

**Followers of Jesus expose others to his grace.**

This week I was brought back to my last post as a young adult pastor and specifically the prayers I regularly prayed for that ministry and our church. I often prayed for a “gospel infection” to spread among the young adults that would infect the church, our city, and beyond. I wanted to be patient zero, I remember telling the Lord.

What a time to reflect on those prayers as we hear concern about infection rates and try to define a disease we still don’t know much about! Do asymptomatic people spread it or not?! But we are acquainted with the church, the spread of Christianity from a city in the middle east to the whole world. So a gospel infection is certainly a spread we can be about and long for.

We do know that “asymptomatic Christianity doesn't spread...” Church Curmudgeon

So we want to know the symptoms of faith in Jesus, and get to infecting!

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**2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2**

This is the purpose of the church. This is knowing Jesus and making him known. These verses are the literary center of 2 Corinthians and they are the missional center of the church.

From the reminders of what has been recounted to the church; that God comforts his people that they would comfort others; that our plans are often overridden by God’s; that a grace drenched church extends forgiveness to repentant brothers and sisters; that our sufficiency is from God; that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom; that we are a people driven by love; living with a vision for the future; regarding people differently as new creations... All this is from God.

These things, the subjective or conscious results of being reconciled to God, flow from God into our hearts and minds through the word of reconciliation.

God who gives us purpose, reason, and lives to live.

Running through the text we see our role, the redemption that claims us, and our response to it.

## **1) Role**

Hinted at as our reality last week... This is what we live for, this is what we are made the church for. The ministry of reconciliation.

God has reconciled us through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. “The restoration of relationship.” Ultimately this is what Christianity is about, humanity experiencing the restored relationship with our Creator.

And here it is not merely personal, it is owned and shown for others to see as the Lord has entrusted to us the message, this good news.

We put forth the reconciliation God is working in Christ.

In modern Christianity, we have been sidelined by a posture of “private faith” or an overemphasis on a “personal relationship” which it certainly is, but it is meant to be exposed for others to see.

We prefer our faith to be an internal combustion engine that is improved and increases our performance, but God desires to make us bonfires, illuminating the people around us.

It is no small thing. This is a big deal and it is not restricted to “gifting” as if some are meant to be lights while others hide it under a bushel!

Our role has a title too, we are made “ambassadors for Christ.” God makes his appeal to the hearts and minds of other people through us.

God chooses to make his appeal through his people - what a privilege.

After grad school the first time, I had a keen interest to work in the foreign service. Career civil servants within the State Department that represent the United States abroad. To make it into the Foreign Service there are a number of stages to make it through. It begins with a test. I had a firm grasp of the facts and my area of focus within political science was foreign affairs. Russian negotiating style! So I excelled on the test.

Probably 6 to 8 months later I was asked to attend the in-person exam which was really being closely watched for a whole day by examiners as you and a group of other applicants worked through a number of projects and interviews to see who was most capable of eventually representing our country. I thought I was doing great, not too bossy with others, really trying to be a team player. But it was the interview where I bombed. I wasn't prepared, but more so, I hadn't translated the knowledge of facts and history with real-life application. I wasn't living out what I knew.

Ambassadors have to be able to speak as the nation - for the king as if it was his voice resounding. Paul uses this diplomatic title to increase our sense that we are representatives for Christ. Our words for him, his truth, his grace on our lips, and in our lives.

Paul lives this out. He stood in his Sovereign's stead and authority. And he tells the church (that's us) that it is our ministry as well.

This is why we go on about not being so wrapped up in other things that you lose the opportunity to share the gospel (4-month warning!)

Christianity then does not leave believers on the sideline. We don't get out of this duty, this responsibility. People are made elect (determined by God who will respond to his grace) and he activates election by the appeal of the ragtag group of saved people.

On mission every moment, always revealing our hope in how we live.

It can seem like work or a burden until we realize what makes us ambassadors.

## **2) Redemption**

God reconciling, giving us ministry by Jesus.

Verse 21 is the gospel in one sentence. **2 Corinthians 5:21** "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (ESV)

For our sake - in love God claims you, you benefit from this.

He made him to be sin who knew no sin - This is Jesus. Made a curse for our sin to be a substitute for us, meeting wrath against sin on the cross. This is imputation (big word); ascribing something to one by the virtue of a provided quality in another. Jesus takes on our sin.

**Galatians 3:13** “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— (ESV)

“Our rebellion is radical and incessant.” And he took every ounce of it on the cross.

Its fire season so we shouldn't do this now, but if you ever as a kid took a magnifying glass and oriented the sun just right, you could burn a leaf... or a bug if you were a boy... All analogies of becoming sin fall short... but imagine all of our sin concentrated and poured on Christ on the cross. Like a magnifying glass in the backyard with a leaf...

**1 Peter 2:24** “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (ESV)

For our sake, Christ takes on our sin... Wow! But there's more... that we might become the righteousness of God.

That we would be clothed in righteousness as to now stand before the very throne of God blameless, undefiled, redeemed. More than that the righteousness of God describes a new way of living. We live righteously because God has declared us righteous.

Paul envisions Christ as our representative, who, in dying and Rising, achieve reconciliation with God. As an analogy we may think of David, the representative Warrior, winning a great victory over Goliath for the benefit of the people.

He became our substitute and sacrifice.

"Things drastically change in light of the exchange of Christ's righteousness for our sin. Our legal standing before God has shifted from that of unrighteousness to righteousness. The status of our relationship with God has moved from conflict to reconciliation, ensuring peace and communion with God. Our very being is transferred from the impending death of this world to the promised life of God's new creational order, leading us to an increased appetite for that which pleases God in a growing distaste for that which does not please him." GTB

Not our work... Reconciliation is God's unassisted work.

This is our anchor, the grace of Christ for us. The absurdity of this! The miracle of this! He became sin so we could be made righteous.

Once we grasp the significance of the love of Christ for us, it will be a strong motivating force in our lives to spread his love abroad.

We live this - the life of ambassadors because we have been redeemed! And it stokes in us an ongoing response.

### **3) Response**

**2 Corinthians 6:1** “Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” (ESV)

Paul is expressing his ministry to the church and describing their ministry as well, but he also wants them to be responsive to the message of the grace of Christ. Appeals, don't receive grace in vain... Don't turn back from what you have believed, keep going. Carry it forward. Don't merely add “faith” to your plate but make it central, and let others see it.

If we think of Christianity as a chemical reaction - many of us approach it as if it should be a calm, nice, non-volatile change. Like a couple of drops of ink into water that subtly changes its color...

But Jesus comes and transforms us... like those experiments where a cup of irritant is added to a mix and towers of colored foam rise and fill the room! This is how noticeable the ambassadors for Christ are called to be.

Paul quotes Isaiah - reflecting on how God would reclaim his people and restore Israel... “in the day of salvation I have helped you.” Tying all of this to the prophetic promise.

And expresses an urgency of the message of the gospel. “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” We take it everywhere we go and with a spiritual urgency, we implore, plead with people to believe in Jesus, to experience this redemption. To join the corps of reconcilers.

This is the ignition of revival... and this is a prophetic moment in the history of the church, things are shifting and we are reclaiming our call, our role, our purpose as a people redeemed.

We are not helpless and alone as Christ's representatives. God has made us partners, co-workers with himself in his great rescue mission to reconcile the world to himself.

Ambassadors living as partners with God, “working together with him.” What grace this is, what empowerment to take the message of reconciliation near and far.

What a task we have... a genuine gift to give to others. "The gospel is not "reconcile yourselves." The gospel is "be reconciled." Receive reconciliation from God." Hughes - As dying men and women to other dying men and women...

He only ever uses those in need of redemption. He uses the weak to make his appeal... Paul, facing affliction but relentlessly spreading the gospel, seeing thousands infected by grace through his ministry. Peter, the guy who denies Jesus, is restored, then forgets big chunks of the gospel and is restored, goes on to be martyred with humility after a life of aggressive proclamation of the gospel.

Like the African Father, Augustine... a wretch, licentious, and under the thumb of the prevailing culture, is freed by the grace of Jesus, and establishes pillars that the church and philosophy will stand on even today.

Martin Luther, the guy who wasted the day repenting because of the inexhaustible list of sins, awakened to grace by faith, goes on his own protest march of sorts, and unshackles the church by sending her back into the Word.

Like me... the chief of sinners among us... like you... redeemed, empowered, and sent as ambassadors.

### **Followers of Jesus expose others to his grace.**

What then do we say to these things?

Behold - Today is the day; receive reconciliation. Jesus became sin so that you would be the righteousness of God. Identity, life, purpose are all found here. Live into the ministry of reconciliation. Expose others to the grace of Jesus like it is your one thing!

Remember Who You Are - Ambassadors. Can't stop, won't stop... redeemed and righteous. Return to this well often that we would set aside the useless things that get in the way and take up again our role as the church. Ask in every situation - "how does this represent Jesus?" And know that when you miss the mark, in Christ you are secure - by his redeeming work. We may fail to live as ambassadors, but Christ never fails to cover us in his righteousness. Rest in this and in our rest we move and act as ambassadors.

Sometime this "infection" may have a long incubation, sometimes the effects are immediate. Keep going. Keep spreading! Live this.