

This morning, I am in the fifth week of my sermon series entitled “Strength in Weakness,” looking at the New Testament book of 2 Corinthians. If you are unfamiliar with this book, it is a letter written by an early church leader named Paul to a church he had started around the year 50 AD in the Greek city of Corinth, which in Paul’s day was part of the Roman Empire. As we have seen in the first few chapters, after Paul moved on from Corinth to start other churches, the relationship between Paul and the church became strained, and so throughout this letter, including the beginning of this section, we see Paul having to defend himself against false teachers who have been slandering him and remind the Corinthians of his love for them. In the section we read last week, he talked about how suffering is part of being a follower of Jesus, as we sacrificially love others just as Jesus sacrificially loved us.

Today we will be in chapter 5:11 – 6:2, which lays out the central message of Christianity and what its implications are better than almost any other passage in the Bible. Let’s read the whole passage and then look at what God has done for us in Jesus’ life and death and what that means for us.

*<sup>11</sup> Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. <sup>12</sup> We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. <sup>13</sup> If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them **and was raised again.** <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.** <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. <sup>NIV</sup> **2 Corinthians 6:1** As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*

As I mentioned earlier, notice that Paul begins this section by trying to defend himself, telling the Corinthians that the false teachers are telling lies about him, and that instead of questioning and confronting each other, they should be taking pride in each other and defending each other.

After that, however, this passage beautifully outlines the main Christian message and what it means to know and follow God. Please, do all you can to listen, to take this in, to take notes, to consider what God is saying to you, because these words are life-changing. The main word in this passage is reconciliation: look again at v. 18-20:

*<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.*

What does reconciliation mean? Reconciliation is the restoration of the relationship between individuals or between a person and God; it is a change from enmity to friendship. So implied in this definition is that the relationship between God and humans is one of enmity, which is the state of being opposed or hostile to something. In our natural state, things are not right between us and God. The reason, according to the Bible, is that our sin has separated us from God, because He is holy, perfect, and without sin. We are a people in rebellion, incapable of making ourselves right with God unless there is intervention on the part of God to restore us to Him. And the terrible news about this is that because of our sinful rebellion, we are headed towards eternal separation from God, Hell itself. Listen to these words of Jesus:

**John 3:16-18** - *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

We are all on a fast train to Hell, but God loves us so much that He has made a way to be saved:

**Romans 5:6-10** - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> 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!

Even though we were enemies of God, rebels against a holy God, God gave His Son to die for us. And this is critical, because we could not save ourselves by our own good works:

**Romans 3:19-26** - Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

We are rebels against a holy God, destined for eternal separation from this God. We can not save ourselves. And there is no other way to be saved:

**John 14:5-6** - Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

**Acts 4:12** - Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Apart from faith in Jesus, you will be lost for all eternity. There is no other way to bridge the gap between our sin and a holy God. I know this may be hard to hear or

believe for some of you, but if it is, I would challenge you to read the words of Jesus and the New Testament for yourself and consider what they teach.

Now that we have established what God has done, let's look at what Paul teaches in this passage about the implications of Jesus' death for us. There are three things in particular that God does for us when we come to faith in Jesus.

## What happens when we believe?

### 1) Justification

*Justification* - The legal act of God in which he thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us and declares us to be righteous in his sight. (God as judge)

*<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.*

*<sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

These are some of the clearest statements in the Bible on justification. Through Jesus' death on the cross, a way has been made for all of our sins and rebellion to be forgiven and for us to be restored to a right relationship with God. Again, not on the basis of our good works, but on the basis of trusting in Jesus. What a gift! And what a cost He paid for us!

But that is not all God has done for us in Jesus' life and death. After all, a judge can acquit an accused person without ever entering into a personal relationship with him. We are not just pardoned, but restored to relationship:

### 2) Adoption

*Adoption* - The act of God whereby he makes us members of his family. (God as Father)

*<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.*

By Jesus' death, God has reconciled us to Himself, restoring our relationship with Him, the relationship of a Father to His children. Consider these passages:

**John 1:12-13** - *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- <sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

**Ephesians 1:4-5** - *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—*

**Romans 8:15-17** - *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

We are not just pardoned but brought into an intimate relationship, where we can come boldly to the God of the universe not as judge or king but as our loving Father, who looks upon us with the same love that he looks upon His Son Jesus.

But that is not all:

### 3) **Regeneration**

*Regeneration* - The act of God by which he imparts spiritual (eternal) life to us (God as heart surgeon)

<sup>17</sup> *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

You were spiritually dead and needed God to make you alive:

**Ephesians 2:1-5** - *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,*

<sup>5</sup> *made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.*

It's not that you were bad and now you are good, or that you were ignorant and now you are wise; no, you were dead and now you are alive. Jesus says basically the same thing:

**John 3:1-7** - *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." <sup>3</sup> In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." <sup>4</sup> "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup> You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'*

Your natural birth counts for nothing. Just because you were born to Christian parents does not save you. You must be regenerated, born from above by the Spirit of God. This is precisely what was prophesied in the Old Testament:

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** - *I will give you a **new heart** and put a **new spirit** in you; I will remove from you your **heart** of stone and give you a **heart** of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

In Christ, God not only forgives us, not only adopts us, but gives us eternal life, a new heart, a new spirit!

**John 17:3** - *Now **this is eternal life**: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Eternal life is more than just life after death; it is a higher quality of life, a God-consciousness. Think of the difference between the life of a rock vs. a plant vs. an animal vs. a human vs. a human filled with the Spirit of God.

This is what happens when you come to faith in Jesus. Complete forgiveness of sins and restoration to a right relationship with God. Adoption as His beloved



child, so that you can come to Him as Father, and know that you are an heir of all that is His. And regeneration – a new heart, eternal life.

### How does the gospel transform us?

#### 1) Christ's love compels us to live for Him

<sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

When we come to faith in Christ, when His Spirit comes to live inside of us, then our primary motivation is no longer guilt, or trying to earn something, but is the love of Christ. And His love constrains us. Although we have the freedom to do whatever we want, His love has transformed our desires so that we no longer want to do those things.

**Titus 2:11-14** - For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

His love is like a barrier hemming us in from going in directions that would bring death. The more you understand God's love for you, the more it transforms you, compels you, motivates you to live for Him, to know Him, to bring Him glory through your life.

#### 2) We see everything differently

<sup>16</sup> 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.

Paul tells them that he once saw Christ as a blasphemer, a heretic, but now sees Him as Lord. Some today just see him as a good man who died a tragic death. But now that we have His Holy Spirit in us, we see Him as the eternal Son of God. And although Paul may appear as ordinary and struggling because of his suffering, through the eyes of faith we see that he is actually following in Christ's footsteps.

Spiritual vision was a big part of last week's passage. Because of the gospel, because of the Spirit of God inside of us, we have spiritual vision. We see the world as fallen yet going to be redeemed. We see our money and possession as things that will pass away, but that can be used for His kingdom. We see each other as family. And we see others as people made in the image of God in need of a Savior. Listen to how C.S. Lewis put it in *The Weight of Glory*:

*It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.*

What would it mean to see the world, to see people, as God sees them, and to treat them accordingly? I think it would result in Paul's last point:

3) **We are sent out as ambassadors with a ministry of reconciliation**

<sup>18</sup> *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.*

If people are not mere mortals, but are heading in one of two directions, and if by our lives and witness we can help people in either direction, then we must be God's ambassadors in this ministry of reconciliation. In fact, this has always been the commission:



**Matthew 28:18-20** - *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

You have been called to be an ambassador, to bring the gospel to the world. Oh, that God would give us His passion for those who do not know Him!

Paul ends this section with these stirring words:

**2 Corinthians 6:1-2** - *As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*

Do not receive the grace of God in vain. God has offered you a free gift of salvation, of justification, adoption, and regeneration. His love can transform your motivation and empower you to become the man or woman God has called you to be. He can give you true spiritual sight. He can give your life the most important purpose of all. But you must receive this gift! You must turn from your sinful self-centeredness to faith in Jesus! I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation! Turn from your sinful self-centeredness and put your faith in Jesus, and you will be saved. And if you have received this gift, do not let it be in vain! Let His love compel you to go and love others, to implore others to be reconciled to God.

If you have never made a decision to follow God, pray this with me:

*Father, I confess to you that I am a sinner, a rebel against a holy God, and that I am deserving of eternal separation from you. But I believe that Jesus died for me, that you put my sins on Him and offer me His righteousness, a right relationship with you, not because of my good works but because of His loving sacrifice. I believe that in you is found eternal life, life to the full. Today, I turn from my sinful, self-centered way of life and I trust in you as my Savior and Lord, and commit my life to you. Open my heart that I might see and know you and live for you. Amen.*