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Ambassadors for Christ

II Corinthians 5:17-21

By Rev. Jay Shaw

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When you see our youth here at church please encourage them in their walk with the Lord. We have such great students and families here in our church and it's such an honor to serve here as the youth pastor. It is such a blessing to be at church like Briarwood and under a pastor like Pastor Reeder. He is so supportive of the youth group. He will be in any video that I have asked him to be in. It's amazing what he will do to support us and he is always asking 'what can I do' or 'is there anything I can do for the youth' or 'how can I pray for the youth' and it's such an encouragement to me to be around the leadership and the love that our senior staff has for our youth.

One of the things that I love about youth ministry is a student's ability to get incredibly deep. We were at a Junior High conference this summer and one of the speaker's was speaking about Jonah and his refusal to go to Nineveh. So the speaker posed the question, "is there anything you would say 'no' to if God asked you to do it?" I took my group back and we were going to discuss that question. The first kid said, "If God called me to go to Africa I think I would really struggle with that." It was a great answer because it was a heart felt answer. The second kid said, "There are a couple of kids at my school that I would really wrestle with sharing my faith with them. That would be really hard." There was another kid in the room that I could tell he was really thinking about what he would say 'no' to and he said, "If God asked me to be a WWE wrestler I just couldn't do it. I could not go into the professional wrestling field." This kid was about 4 foot 8 and about 100 pounds and that was the first thing that came to his mind. So we won't have any missionaries in the pro wrestling field but it really is amazing to see the depth of these kids love for the Lord and their desire to walk with Him which keeps us going as a youth staff.

It's especially incredible to see a seventh grader and you get the opportunity to see them all the way through to twelfth grade and then you able to see them come back and pour into the youth group. There is nothing better than to see them begin to do ministry.

As I was preparing for tonight to give the last challenge for our students at Impact Weekend one word kept popping into my head and that was the word

‘ambassador’. What do I want them to hear and what do I want for them? I want them to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ. That is the word that kept coming to my heart. That is also what I want for myself and all of us and that is to be ambassadors for Christ. I want to look at a passage in 2 Corinthians 5. This is a very familiar passage and as a matter of fact our Vacation Bible School this summer used verses 20 and 21 as their theme so many of our students who were helpers in VBS have heard this and memorized it. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 says 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself 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 entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 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 passage and there are a lot of things we could pull out of that passage but I want to focus on verse 20 and what it means to be an ambassador for Christ. Before we get there we have to talk about what it takes to become an ambassador for Christ. What does it take to be a representative of Christ? You have to be reconciled to God before you can represent the Lord. Again 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 says 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself 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 entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. When you think of the word reconciliation it automatically implies alienation. If we are in need of reconciliation to the Lord then that implies that we’re alienated from God. In that word reconciliation there’s a break in our relationship with our Father. There’s strife.

I think about my marriage. On the rare occasion perhaps one in every five years that I do anything wrong to hurt Alison it puts a wedge in our communication in our relationship where I’ve done something against her and there’s a need to be reconciled. There is a need to make things right and there’s no peace. So I have to repent, confess, tell her I’m sorry and ask her for forgiveness. We need to be reconciled to God but the difference is that we were never at peace to begin with. We were born sinful. We were born alienated from God. Romans 3:23 says “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” and Scripture tells us there are “none righteous, no not one.” No one seeks God. All of us have turned aside. All of us were alienated. From the day we were born we were born in sin and separated from God. Romans 5:10 even says that we were enemies of God. It’s not that were just in an argument. We are actually enemies of God. Romans 5:10 says “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

2 Corinthians 5:19 says that “in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...” We’re in sin. We have to experience the punishment of God for our sins. God is a just God. He has to carry out His justice and so we deserve death and condemnation but it goes on to say in 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. Christ endured all of our sins on the cross. Christ endured the punishment that we deserve on the cross so that we could stand right before God if we put our faith in Him. If we confess, repent and surrender our lives to Him then we get Christ’s record put on us and Christ received our record on the cross. The punishment that we deserved Christ endured on the cross and we get to become the righteousness of God. So in our standing as Christians we are seen as righteous. When God looks at us He sees Christ and someone who is forgiven of everything, past, present and future. Praise the Lord for that! We are reconciled, made right with God, because Christ took our sin on the cross. That doesn’t mean we’re perfect in our everyday life. That would be sanctification. We have to grow and grow and grow and become more like Christ but in our standing with God we are made perfect. So in order to be an ambassador you have to be reconciled to God and the only way to be reconciled to God is through Jesus Christ and faith in Him.

What does an ambassador do? An ambassador is someone that represents something or someone. I remember walking in Washington DC when I was fifth grade with my parents and seeing embassies and asking my parents, “What are those? I don’t understand.” They explained that there was an ambassador from another country that would live in that embassy and their job was to represent their country. They were to be the mouthpiece for their country. That’s the picture we get when God calls us to be ambassadors. If we’re reconciled to God through Christ then it’s not an option. We have then become ambassadors for Christ. The picture is that we are to represent Christ.

This summer we took a mission trip to New York City. We took 48 from the Senior High group. I’ve had people ask me if I was crazy for doing that but we get to hand pick who we take so get to make sure we take the ones who are mature enough and ready to go. We were able to work with a ministry that had primarily Dominican children. We were able to work at two different sites. One was first through eighth graders and one day I don’t know if I would have chosen to do this but we were told that we had to take all 100 students that we were working with to Times Square. We were north of Harlem in Inwood and Washington Heights. We had to take all the students on a subway and get them to Times Square and keep count of them. It was pretty stressful but they were great. One of our students was sitting beside a kid on the subway named Marcos. Marcos is an eighth grader and he’s 6 foot 1, 225 pounds. He is a big guy. As this student tells it she said she felt convicted to share Christ with Marcos right there on the subway. She explains how she was very uncomfortable doing that and she just had to take a step of faith knowing that God asked her to do that. She knew God had called her to represent Him. So she asked Marcos, “Can I share with you my

favorite verse?" She then took out the Bridge to Life and shared the verse "For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus." She took out a piece of paper and drew it out for Marcos to see. He folded it up and told her 'thank you' and put it in his pocket and she would say that it was really awkward after that and they just kind of sat there. That was on a Wednesday.

On Friday we had a chance to have a discussion with those older kids, the seventh and eighth graders, we were working with. They had some great questions and we answered all their questions with many being about Christianity and Marcos prayed to receive Christ. He took out the drawing that this student had drawn for him on the subway and he said, "I've kept this since you've drawn it and looked at it every night and I'm going to keep it from now on just to remember that verse." What a great example of being an ambassador for Christ where we are reflecting Christ in everything we do.

What are some other things an ambassador does or some elements we can look at in the Scripture where we are called to be ambassadors for Christ? An ambassador is chosen and selected. God has chosen each one of us. He selected us to be His representative to reflect and represent Him. An ambassador represents his or her country in another country so a US ambassador in China would represent the US in China. The Bible says our citizenship as Christians is not of this world and that we are on foreign soil. This world is our foreign country and we are actually aliens here. Our home is in heaven and our King is Jesus. So we are to reflect and represent Jesus, our King and the Kingdom of heaven which is our country, here on earth. A US ambassador is on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They can't take an off day. They can't just decide to be off and say "I'm not going to represent the US today." Everything they do is to represent the country they are from and this is the same for us as ambassadors for Christ. Every moment of our day is an opportunity to reflect and represent Christ.

We talked about Romans 12:1-2 which says 1 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. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Every moment of our day is a worship moment where we can bring God glory and we should bring God glory and worship. We are to represent Him 24 hours a day seven days a week. A US ambassador represents the US every where he or she is. Even when they are not in their embassy or meeting with a president they are still representing the US. Even when they are not on duty people will look at them and say "They represent the US." That's the same with us everywhere. A US ambassador represents the US in everything they do or say. A Christian is to represent Christ in everything we say and do.

The thing we have to guard is that we don't misrepresent Christ. When you think of golf what's the first name that comes to your mind? It probably is Tiger Woods. Many would say that Tiger Woods in an ambassador of golf. When you think of golf you think of Tiger Woods and when you think of Tiger Woods you think of golf. After Tiger Woods went down the death spiral which he was already in but just fleshed itself out publicly, people would now say that Tiger Woods gave golf a bad name. He misrepresented his game. Golf will live on despite Tiger Woods because we have Pastor Reeder but even though golf doesn't depend on Tiger Woods, Tiger did misrepresent golf in a way and people would say that. He gave golf a bad name. In the same way we can give Christ a bad name and we can put a bad taste about Christianity in other people's lives. We can misrepresent Christ when we're not careful about doing the things we know we shouldn't do. For instance when we don't love people like Christ loves us or we don't forgive when we're bitter and we have a bad attitude when we disobey the Lord, we can misrepresent Him. That is what it means to be an ambassador for Christ. It is reflecting Christ everywhere, all the time and in every situation with everything. We give everything to Him. He is on the throne and everything in our lives is given to Him.

The last thing I want to cover is the ambassador's message. What is the ambassador's message? A US ambassador in China is carrying a message. When he meets with a president he is carrying a message. He is the mouthpiece of the United States. In the same way God has allowed us to be the mouthpiece for Him. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. And verse 18 says we are given the ministry of reconciliation. So our message as Christians, as ambassadors for Christ, is the message of reconciliation. We are not the reconcilers. Jesus reconciles people to the Father but we are to give the message of reconciliation. We are the mouthpiece to the lost through our lives and our lips. You don't have to be an ordained minister to represent Christ and to bring the message of Christ to other people.

What really blew me away in this 2 Corinthians passage was when it said that God is making His appeal through us, that God would allow us to be a part of that. He doesn't have to do this for the rocks would cry out if we didn't proclaim Jesus Christ but He allows us to be a part of that. That is amazing to me! Spurgeon said about this verse; "that staggers the mind, see the great God that directs angels at His command. They go here or they go there, who speaks and the universe comes into being, seeing the great God beseeching His obstinate creatures. He who is King of Kings veils His sovereignty and stoops to beseech His creatures to be reconciled to Him." What's even more staggering is that He allows us to be part of the process. He allows us sinful people to be a part of that process but we can just praise the Lord in that because what great joy we can have in being able to bring people to Jesus so that they can be reconciled to Christ.

We have a great opportunity in our youth group and we would ask for your prayers. In our youth group we have about 15 different schools that are represented. So we have ambassadors for Christ all over the community and the request is that they would take hold of that challenge of that identity that we are ambassadors for Christ and that they would continue to make an impact for Christ bringing the message of Christ to their friends, kids on their sports teams, even their teachers, those they are not friends with and to everyone they come in contact with. One of the things we have done just recently as a youth staff is we have said we need to give our students a resource that they can use to go and spread the Gospel in their schools. We came up with something called an investigative Bible study. So anyone in our youth group that has a passion for the Lord and their lost friends can sign up for an investigative Bible study and it will be student driven. The students will actually invite the students in their schools and they are in charge of who they invite. The Lord is in charge of who comes but they are in charge of who they invite.

We had a couple Vestavia students that really were passionate about this. One came and talked to me early on and said, “I want to do this” and she started an investigative Bible study and another girl jumped in. It was a co-ed Bible study with guys and girls and they met at 6:30 in the morning and eat breakfast together. They invited about 12 friends to come to this. So we had about 10 to 12 students at 6:30 in the morning meeting before school and we talked about how you know the Bible is real, what Jesus claimed and who Jesus is. It was really neat to see the kids respond to this and especially the visitors who came. One of them began attending Briarwood after that and he hasn’t stopped coming. He is very involved and comes to all the events and he was connected through this investigative Bible study. He even wanted to be on our servant leadership team. We make everyone fill out an application and one of the comments he put on his application is he said “I was having a rough freshman year in High School and I was questioning God on why all these bad things were happening to me. My friend told me to come to church with her and that it would help me out of this. I didn’t believe her. Eventually I met one of the BYG staff as well and everything changed. I wouldn’t be who I am without them both.”

It is so encouraging that God allows us to be a part of the reconciliation process. We are not the reconcilers because only Jesus can do that and He has done that on the cross but He allows us to be a part of that process. We get to be His mouthpiece. We get to be the messengers of Christ. To the students, that would be my challenge for you as you go back to school and that you would be an ambassador for Christ. For all of us, I’d like us to represent Christ in all that we do at all times. What an honor that is that God would bestow that upon us. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You that while we're enemies You loved us. While we were running away from You, You chased us down and pulled us into Your arms. While we were happy in our sins You drew us close to Yourself. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus because we know that we are not righteous and we have to have the perfect One who did all things perfectly to take our punishment so that we can be credited His record and stand before You as righteous. I pray that we would be ambassadors for You and that we would carry this message of Jesus to other people giving us sensitivity to the lost and a passion for the lost. I especially pray for these young people, these students, as they go back to school and their everyday lives that they would be the mouthpiece that You use to spread Your Word. Father, thank You, we love You and pray these things in Christ's Name, Amen.

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