**We are Christ’s Ambassadors for Ministry of Reconciliation**

February 15, 2015

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

Key Verse 5:20 “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.”

We have a big word “reconciliation” today. Webster’s dictionary defines the term “Reconcile” as: (1) to restore friendship or harmony (2) To settle or resolve. Let me give an example first to give you an idea of reconciliation. Once upon a time, there were two brothers. Their father had a large farm and when he became too old to work, he called his sons to him. “I am too old to work anymore,” he said. “I will divide my farm in half and give each of you one half. I know that you will always work together and will be good friends.” When the brothers first started farming on their adjoining farms, they were the best of friends and would share everything together. Then, one day there was an argument between the two brothers and they stopped speaking to one another. For many years, not a word was spoken between them. One day, one of the brothers was at his house when a carpenter came to his door and said, “I would like to do some work. Do you have any work that I can do?” The brother thought for a moment and then replied, “I would like for you to build a fence on my property. Build it down near the stream there that separates my farm from my brother’s. I don’t want to see my brother anymore and I would like for you to build a high fence there. I’m going into town and I’ll be back this evening. When he came back that evening, he was shocked to see that the carpenter had not followed his instructions. Instead of building a high fence there, he had built a bridge over the stream. The man walked down to take a look at the bridge, and as he did, his brother walked toward him from the other side. His brother said, “After all the terrible things I’ve done to you over the years, I can't believe that you would build a bridge and welcome me back.” He reached out to his brother and gave him a big hug. The brother then walked back up to his farmhouse to talk to the carpenter. “Can you stay?” he asked. “I have more work for you to do.” The carpenter answered, “I’m sorry but I can’t stay. I have to go, for I have many other bridges to build.” Someone wrote a song that says: “With only 3 nails and 2 pieces of wood, with one rugged cross, Jesus built a bridge.” Today, we look at that bridge, which is called “The Ministry Of Reconciliation” The bridge that Jesus built allows unholy man to be reconciled to a Holy God! As we prepare to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is quite appropriate to think about the meaning of reconciliation.

Last week one woman confessed that she has been separated from her husband for 4 years, and she desperately wants reconciliation. Many of you may have had relationships that have faced difficulty and after a while you too have experienced reconciliation. This is a great event in one’s life or a couple’s relationship! There is one form of reconciliation that is more important than any other, I am speaking of your personal reconciliation to God!

Reconciliation is taking two parties that are at enmity with each other bringing them together where the enmity is no longer there and they can be friends and they can have fellowship together. The fact that we need to be reconciled to God means that we were at war with God. Jesus talked about man’s enmity towards God in Luke 19:12-14. He said, “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’ ‘But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’” There is the enmity in the human heart. Man is shaking his fist at God and has an enmity towards God, saying to God, “I will not have you to reign over me.” We say, “I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul.” We call it rebellion against God. When we rebelled against God, we lost the paradise and suffer much in a cursed world with fear and anxiety. Because of man’s sin, God’s image in man was severely damaged like leprosy. One who should look like a heavenly prince looks a monkey who only looks for bananas. One who should look like a heavenly prince looks like a Gerasene demoniac. One who should look like a heavenly princess looks like a prostitute. But because man is made in the image of God, man has intuition that something is not right, and he has a longing for peace.

God, in his infinite mercy, took the first step at reconciliation. God said, “I’m going to make a step. I’m going to take the first step and try and bring reconciliation between me and man.” Look at 5:18-19 “…God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” What an amazing grace that God has already reconciled the whole world to himself through the death of his Son. That is why Jesus on the cross said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He was bearing the enmity. He was bearing the enmity of God’s holiness against sin. God reached his hand to man and said, “Listen, I’m going to take the first step. I’m willing to reconcile myself to you. I’m going to take the enmity that I have in my heart towards your sin and I’m going to pour it out upon my Son, because I want reconciliation with you.” The cross of Jesus Christ was God taking his enmity towards man and his sin and rebellion and slaying it on the cross. God is reaching out his hand to you and he wants reconciliation.

When Paul realized this grace of God, he cannot but go crazy for Jesus. Look at verse 13. “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.” Some people criticized Paul by saying, “He is crazy. His life is too extreme.” Paul admitted the possibility. But if he was crazy, he was crazy for Jesus. Actually, everyone is crazy for something. Some are crazy for sports, others for romance, and still others for money or political power. Then again some are crazy about their pets, video games, or drugs. What are we crazy for? We must be crazy for Jesus. In fact, the word “Christian” was first coined by unbelievers in Antioch who observed that the early Christians were crazy for Christ. In modern days, Christians are called “Jesus freaks.” Paul explained why he was crazy for Jesus. Look at verse 14. “For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.” Christ’s love compelled Paul. Whoever believes in Christ participates in his death and resurrection and is liberated from the power of sin and death. Moved by Christ’s love, Paul was passionate to love and serve God. Christ’s love was his inner motivation. Some people are motivated by selfish ambition. They work hard. If they succeed, they become proud and useless. If they do poorly, they despair and give up. However, when Christ’s love compels us to do God’s work, we are never tired. We never despair. Our love does not dry up. We are continually motivated to do God’s work with willingness and joy. What is your inner motive to serve God? May Christ’s love compel us as it did Paul.

Look at verse 17. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” When we accept God’s invitation of reconciliation, our position immediately changes. In Christ, we become a new creation. It does not mean that all our bad habits and sinful desires are gone. It means that our identities change. We are no longer enemies of God and objects of his wrath. We become his holy children and heirs of the kingdom of God. It can be explained as follows: Some of you want to be Canadian citizens. When you become a Canadian citizen, you immediately enjoy the privilege of Canadian citizenship. You don’t need visa to go to US. But your habits from your old country still remain. It will take time to become fully Canadian. Likewise, when we are in Christ, Christ changes us into a new creation. He changes everything: our lifestyle, value system, hope, inner desires, and the way we see others. And Christ gives us love and joy and peace in our hearts. Christ gives us eager desire to serve God. We can give thanks in all circumstances, we are joyful always, and we can be kind to others. Though the world does not change, those who accept Christ change inwardly and become a new creation. From time to time, even though we struggle with our bad habits, we should continue to live according to three kingdom dynamics: being humble, inclusive, and sold-out to Jesus with a glorious hope in the kingdom of God. Then one day when Jesus comes again, we will truly be holy children of God.

Not only God changed us, he gave us the glorious mission. Look at verse 20a. “We are therefore, Christ’s ambassadors....” When we accept God’s commissioning as ministers of reconciliation, we have a new identity. We become Christ’s ambassadors. An ambassador represents his government in all of its character and all of its dignity, in all of its philosophy. To scorn an ambassador or to mistreat him is to scorn and mistreat the government which he represents. To send him away is to break off relations with the government and the ruler whom he represents. An ambassador speaks only for his ruler, and he is his ruler’s mouthpiece. He never utters his own thoughts. He never offers promises, demands his own things, but rather those things of his kingdom. And certainly an ambassador’s person and character and virtue lend weight to the authenticity and dignity of his kingdom. So ambassadors are chosen very carefully. An ambassador is a messenger. An ambassador is a representative. His message and his authority are given to him by his king. And in Paul’s day such a duty was as highly respected as it is today. Generally speaking when the Roman government would conquer a particular country, they would put into that country as many as ten ambassadors who would have responsibility for representing their interest and their presence in that conquered land.

So an ambassador is also in a foreign world. He spends his life with those who are strange to him. He has to speak a different language. He has to interface with a different culture. He has to bear a different life style. He has to endure a different tradition. He lives really in a foreign world. And in that foreign world he represents his own king, his own monarch, his own kingdom and he brings the message of his sovereign. So it perfectly describes our calling. Here we are in this alien world and we are ambassadors for the kingdom of God. Our citizenship is not here, it is in heaven. We belong to another world and we have been called into this role of ambassador to tell the people of this perishing world that they can be reconciled to the King of our Kingdom who desires to make them subjects of his eternal kingdom and glory.

Look at verse 20b. “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” God is begging sinners through us to be reconciled to him. You do not see ambassadors begging people to do something. They command others. But God is on bended knee and with teary eyes begging men and women to be reconciled to him through us. This is the grace of God, and the glory of the gospel. God is doing all he can do to reconcile. Now man must lay down his stubborn rebellion and accept God’s reconciliation. Isaiah 55:6-7 says, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”

Yesterday was Valentine’s Day. Many people long for loving relationship. Most people think that their relationship problems are with another person. So they try to solve the problem with the other person and fail. It is because at the root, each one has a relationship problem with God. Without solving the relationship problem with God, we cannot really solve our relationship problems with others. But when we are reconciled with God, we can be reconciled with others as well. Sin against our brothers is sin against God. Trying to reconcile with others before reconciling with God misses the mark. We must be reconciled with God in order to be truly reconciled with others. That is why Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be reconciled with God first.

Look at 6:1-2. “As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of my salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” God’s favor is deeper than the ocean. However, the opportunity to claim it will end. We don’t know when Jesus will come again. We also don’t know when we will leave this world. It is most urgent to receive God’s grace. It is urgent for us to be reconciled to God.

God took the initiative to reconcile us to himself by sacrificing his one and only Son Jesus Christ for our sins. Not only did God reconcile us to himself through Christ, he also gave us the ministry of reconciliation. We are Christ’s ambassadors. So we implore people on Christ’s behalf: “Be reconciled to God.” Now is the time of God’s favor. Today is the day of salvation. Let’s pray that we may carry out this glorious mission this year with the love and humility of Christ.