

Jesus Is Still the Only Answer

II Corinthians 5:11-21

preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church
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Intro.

Except for those who remember the Second World War, I doubt that any of us have ever lived through more perilous times than now. I'm not just talking about North Korean nukes, either. We live in a world where no crowd is safe from an evil person deliberately driving into them with a truck or a car, and where on any street a bomb may go off or someone may suddenly start slashing passers by with knives or swords. Nor is terrorism our only peril. Our world is divided like no other time in history. Those who call evil good and good evil are in charge these days, and I literally lose sleep over where these people are taking us. Honestly, I never thought that I'd live long enough to look back with fondness upon the Cold War and think of it as almost a golden age.

Nevertheless, there is still only one solution, one answer to the problems plaguing our world, or, to be as personal as possible, to the problems plaguing you and me. That answer is Jesus, Son of God, crucified, risen, and ready to save. And it is past time for the people of God's world to bow the knee and worship His Son as Lord and King. More importantly, it's time we who call ourselves Christians remind the world more forcefully than ever that there is no lasting peace apart from the peace of Christ, no truly enduring love apart from the love he showed upon the cross.

If there is no peace apart from Christ, then there can be no greater service to God or man than to dedicate one's life to a ministry of reconciliation, to give one's heart and energy to proclaiming the glorious truth that God has made a way for us to be healed in ourselves, healed in our relationships, and united with Him in peace and love forever.

I wanted to preach on this theme today because I knew Deborah was coming. But I also wanted to preach on this theme because I believe God is saying it is time for all of us who believe to recommit ourselves to the message of reconciliation.

II Corinthians 5

11 Therefore, because we know the fear of the Lord, we seek to persuade people. We are completely open before God, and I hope we are completely open to your consciences as well. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to be proud of us, so that you may have a reply for those who take pride in the outward appearance rather than in the heart. 13 For if we are out of our mind, it is for God; if we have a sound mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ's love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If One died for all, then all died. 15 And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised.

Let's lock into our minds Paul's message of reconciliation.

Syllogism (v.14)

Major Premise: All humanity is condemned to death because of sin.

Minor Premise: Christ identified with all sinful humanity and died.

Conclusion: Therefore all died in Christ.

First related conclusion: If Christ's death is our death, His resurrection is our resurrection.
(v.15)

Second related conclusion: "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."
(Rom. 10:13) In other words, when a person calls upon the name of the Lord, the phrase "He died for all" ceases to be a theoretical statement and becomes an experienced reality. Such people become included among "those who live."

Third related conclusion: If we died in Him and live in Him, then Jesus' life becomes our life—a life in God, a life of power, an overcoming life, a life of love, a life of joy, a life of godliness.

Paul has already made this point in II Cor. 4:11 "For we who live are always given over to death because of Jesus, so that Jesus' life may also be revealed in our mortal flesh."

Fourth related conclusion: Those who are convinced (who believe, who know) that Christ's death and resurrection is the central fact of human history cannot help but testify to it. (v.16-21)

II Corinthians 5

16 From now on, then, we do not know anyone in a purely human way. Even if we have known Christ in a purely human way, yet now we no longer know Him in this way. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. 18 Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ 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 He has committed the message of reconciliation to us.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." 21 He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

God is reconciling the world

So as I said earlier, with Deborah here to remind us that God is still calling men and women to speak the message of reconciliation to all the peoples of the earth, I want us to examine from I Corinthians 5 just what made Paul such a zealous missionary. But as we do this we need to be asking two powerful questions: (1) Is my experience with God anything like Paul's? And (2) Is my life anything like his?

Of course I don't mean, were you saved by means of an amazing experience on the road to

Damascus, or were you called to be God's apostle to the Gentiles. I'm only saying this. If your experience of salvation is as real, as lasting, and as revolutionary as Paul's (and on that level every salvation experience matches Paul's) then your heart will beat with Paul's as he cries out to the world, "Be reconciled to God." So let me ask again. Are you as ready as Paul to give your life to do your part in reconciling the world to God? God help us to pray, and to pray for one another, until we can answer this question with a resounding, "Yes!"

Fundamental principle

This is God's world. He created it for His purposes. He is accomplishing His purposes in it. Nothing but God's purposes are being accomplished in this world. God's ultimate purpose is His own glory. "All of history is rushing toward one great goal, the white-hot worship of God and His Son among all the peoples of the earth."¹ Preaching the gospel is the means to that goal.

Limited Choices

1. If you choose to work with God He will work with you, and in you, to enable you to accomplish the purpose He had for you from before the foundation of the world. *But always remember, God's purpose for your life is a subset of His ultimate purpose for all of history.*

2. If you choose to work against God, He will work with you, and in you, to enable you to accomplish the purpose He had for you from before the foundation of the world. The only difference is, there is no blessing attached to the second choice.

It's crucial, then, that you know where you stand in relationship to God's purposes. Are you one who rejoices to work with God, and to know that God is working through you to reconcile the world unto Himself? Or not? And if you aren't sure, today's text is a great set of guidelines by which you can judge for yourself where you stand.

1. Do you know the fear of the Lord? (v.11)
 - a. Two kinds of fear are proper
 - i. The fear of the person without God. If you are without God, it is proper that you should begin to sense that there is a holy God, and that you will have to meet Him someday as a desperate sinner who cannot save yourself. If this fear runs its proper course you will find yourself crying out to God, asking Him to show you His plan of salvation. If this describes you, take comfort in the thought that "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).
 - ii. Once you've come to faith in Jesus Christ, the fear of God takes on another tone. Now it becomes the fear of reverence and awe. For the first time you begin to realize the greatness of the triune God, the greatness of the mercy of God, and the greatness of God's plan to send His only begotten Son to die on the cross for your sins. You begin to appreciate all the Father and Son have done for you, in creation and at the cross, and you begin to realize that you have been given a gift for which you will never be worthy.

¹John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, page 20.

2. Do you know the love of God in Christ? (v.14) Now you may say, “Pastor, how do I know if I know the love of Christ?” The answer is quite simple; it’s the same as knowing when anyone loves you. You know it when someone loves to be around you, when they take delight in you, when they serve you from delight and not duty, when they seek ways to bless you, and when they prove, over and over, that their love is not dependent upon anything you do, and just as importantly, that it cannot be killed by anything you do. And when you know that love—which can only be known by the Spirit—it makes a real difference in your life.

A British padre named Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy put it this way as he sought to find a way to go on in the midst of the horrors of the Great War.

*Only in Him can I find home to hide me,
Who on the cross was slain to rise again;
Only with Him, my Comrade God, beside me,
Can I go forth to war with sin and pain.²*

Do you know this kind of love? Has the Holy Spirit confirmed God’s love to you? Does He walk with you and talk with you? Does He tell you that you are His own? And then does He send you out weeping, bearing precious gospel seeds to reconcile the world to Himself?

Let me ask you a question. What has your experience with God compelled you to do?

3. Do you know Christ as Lord of a spiritual kingdom? (v.16) That is, has your understanding of Christ changed like Paul’s? In his pre-Christian life Paul, then Saul, had thought of the Christ, or the Messiah, as a man, a new Moses who would lead the Jews out of Roman bondage, a new David who would establish a new Jewish kingdom to rule over the world.

But when Saul actually met the Lord it was a spiritual revelation. He realized Jesus was the Messiah, but he also realized that Jesus ruled over a spiritual kingdom that was not and is not of this world.

4. Are you born again? (v.17)
5. Are you reconciled to God? Through Christ? (v.18)
6. Are you in the “us” at the end of verse 19?
7. Are you an ambassador for Christ? (v.20) How certain are you that God wants to speak through you, will speak through you, is speaking through you? How ready are you to
8. Do you know how to plead with people to be reconciled to God? (v.20)
9. Do you see how we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ alone? (v.21)

²G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, *The Comrade God*.