

## **The King Commissions His Ambassadors**

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

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This is our third sermon in the King's Commission series. We have been looking at the ten motivations for sharing Christ with others in 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:21. So far, we have covered six of them. This morning, we will cover the last four motivations that are found in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.

To begin, I want to look at v. 20. As the Apostle Paul concludes his argument on why we should share the gospel, notice what he calls Christ's disciples. He calls us "*ambassadors for Christ*." Circle the phrase "*ambassadors for Christ*." Listen to v. 20:

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.*

*We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

Remember, Paul had just given us six motivations for carrying out the King's Commission, and then he says, "*Therefore*." He's making his key argument here, and as he does, he says, "*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ*." If you are a Christian, have you ever considered yourself an *ambassador for Christ*? Have you ever thought about what it means to be Christ's ambassador?

In today's world, much like in the ancient world, ambassadors represent nations. They don't speak for themselves, but have been given the authority to speak on behalf of their nation. They carry the message of their King/President and homeland to other nations.

Also, when Paul said, "*We are ambassadors for Christ*," he wasn't referring only to his mission team. He was referring to all of Christ's disciples. It means that this role is not limited to pastors and missionaries. So, if you are a Christian, you are His ambassadors and represent heaven. You represent King Jesus to the world wherever you go and wherever you live. So, this is Paul's fundamental motivation. The Christians' identity as Christ's ambassadors is a key motivation for carrying out the King's Commission.

If, as Christians, we are ambassadors for Christ, then that means the local church is our embassy. The local church is the embassy where we gather each Sunday to worship our King and remind ourselves of our mission as Christ's ambassadors. Our identity as Christ's ambassadors is key to understanding our motivation for carrying out the King's Commission.

So, when we look back at vv. 14-19, we hear the Apostle Paul argue for what our motivation should be for carrying out the King's Commission. Then, when he gets to v. 20, he drives home his point by saying:

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.*

So, as Christ's ambassadors, what should our message be? What should we say on our King's behalf? Let's look at the last part of v. 20:

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.*

*We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

*We are to proclaim His message of reconciliation of sinners to God to the world. This message is the gospel of Jesus Christ.* It is that Jesus came from heaven to earth to meet God's requirement (His very own requirement) for our salvation for us. He met the requirements of our Holy God by living a perfectly sinless life and then died on the cross to pay for our sins. Then on the third day, He rose from the dead and conquered death and hell. So, now all who place their faith in Jesus have their sins transferred to Jesus and His holy, righteous life credited to them by the Holy Spirit of God. Then we are fully forgiven of our sins. We are born again by the Spirit of God and given new life in Christ. We receive the promise to inherit eternal life in heaven with God when we die.

Here's one more fantastic thing about our ministry of reconciliation: When we share the message of the gospel, it is simply us sharing the message, but God who speaks through us. This is amazing!

Now that we have set the text up, let's consider the charge the Apostle Paul gives as Christ's ambassadors. I want to remind you that there are many other very important doctrines in this passage, but for our purposes, we are only considering the motivations for carrying out the King's Commission. So, let's look at these last four motivations in this text.

#### I. Jesus is Our Lord (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

*"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;<sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."*

Paul is convinced that Christ has died for him, which motivates him to live for Christ. If that motivates Paul, then each of us should consider this as the key motivating factor to share our faith. Listen to what the Apostle Paul tells the church about his motivation to share the gospel in other letters. In Galatians 2:20, Paul says:

*"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Then in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, he says:

*"You are not your own,<sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price."*

It is the gospel that gives us our motivation to live for Christ. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the heart of why we witness. It is the power of the gospel that works in and through us to share Christ.

Then in Romans 12:1, Paul says:

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

The Apostle Paul anchors our obedience to Christ in the word "*sacrifice*." Consider what Paul had written in Romans. He had unpacked the gospel for eleven chapters, and now he lets us know that our obedience flows from our lives being "*a living sacrifice*," because it flows out of Jesus' sacrifice for us. In other words, now, as a result of Christ's *sacrifice*, we are to live our lives as *living sacrifices* for Jesus.

Sacrifices can be costly. That's why they are called sacrifices. However, if Jesus is Lord and our Lord has sacrificed, then we are only following in His footsteps. So, have you ever considered what it means to live your life as a living sacrifice? Living your life as a *living sacrifice* can be costly. Have you ever considered what obedience in sharing Christ might cost you? It is possible that carrying out the King's Commission might be costly in your family relationships, work relationships, and even financially.

Dr. Helen Roseveare was a British medical missionary in the Belgian Congo with the Heart of Africa Mission in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1964, the Congolese civil war broke out, and she was taken captive. She was brutally beaten and raped. She later wrote of that experience,

*"On that dreadful night, beaten, bruised, terrified and tormented, unutterably alone, I had felt at last [that] God had failed me. Surely he could have stepped in earlier, surely things need not have gone that far. I had reached what seemed to be the ultimate depth of despairing nothingness."*

She said that while she felt God had abandoned her, He actually didn't. She goes on to write,

*“Through the brutal heartbreaking experience of rape, God met with me – with outstretch arms of love. It was an unbelievable experience: He was so utterly there, so totally understanding, his comfort was so complete – and suddenly I knew – I really knew his love was unutterably sufficient. He did love me! He did understand! . . . One word became unbelievably clear, and that word was privilege. He didn’t take away the pain or cruelty or humiliation. No! It was all there, but now it was altogether different. It was with him, for him, in him. He was actually offering me the inestimable privilege of sharing in some little way the edge of the fellowship of his suffering. In the weeks of imprisonment that followed and in the subsequent years of continued service, looking back, one has tried to “count the cost,” but I find it all swallowed up in privilege. The cost suddenly seems very small and transient in the greatness and permanence of the privilege.”<sup>1</sup>*

I do not know what God may call you to do to have the privilege of sharing the gospel as Christ’s ambassador. He may call you to go across the street, go to another state, or go to another nation. Like I said, I do not know what He will call you to do, but I do know that if you are a Christian, He has called you to figure out how to share Christ in word and deed in the context of life in which you live.

Our King died on the cross for our sins. Now, as our Lord, He calls us to live for Him as His ambassadors. He may call you to go to a hard place in the world, like Dr. Roseveare, but do not fear. You will never step foot on land that King Jesus has not gone before you. You will never be separated from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And this is a very comforting thought.

## II. The Gospel Changes Lives (2 Cor. 5:16-17)

*“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*

In these two verses, we learn how the person and work of Jesus brings transformation. First, Paul tells us that Jesus was transformed. In other words, once He was flesh and blood, but after His crucifixion and resurrection, He was given a resurrected body. Now, similarly, when we are born again, we are spiritually transformed. Our old, dead spirit is given new life *“in Christ.”* So, if anyone is *“in Christ,”* a *“new spiritual creation.”*

Transformation is what we want when we come to Christ. No one comes to Christ and wants to stay the same; if they do, they do not know Jesus. If you come to Christ and you think you are okay and do not want to change, that is the same as saying I do not need to repent because I am not really a sinner. Transformation is imperative!

Just two chapters earlier, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18,

*“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*

You must consider who says we are new creations and being transformed from one degree of glory to another. This is Paul, who used to be Saul of Tarsus. Do you remember what Acts 8:1 says about Saul after he led a mob to kill Stephen by stoning him to death?

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<sup>1</sup> David Gibson, *The LORD of Psalm 23*, 131-133.

*“And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”*

There is Paul before being saved, killing Stephen, and persecuting the church. Then, after killing Stephen, look at what Saul did. In Acts 9:1-2, it says,

*“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”*

Then, just a few verses later, you see that Christ sovereignly broke into his world and saved him. He didn’t want to know who Jesus was. He hated Jesus and all who followed him. But Jesus was seeking him, which made all the difference in the world.

You see, Jesus opened Saul’s spiritual eyes to who He was by closing his physical eyes for a period of time. Saul was given a new heart and a new name and began to teach and preach in the name of Christ. The power of the gospel changed everything for Paul. Jesus transformed his life.

If you are here this morning and you are not a Christian, Jesus offers you salvation. He offers you transformation and new life in Christ. Humble yourself and commit your life to Christ today, and let the transformation begin.

However, what about the transformation of those of us who are already followers of Jesus? Here’s the deal: Even when we are a new creation, that doesn’t mean we forget who we were. We still retain the brokenness of the fall, but our lives are broken and in desperate need of transformation. I’m not talking about behavior modification or some kind of psychological modification, but the transformation that comes from the power of Christ in His gospel.

Think about Christ’s transformation of our lives like this. For centuries, Japanese artists have repaired valuable pottery by sealing the breaks and cracks in the pottery with lacquer that has been mixed with powdered gold. The word for this tradition is called *kintsugi*. *Kin* is the Japanese word for *gold*. *Tsugi* is the Japanese word for *join*. *Kintsugi* means “to join with gold.”<sup>2</sup>

This illustrates what Christ does with us. Instead of throwing the broken ceramic jar of our lives because it is worthless, Jesus takes the broken pieces and, by His blood that is more precious than gold, He puts our lives back together. The priceless blood of Jesus creates a stunning work of art with our lives that results in a life that is more precious than gold because now it has a redemptive story. It is the gold of God’s grace that creates a priceless work of art of our lives and puts it on display for all to see.

So, back to the burning question of our sermon series: *Why do we continue to carry out the King’s Commission?* It is because we realize that lives can be transformed by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Everyone who trusts in Jesus will become a new creature so that the glory of God is seen in their transformation. We must believe that Jesus can transform lives.

### III. We’ve Been Called into the Ministry (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

*“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God*

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Tautges, *Remade: Embracing Your Complete Identity in Christ*, 259.

*making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."*

This is a famous passage, and you are probably familiar with it. We've covered some of it already. Yet, I want to ask some questions as we work through these three verses.

Did you notice what the motivation was for sharing the gospel? Paul cited the gospel *"itself"* as the reason for sharing the gospel. Listen to what he said again. *"All of this is from God."* All of what? All of our *transformation into new creations* is from the gospel. The *transformative* work of the gospel is from God.

It is the gospel that *transforms* us, but it also *reconciles* us to God. The Greek word *reconcile* in this verse means *"to exchange one thing for another."* When we think about the message of the gospel, we must keep in mind what was *exchanged*. What was *exchanged* was our *sin* for *Christ's righteousness*.

Now, as a result of this great exchange, we are made ambassadors for Christ who have been entrusted with the message of the King who makes His appeal through us. Through us, King Jesus says to those who have yet to believe – *"Be reconciled to God."*

Remember what we said it meant to be an ambassador for Christ? An ambassador is sent into a foreign country to speak on behalf of their country's president or king. This means as Jesus' disciples, we are here to speak on behalf of King Jesus.

However, there can be a problem. There can be difficulties as an ambassador for Christ. What happens is that many of us can become too comfortable in the foreign country in which we live – this world. When this happens, we neglect our calling as Christ's ambassadors, don't we?

It's like this: We begin to think of ourselves as Christian teachers, Christian engineers, Christian homemakers, Christian truck drivers, Christian wives & husbands, and Christian students. But here is the problem: The word Christian is not an adjective.

As Christ's ambassadors, we must think of ourselves as Christians first. We are teachers, truck drivers, engineers, carpenters, wives, husbands, college students, etc., who are first and foremost Christians. Whatever you do, we are Christians first. We are Christians who are truck drivers, teachers, managers, supervisors, carpenters, housewives, husbands, and students.

Brothers and sisters, God has graciously called us into the ministry of reconciliation. We are called to be involved in reaching the lost in this world. It will take all of us working together in our various professions to reach a lost world. We must remember that we are Christ's ambassadors first and our professions come second.

#### IV. The "Wonder of It All" (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."*

This is an amazing verse! In this verse, Paul explains the great exchange that occurred on the cross. Christ became sin so that those who place their faith in Jesus may become the righteousness of God. This is actually a stunning truth.

Someone once asked the British evangelist, Gypsie Smith, why he kept sharing Christ with people? He replied, *"Because I never lost the wonder of it all."*

We have looked at nine amazing motivations for carrying out the King's Commission. However, this last one may be my favorite. I think it may be my favorite because it is a doctrine that is the most incredible, and because it is the one that I fear losing the most. You see, when the gospel becomes mundane, then we are in danger of losing heart. This was what the Corinthian church was in danger of doing – losing heart. This was why Paul began his argument in these verses. They were losing heart.

I believe that when we cease to marvel at the beauty of the gospel, we begin to lose the wonder of the message. Brothers and sisters, we must guard against allowing the message of the gospel to become ordinary and mundane.

Let's strive together to live in the wonder of the person and work of Jesus. May we grow in our wonder of what Jesus has done to save us. May we take time to think deeply about all that Jesus has done to establish His church as His embassy for His ambassadors. When you meditate on the reasons you believe and come to terms with the fact that it is sheer sovereign grace that opened your eyes to the beauty of Christ, you will live in the wonder of it all.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, *"Has the good news become old news?"* If it has, you need to repent, return to your first love, and ask God for refreshment.

King David needed refreshment in the wonder of the love of God. He wrote Psalm 27 after a very difficult season of life. He was tired and had lost the wonder of the love of God. So, to fight losing heart, he wrote:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? <sup>2</sup> When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. <sup>3</sup> Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. <sup>4</sup> One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple . . . <sup>13</sup> I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! <sup>14</sup> Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*

King David needed refreshing. He needed to have his desires renewed by the Spirit of the Lord. If you feel like you have lost heart,

*"Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage and wait for the Lord!"*

Let me close our time this morning by pointing us back to vv. 14-15. Remember what the Apostle Paul wrote:

*"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."*

When I think of this verse, I think of the movie *Braveheart*. It is one of my all-time favorite movies. I know it is not entirely historically correct, but it is so good. I love the scene where Sir William Wallace is about to lead the Scots into battle with the English. The Scots looked at the English army, and they lost heart. The men are about to turn and run away when the King, Longshanks, offered the army their lives, families, and land if they would not fight. Of course, this was a lie. Then Mel Gibson, who played Sir William Wallace, rallies the army and says,

*"We want to go home to our wives and children, we want to live. Fight and you may die. Run and you'll live . . . but only for a while. But how many of you, lying on your deathbed, would not give every day between this one and that one, to come back on this battlefield and look at your enemies and say, 'You may take our lives, but you'll never take our freedom.'"*

At that point, the whole army rallied and put a beat down on the British. What happened? The whole army understood that they were as good as dead anyway. They went out and laid their lives down for something greater than themselves.

The Apostle Paul understood this truth. That's why he could write in Galatians 2:20,  
*"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Then in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, he wrote,  
*"You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price."*

Finally, in Philippians 1:21, he wrote,  
*"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

The Apostle Paul reckoned himself as dead, and he lived that way for Jesus. He knew he was living for someone (Jesus) and something (the Kingdom of God) greater than himself. God took that man, transformed him, and then turned the world upside down.

Friends, our enemy, the devil, will tempt you to live for his kingdom and his designs for your life. He offers you money, possession, status, acceptance, and love if you will live for yourself and not live for Christ. It is a lie. He has no plans to deliver on that promise because he can't deliver.

On the other hand, Jesus calls you to something greater than yourself—His Kingdom and His glory. If you are a Christian, He has given you the glorious ministry of reconciliation so that you may share the story of Jesus.