them* until you’re right with *Him*.”

God reconciled us to Himself by sending Christ to live a sinless life, then die as a substitute for our sins and then to be resurrected from the dead. So on the basis of the death of Christ, God’s holy anger against sinful man was satisfied, so it’s possible now for that one who was once an enemy to have a relationship with God. Reconciliation doesn’t mean that God just ignored our sin; it means He judged our sin completely through the death of His Son. And this reconciliation doesn’t mean just a cease fire between two enemies. It means a total removal of the sin that stood between us and God, so that we might have a relationship with Him.

Now it says that God reconciled us to Himself through Christ. But that doesn’t mean that it is automatic for us. No one is automatically saved.

ILLUSTRATION – No one is automatically saved, just like no one automatically knows something. It would be like someone thinking that they could sleep with their school books under their pillow at night and expect that they don't have to study for their test.

There's a choice that we must make. Someone has to tell us the Good News and then we must make a choice what we will do with that. This is what it means to put our trust in Christ. And when we enter into that relationship with God through Christ we immediately are drafted as Christ's ambassador.

2. AN AMBASSADOR RESPONDS TO THE MISSION OF THE KING (vv.18-19).

2 Corinthians 5:18b - And gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

When it says that God "gave us the ministry of reconciliation..." it means something that happened in the past. You see, the *ministry* of reconciliation was given us at the *moment* of our reconciliation to God. And then it says...

2 Corinthians 5:19 - God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

The "world" is the cosmos ... the world of human beings. And that whole world is on God's heart, and He deposits His people throughout the world of human beings to be His ambassadors. Now our "world," in part, is Tarrant County. Are you aware of what has happened in Tarrant County and Fort Worth in the last ten years?

SLIDE – PICTURE OF A CROWD

Just think about the land where our King has sent us as His ambassadors ... Tarrant County. You may think, "Tarrant County ... lots of big churches, in the heart of the Bible belt, several seminaries and Christian colleges ... not much business for an ambassador for Christ. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

SLIDE – Did you know?

Tarrant County Population in 2002 = 1,526,403

Tarrant County Population in 2012 = 2,290,034

10 year growth = 67%

SLIDE – Did you know?

Average weekly attendance in all Tarrant County churches = 300,000

Unchurched (probably non-believers) in Tarrant County = 1,900,000

These are people within driving distance of our church. Now that number includes non-evangelical churches where the Gospel isn't preached. So we might safely assume that about 1 out of 10 people you meet in a crowd at a football game or at a concert are non-believers.

SLIDE – PICTURE OF PEOPLE IN A CROWD WITH 90% OF THE FACES HIGHLIGHTED

I'm reminded of the Apostle Paul in the book of Acts where we are told that he was in the great city of Athens and he reasoned in the synagogues of the Jews as well as in the "marketplace." I have stood among the ruins of the old *agora* or "marketplace" in Athens. It would have been an incredibly busy and active place. Do you realize that in less than a year our church is going to be in the heart of a marketplace with the opening of the Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market just across the street. What an opportunity that will be for us.

Notice that v.20 does not say believers *should be* ambassadors, but that they *are* ambassadors. It's just like Jesus saying, "You *are* the salt of the earth ... You *are* the light of the world." In the mind of our King, that's who we are.

God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, and He has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. As Christ's ambassadors, we don't have the freedom or luxury to ignore that. We have to respond to the mission of the King.

3. AN AMBASSADOR REFLECTS THE HEART OF THE KING (vv.18-20).

The honor of a country is in the hands of its ambassador. The honor of the king is in the hands of his ambassador. And if we are ambassadors for Christ, our lives must reflect the heart of our king. Now I want you to catch the heart of our Great King in all of this. Look at it...

2 Corinthians 5:20 - We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Here is God pleading. The pleading voice of God comes from a pleading heart. It's amazing. Here is the omnipotent God who has all power in heaven and in earth committed to Him ... pleading! But don't misunderstand. This is not the pleading of weakness, but of strong love. This is not a rebel begging to be accepted. This is not the offender begging the offended to take him back. But here is Almighty God in Jesus Christ breaking through all the patterns of human relationships. Here is God Almighty in heaven bending down to this little planet in which there has been a total rebellion against His rule, and saying to the rebel race who lies helpless at His feet, "I beg you to be reconciled to God."

What a heart! Do we possess that heart? Do we possess that character? Does that heart push aside every other consideration in our lives, that we would rather die than to misrepresent the heart and the values of our King?

ILLUSTRATION – I was meeting with one of young men last week and we were talking about his efforts to build witnessing relationships in his new job. And part of that is that he is trying to discover the spiritual condition of his coworkers ... are they already believers or not? He talked about how it is difficult because there's one who says that she listens to a radio preacher, but then her foul language causes him to wonder where she stands with Christ.

What does your behavior, your language, your priorities, your character say about your Savior to those who are in your circle? Does it make them want to know more about the One who has made such a change in your life?

Why? Because an ambassador reflects the heart of the King.

4. AN AMBASSADOR RELAYS THE MESSAGE OF THE KING (vv.19-20).

2 Corinthians 5:20 - We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Literally it means, "Get reconciled to God and do it now!" There's a note of urgency to this message.

An ambassador doesn't just sit in the embassy. He relates to the nation to which he is assigned. He has to know the customs of that land. He has to be able to relate to the leaders of that land.

ILLUSTRATION – One of the guys I run with on Saturday mornings told me about an effort he was making to build a relationship with one of his coworkers who happens to be a big tennis fan. The problem is my friend knows nothing about tennis. So sat in front of the TV and watched the US Open a few weeks ago so that he would have that connection with his co-worker.

But then ultimately the King makes His appeal through us. We implore others to be reconciled to God. The voice of the ambassador is the voice of the king. He speaks with that kind of authority. And the pleading heart of the King is only made known through the voices of the redeemed.

That message must come through every *ministry* of our church. And it must come through every *member* of our church.

CONCLUSION

We look at the senseless violence of the Muslim mobs in Libya, and the senseless death of our ambassador there. And we might wonder what's the point of having ambassadors to these places that hate our country. And we might wonder the same thing about non-believers. What's the point? They don't care about our King, so write them off.

ILLUSTRATION – Last Friday evening we had a wonderful experience in what we called "Underground." It was an evening of solidarity with the persecuted church, particularly in India. We had a 30-minute conversation by Skype with a friend and partner in the India Baptist Society, Subba Rao. He told his inspiring testimony, and he gave us a report of some exciting things that are happening in Karnataka, and in the district of Mandya which our church has adopted, for which we pray, and to which we send funds to support trainers and church planters. You may recall that about 7 years ago there was a team of us who went to Mandya City to spend a week prayer walking and seeking God's direction as to how we could best invest in establishing churches in that region that is one of the most resistant places to the Gospel and to Christians. One day as we were in our hotel

meeting, praying and strategizing the phone rang. Our host Pastor Jacob answered the phone and I knew immediately something was wrong. He hung up and told us that it was an anonymous caller who said that he knew who we were and why we were there. He said that if we didn't leave town by dark that the hotel would be attacked and we would be harmed. We prayed and discussed what we should do. We determined that we didn't want to create problems for the few believers that were already living in Mandya City, and that it was best for us to leave town. But we had to wait about four hours for the bus to come from Bangalore to get us out. So we holed up in a hotel room with a police guard outside our door and we prayed for God's work in Mandya. I was discouraged. We had grand hopes for this partnership and it appeared that it was doomed from the beginning. As we loaded our bus with crowds looking on, we prayed for God to move in Mandya. Later we determined that it would be best to quietly send Indian trainers into Mandya so that they could work under the radar and not draw attention like a bunch of Americans would. We currently support five of those church planters/trainers, and they report to us of amazing progress that is being made. But last Friday night Subba Rao said something that caused my heart to leap within me. Just recently in Mandya City where our team was persecuted and harassed, in the city where we thought there was little hope of establishing a foothold for the Gospel, 250 believers gathered for a rally for Jesus Christ!

As Christ's ambassador, you may be rejected and become discouraged because the people in your circle are not interested in or are maybe hostile to the message to be reconciled to Christ. You remain a faithful to your King, and you'll get to heaven one day and perhaps you see someone who says, "Thank you for being faithful. I'm here today because of you."