

2 Corinthians 5 Pt 2

Good morning and thank you for joining us. We're resuming our VBV study through 2 Corinthians, so would you please turn to 2 Corinthians 5?

As we mentioned before, our study in 2 Corinthians is going to feel a bit like a new teenager driver. **SHOW PIC** We'll speed up for a bit and tackle several verses, and then suddenly grind to a near halt and do an in depth study over a smaller section of scripture. **CLOSE PIC**

This morning, we're only studying 4 verses- 18-21. After this our pace on Sundays will pick up, but we're going to camp out in these verses as they are some of the most important verses in all of the NT. These verses are so important, that anyone who keeps them in the forefront of their mind will change their life forever. Let's read verses 18-21 together, then we'll break 'em down. **18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.**

20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The title of this morning's message is Remembering our Ministry
Let's pray

This morning I want to introduce you to a family member of ours that you won't be seeing in church anytime soon. **SHOW PIC**
This is Ludus, my son's bearded dragon. (nickname?)

He's a pretty interesting guy, but he always fascinates me when he goes swimming in the bathtub-he's a natural born swimmer.
CLOSE PIC.

Recently I heard a story about another lizard that got me thinking.

Tori Matthews works for the Southern California Humane Society. One day, she got a frantic call from a child whose pet iguana had drowned. A dog frightened the iguana up a tree. He climbed out on a limb, and fell into a swimming pool. When Officer Matthews arrived the little boy was next to the pool crying. His pet lizard lay motionless under the water. Shockingly, Tori dove into the pool and emerged with the lifeless iguana.

But that's not all. Officer Matthews thought, "Well, you can resuscitate a person, and a dog, why not an iguana?" She locked lips with the lizard, and actually revived the pet!

Afterwards, Tori commented, "It's a pretty ugly animal to kiss, but the last thing I wanted to do was tell this little boy that his iguana had died."

It got me thinking, if my son's lizard were drowning, what lengths would I go to to save him?

And then it hit me. Even more important than rescuing a lizard, what lengths am I, what lengths are we willing to go to to rescue souls that are dying and on their way to hell?

If the last thing officer Tori Matthews wanted to do was tell a little boy his pet had died – I stagger at the thought of how our lost family, friends and neighbors must break the heart of God.

God's desire is that every person have a real meaningful relationship with Him, and this is what our scriptures this morning remind us of.

18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, Have you noticed that as we get older, it's common for Christians to unintentionally seal ourselves off from the rest of the unbelieving world, limiting our impact to share Jesus with them?

Here's how it often happens... All our friends are Christians. All our activities are either at church, or with church family. We start spending time with the same people over and over again. Sure we may work around non-Christians, but we keep social contact with them to a minimum, and suddenly, without realizing it, we live in our own Christian bubbles.

Now you know as I do that it's not easy getting involved with people mired in sin is it? It's often messy - and tiring – and even awkward at times. Ministering to the unsaved demands a lot of effort, and thought, and patience, and prayer, and love.

But never forget that none other than our Lord Jesus was called "a friend of sinners." Jesus hung out, and ate meals with people who had lots of drama and baggage, and sin.

Matthew 9 10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'^[fn] For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."^[fn]

Could it be that the gay community, who's rallying cry is 'love is love', and they're so desperate for love, could it be they despise Christians because we've only pointed fingers and not shown them the love of Christ? Have we forgotten Romans 2:4?

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Jesus, our friend, spent time with sinners, not to join their sinful ways, but to present them the good news that forgiveness was available.

Here's the question for us to ponder during this unofficial start to summer. What lengths are we willing to go, to rescue lost souls from an eternity in hell?

Will we set aside our prejudices, and preconceived notions? Will we be like Jesus, and hang out with sinners so that we can share the good news of the gospel?

Hey if Jesus would minister and hang out with the unsaved, and He's given us the power of the HS inside of us, is there any reason we can't?

Remember as Christians the Gospel isn't something we go to church to hear; it's something we go from church to tell.

Verse 18 is a life changing verse, if we allow it to affect our interactions with the lost world. Because it tells us that God has given each of us a ministry! Each of us has been given the ministry of reconciliation. Every follower of Christ has been given the incredible privilege from our King of Kings of placing the hand of lost people into the hand of God.

18-19

18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. The word translated "reconciliation" means "to exchange." It's an old Greek word for exchanging coins.

And as Christians, we're called to act as exchange agents. Think about it- we help people perform trades: they trade their sinful rags for royal robes. Fear swapped out for forgiveness.

Loneliness traded in for love, frustration for fulfillment, pain for peace. An eternity in hell traded for an eternity in heaven!!

Think about it-we get the opportunity to share the good news to folks who've only known bad news!

This is no small deal. We must always remember the work of reconciliation is the reason God sacrificed His only Son. Reconciling the lost world to God is the reason Jesus endured the horrors of the cross and shed His sinless blood. Jesus Himself said **Matthew 18:11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.**

It's wisely been said that you can cut Christianity anywhere, and it will bleed reconciliation.

And despite the craziness of the world all around us, God is still reconciling sinners to Himself– and He wants to use you and me as part of the process!

And if we're to be obedient servants of our King, each of us need to become a “minister of reconciliation.”

Which means, we have to have a heart for the lost.

Understand God loves the people we so often despise. Our Lord takes no pleasure in their pain or failure. God's desire is to forgive!

Some of us enjoy watching our enemies squirm a little - sweat a little - suffer a little. We sometimes delight in the misery of others, don't we?

This isn't how God thinks! Before He went to the cross, remember what Jesus said? **Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!**

When the prodigal son returned home with a repentant heart his Father didn't make him do penance or serve probation. The boy didn't even have to pay back the money he had wasted. The Father's forgiveness was full and free!

And God's forgiveness toward lost humanity is just as lavish. But are we telling anyone about it?

Verse 20 reminds each of us of our duty in sharing this glorious news...

20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. You and I are called ambassadors.

What exactly is an ambassador? An ambassador is someone who lives in a foreign land, who's a spokesman for his homeland. An ambassador represents the interests of home in an foreign culture.

The bible is clear-we too are ambassadors. Our citizenship is in heaven, yet we're here serving on earth.

As ambassadors for Christ we represent the will of our King, while occupying a foreign land. Hey, we're all divine diplomats.

Every good ambassador must possess 2 characteristics. **SHOW PIC** First, the ambassador only represents the will of His King. **CLOSE PIC**

We're just the microphone, not the singer. When an ambassador speaks he doesn't interject his own opinions and agenda.

Secondly, **SHOW PIC** an ambassador must relate to the people he's been sent to. **CLOSE PIC**

Verse 20 says God is in us, pleading with humanity to be reconciled. The term "pleading" means "to come alongside" – to slip into someone else's shoes.

Yet as I mentioned before, as we grow in Christ, we often completely separate ourselves from non-believers. In fact, have you noticed that over time, we Christians develop our own vocabulary that only we can decipher? It's like we have our own language. Call it "Christianese."

There's an article that describes this, and although it's humorous, it belays a critical point about us being ambassadors. The article is called "They Speak with Other Tongues." It's about 2 men in a conversation, a Christian witnessing to a non believer.

"Ever been saved?" A wide-eyed fellow startled me as we waited for the bus.

"Sure," I replied, "When I was nine I was swimming, and a strong undertow drug me out to sea... My uncle heard my call for help and..."

"No, no," he interrupted, "Redeemed! Have you ever been redeemed? You know, reborn... washed in the blood?"

I said, "What in the world are you talking about?"

"Convicted. Have you ever felt convicted?"

"Of course not," I replied. "I've never been in trouble with the law."

He looked at me square in the eye. "I think you need to be delivered."

"Delivered? I'm just waiting to ride the bus home. I'll stick with that, thank you." He looked at me as if I were speaking another language.

One day this fellow invited me to lunch. He seemed harmless, so I agreed. But he was definitely unusual, and difficult to understand. That Wednesday I had lunch with Ed. He was a little late but explained that he was having quiet time.

"Quiet time?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"Each day just before lunch I go into my prayer closet."

I was puzzled. "Do you pray in a closet at work?"

He answered, "No, it's in my car."

"A closet in your car?!"

He changed the subject.

Like the first day I met him, he left me confused. This Ed is quite a unique fellow...

As we parted, Ed gave me a little booklet that explained how someone could come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. I read it, and understood it, and knew this was exactly what I needed. That night I gave my life to Jesus, and I was "born again" as it stated in the booklet.

Two days later I told Ed. He was overjoyed. The following week we got together again, and Ed strongly urged me to find a good body.

I was surprised at his suggestion, but it sounded good. I started combing the local health clubs looking for an attractive woman. When I met Denise, I knew she was the one. She soon became a believer.

Ed told us we should get planted so we could grow together. "Sometimes it's hard to understand this guy," I confided to Denise. I wasn't sure what Ed meant when he told us we needed to be planted.

He replied, "Committed! You both need to be committed now that you know Jesus."

"Now wait a minute," I protested. "Trusting Jesus is the most sane thing I've ever done." It was obvious Ed's patience was growing thin.

I had to miss worship the next Sunday, but Ed and I had breakfast Monday morning, and he filled me in on what had happened.

"God moved!" He said with excitement. "God really moved yesterday!"

"Where is He now?" I pleaded. "I was just getting to know Him, and now He's gone?"

"No, no, Bob, God hasn't gone anywhere."

I was relieved.

"It's just that so many people were plugging in, and stepping out, and moving in the gifts."

"You mean people left the meeting? And what's this about presents?"

"No, it's the gifts. The gifts were flowing," he said.

"How beautiful, folks were giving gifts to each other. I wish I'd been there."

Now Ed seemed confused. "Anyway, " he said, changing the subject, "Denise was there, and boy, was she on fire."

"Fire? Denise got burned? Is she OK?"

"No, Bob, you don't understand." (That was an understatement)

"Denise is just fine."

Ed sighed, "Can I walk in the light with you?"

I answered. "Of course, we can walk in the light. It's daytime, Ed."

Ed just shook his head. Sometimes we don't communicate very well.

Well, it's been over two years since I was saved and delivered. I'm plugged in, planted, and committed to a good body. God is moving, and I've been stepping out in the gifts... But I've developed one new problem... My old friends no longer understand me. I share about my redemption, that I've been washed as white as snow, that I follow the Lamb – yet they tune me out.

I guess they're just convicted when they see that I'm on fire.”

Without realizing it we can alienate folks by the Christian lingo we use. But an ambassador avoids clichés' and buzz words when they communicate, because they realize the importance of being understood when they speak.

When Jesus communicated, He spoke only the words His Father gave Him - but those words were always packaged in ways that appealed to hungry hearts, and stirred up an interest in His listeners.

To be clear, the job of a heavenly ambassador is much more than uttering cold, matter of fact declarations. A good ambassador for Christ packages the truth and love of God in a way that appeals to others. A good ambassador presents the truth as clear and lovingly as possible.

SHOW PIC A few years ago, Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States was Hamdullah Mohib. Notice he's not wearing a traditional Arab headdress, or have a beard – nor is an AK-47 slung over his shoulder. He looks like a typical American businessman – not a nomad off the back of a camel. **CLOSE**

PIC An ambassador knows his audience, and deliberately appeals to their needs, logic, and style, without compromising the truth

This is why Paul said those so convicting words in **1 Corinthians 9:19-22** **19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;** Are we a servant to sinners so we can win them to Christ?

20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law,[fn] that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God,[fn] but under law toward Christ[fn]), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as[fn] weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

As an ambassador, Paul built bridges. He looked for ways to identify with people... If he was with a Jew he would talk the Torah, and eat kosher food. If he were with Gentiles he'd discuss Greek philosophy or the Olympics. If Paul was with a person fraught with fear he would open up and share his own insecurities.

See Paul wasn't deceitful, just flexible. He knew his audience and looked for common ground.

All too often, our tendency as Christians is to focus on our differences with non-Christians - as if we had nothing in common.

Obviously, our spiritual state is as different as night and day, but we both have a mortgage to pay, and a lawn to mow, and cars to repair, and groceries to get, and inflation to battle!

By focusing on our similarities we can build relationships with people that will produce opportunities to explain our differences. And here's where the rubber meets the road. All this sounds good, but it takes time, and it takes effort.

Read verse 20 one more time

20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. God is pleading through us to reconcile people to Him. And we willing to share the good news of Jesus with others?

The message we have to share is simple...

21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus wasn't a sinner, even on the cross. On the cross, the Father treated Him as if He were a sinner, yet Jesus remained sinless. And on the cross a holy, heavenly transaction took place.

Jesus took our sin, and traded His righteousness in exchange for it. How amazing is the love of God-I'm still a sinner-yet because of my simple faith in Christ, God views me as righteous-which means right standing with God.

Since Jesus has done this for us, how can we not share the good news with the world?

But tragically, in time, what happens with Christians like you and me, and churches, churches just like ours, is that we lose our zeal, and even lose their interest in sharing the gospel with the lost. And if we're not committed to sharing Jesus with others, this church will begin to look more like a social club than a hospital for sinners.

There's an often-told parable of what the church's concern for evangelism has been like, and I'm going to close with this.

On a dangerous sea coast where shipwrecks were frequent, a crude little lifesaving station was built. It was really just a hut, and there was only 1 rescue boat, but the few devoted crewmen kept a constant watch over the sea. With no thought for themselves, they went out day or night, tirelessly searching for any who might need help. Many lives were saved by their devoted efforts.

After a while the station became famous. Some of those who were saved, as well as others in the surrounding area, wanted to become a part of the work. They gave time and money for its support. New boats were bought, additional crews were trained and the station grew.

Some of the people became unhappy that the building was so crude-just a little hut. They felt a nicer, larger place would be more appropriate as the 1st refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots with hospital beds and put better furniture in the new, bigger building.

Soon the station became a popular gathering place for its members to discuss the work and to visit with each other. They continued to remodel and decorate until the station more and more took on the character and look of a club.

As time passed, fewer members were interested in going out on lifesaving missions, so they hired professional crews to do the work on their behalf. The lifesaving motif still prevailed on the club emblems and stationery and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club held its initiations.

One day a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in many boatloads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty, bruised and sick. The beautiful new

club was terribly messed up, and so the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside where the shipwreck victims could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting there was a split in club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities altogether, because it was unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted on keeping lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that, after all, they were still called a lifesaving station.

But those members were voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives they could begin their own station down the coast somewhere.

As the years went by, the new station gradually faced the same problems as the other one had experienced. It too became a club, and its lifesaving work became less and less of a priority. The few members who remained dedicated to lifesaving began another station.

History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit the coast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.

What a heartbreaking illustration of the history of the church.

God sent His Son to earth for the very purpose of saving people from sin. Rescuing people from sin is God's great concern. Is it ours?

Are we fulfilling our ministry of reconciliation?

1 John 4 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live

through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.