

Ambassadors (2 Cor. 5)

Part 1

Speaker	Jack Atkins
Duration	00:42:48
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/ja009/ambassadors-2-cor-5

Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:01] Read together from the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, beginning to read in chapter five at verse eleven, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences, for we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance and not in heart. For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God, or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then [00:01:08] were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh, yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new, and all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ [00:02:09] reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God, for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive not the grace of God in vain, [00:03:11] for he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee. Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation. Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed, but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, by pureness, by knowledge, [00:04:01] by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and yet well-known, as dying and behold we live, as chastened and not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things.

[00:05:07] The Lord blessed to us that reading of his own word. However much we may try to get away from the things that are happening around us, I think it is very true that these things do have an influence upon us. And it would be a very strange thing that if in a company of God's people there was not at this present moment an increasing thought for those who are without the gospel [00:06:01] of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was apparent from remarks this afternoon from our brother that he too was not able to turn his thoughts away from the great crusade that is taking place at this moment. I have no apology whatever to make for referring to it, because I believe with all my heart that the

ministry of the Word of God, if it is going to be up to date, and the oral ministry of God's servants ought to be up to date, then it must have some bearing upon the happenings that are going on around us. And it is more than likely that it is because of this that my thoughts were [00:07:10] turned for this evening's meeting to some of the verses that we have read together. The verses that have come to me with great force in these last few days as I thought about this meeting, and I will tell you with no shame that it has been with more than considerable exercise, it has been with strivings, with almost revolting against it, that God has brought me back again to these words. The words that come with such power to my own soul are these, that God was in Christ reconciling the [00:08:11] world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation. Now then, for Christ, we are ambassadors. I don't know what it means to you to think of being, for Christ, an ambassador. But I want to take you for a moment back to that other word, because if I am going to understand what it is to be an ambassador, I must understand [00:09:08] something about reconciliation. Because the message of the ambassador, if I read the text right, is, be ye reconciled to God. Now I am well aware that this is not a gospel meeting, nor do I think that the Apostle Paul, in penning these words, had any thought that the people to whom he was writing were not converted. I don't think there was any such thought in the Apostle's mind. He was writing to converted men and women, and somebody has said of this passage that this is an example of what Paul was telling these believers they should be taking to the world [00:10:07] as a message from God. It's a sample of what an ambassador should be about. And the message of the ambassador then is, to the world, be ye reconciled to God. What is this reconciliation? Well, reconciliation denotes change. It's from enmity to friendship. In the relationship between God and man, reconciliation is something that God does. God accomplishes this. Man is at enmity with [00:11:07] God, but God is not at enmity with man. The way people talk in the world today, you would think that God was their greatest enemy. This is not true. This is not true. God is not the enemy of man. God is the friend of man. The whole of the Word of God declares it. If you want an illustration of this from the Old Testament, and many of you know I'm sure that I am very fond of going to the Old Testament for my illustrations. If you want an illustration, you simply have to go to the wonderful story of David and Mephibosheth. There was Mephibosheth, lamed as a boy, running away, [00:12:07] or being carried away, from the very one whom his nurse thought was his enemy. You know the story, don't you? Saul and his sons had fallen on Gilboa. The only living one in line for the throne of Israel, naturally, was this Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the grandson of Saul. And his nurse, in fear of his life, caught him up and carried him right away to the edge of the kingdom. And for years, until he was a grown man with a child of his own, Mephibosheth lived at enmity with David, in his heart. And that's where man is. I'm sure every one of us are very familiar with that [00:13:04] wonderful ninth chapter of that book, where David looks round his court and says, is there anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God for Jonathan's sake? And there was one man who knew and who spoke of Mephibosheth, who sent for him, and it was with fear and trembling that Mephibosheth came into the presence of David. But you know the result, don't you? As he took his place as a sinner, as a dead dog, is the expression he uses. He discovers in the heart of David a wonderful picture of our Savior, one who brought him back and who gave him a place at his own table. That's the heart of God toward [00:14:10] man, the heart of God that would draw the sinner to himself. Reconciliation, I say again, is what God accomplishes. And all that God has done, I want you to mark this, all that God has done in the matter of reconciliation, he has done in Christ. This is wonderfully true. And he's done it in Christ, and the very basis of it is the last verse of that fifth chapter which we have read together. Him who knew no sin, God hath made to be sin for us, that we might be made the [00:15:06] righteousness of God in him. This is wonderful, you know. But what God does, what he has done, what he's still doing in the way of reconciliation, he has done in Christ. I want to take you for a moment back to the very beginning of things in this world, back to the scene that we have in the

second chapter of Genesis. It's a wonderful picture. It's a picture of God who has brought into being this world, in all its beauty, a God who in this world placed that very wonderful and [00:16:13] beautiful Garden of Eden. And of a God who caused that from that Garden of Eden there should flow forth that wonderful river which flowing through Eden broke into four and spread out throughout the whole world to water it and to refresh it. This is God in creation. A God who having created, loved with all the fiber of his being and provided for that world of his creation a means of sustenance [00:17:03] and refreshment. And every one of us are so familiar with the sad story of Genesis 3. When sin came into that fair creation and marred all that God had brought into being. And the blessing that flowed from Eden was interrupted. Staggering thought, isn't it? It's a shattering thing to me to think that man by his sin interrupted the flow of blessing that came from God. But it was only an [00:18:09] interruption. Thanks be unto God it was only an interruption. For in that moment we find that God begins to work again. You know sin is something which revolts God. Sin is something which God abhors. But sin did not stop God's activity. And there's a very wonderful verse in the fifth chapter of John's Gospel which never ceases to thrill me as I think of this. It's a glorious [00:19:04] word which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to those who came to him then expressing their displeasure at the fact that he had healed a man on the Sabbath day. He turns round to them and he says, hitherto my father worketh and I work. I would dare to say to you tonight that the whole of the scriptures revolves around that verse. Sin had come in and with sin death and it had left God with a choice of two things because God was holy. Either he came out in his holiness and in his [00:20:04] righteousness and he destroyed that world that he had created or he began again to work for the salvation and for the redemption of that which sin had wrought. Oh how wonderful it is to remember that this is exactly what God has done. That's what the Lord Jesus meant when he turned round to those Pharisees and said to them hitherto my father worketh. From the moment that sin came into this world my father who had sat down looking upon all that he had created pronouncing it good [00:21:01] who had sat down and rested the seventh day. That was a Sabbath. That was a Sabbath. But now God was back at work again. Wonderful grace he was back at work again. The Lord Jesus says and now I'm here I'm here to carry on that work which the father started a way back when Adam by transgression fell. I'm here to do the work that God needs doing in this world. God was in Christ reconciling the world. May I move you further through in the way of illustration? Wherever the water flowed God was [00:22:14] there blessing and you know the water that was interrupted the flow of that blessing flowing out from Eden interrupted in Genesis 2. Wasn't the end as far as God was concerned because we can turn to another very wonderful picture in the Old Testament. In the 17th chapter of Exodus where again we see the water flowing. What were the circumstances? The circumstances were a rebellious people in an arid desert. A desert through which God in his grace was conducting them. A people [00:23:03] in chapter 16 cried for bread for meat because they loathed the light bread that God was giving them. But a people who in chapter 17 were thirsty and who cried for water and a leader who turned in desperation to God and said God what shall I do with this people? The word that came to Moses was to go and to smite the rock and out from that smitten rock there flowed water to quench the thirst of those thirsty Israelites. You know don't you that that rock was Christ? This is [00:24:02] sovereign grace ministering to the needs of sinners. You say to me it's a picture of the Holy Spirit. Yes it is but isn't it a picture of the Holy Spirit given as a result of the redemptive work of Christ at Calvary? It was from a smitten rock that it flowed. Beloved this is redemption. This is God working to bring back to himself a people who were sinners and who desperately needed him. I tell you again that everything that has been done by God in the way of reconciliation [00:25:13] has been done in Christ. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound. And over every human iniquity God triumphs in Christ. That's a glorious thing. I don't care what the human iniquity is. I don't care what the depth are to which men have sunk. Christ has triumphed over it. This is true. It must be true. And you know when you read this verse in the fifth of Second Corinthians that God was in Christ reconciling the world. And those of you who have got

authorized [00:26:06] versions in your hand and I expect that's most of you probably all of you. Will you forget the comma that comes after Christ in that verse? It's not there at all. It leaves an awful gap if you stop there that God was in Christ and leave it there. That's not the meaning of the verse. The meaning of the verse is that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. I want to say this to you. Something which may surprise some of you but I hope it doesn't. That that word strictly speaking is referring not so much to the death of Christ as to his life as a man in this [00:27:02] world. It's God in Christ reconciling the world. As he moved through this world every step that he took, every action, every miracle shouted of this glorious truth that God was present in Christ reconciling the world. You say to me the life of Jesus couldn't save? Ah wait a moment, wait a moment. As a man in this world how many people did he heal? How many did he make to see? How many to walk? How many did he raise to life again? I tell you as a man in this world Christ was triumphing [00:28:10] over sin in everything that he did. His life was a constant triumph for God in this world. But oh, but oh, when we turn to Calvary we see it do we not? In all the wonder of its fulfillment for everything that he did as a man, all the triumph which was his over sin and over iniquity in reconciling the world to God, all that wells up in all its glorious fulfillment. When as a man he went out to that place called Calvary and in obedience to God and in love for [00:29:10] the dying souls of men he gave himself. Yes, yes it was in his cross in the very fullest sense.

God was in Christ reconciling the world, rising above every offense.

Beloved, you, the fruit of all that pain and sorrow of that death of his upon that cross, it's to you who are reconciled to God by faith in his name, it's unto you that is committed [00:30:14] the ministry of reconciliation. The Christ who moved through this world reconciling the world to God is no longer here. He's gone back to heaven. He's gone by the way of the cross, but he's gone back to heaven. But the character of that love and of that service, the reconciling character that was his in this world, that ministry of his which was for God toward men, is committed to you who have been reconciled. Oh beloved, what a responsibility this place is upon [00:31:15] us. Reconciled to God? Yes. And have committed unto us the word of reconciliation. I want to quote you the next verse, not as you have it in our authorized, not as you have it in probably any of the translations that you have, but as you will find it as Mr. Kelly translates it. I love this. Listen. [00:32:04] God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. For Christ, then, we are ambassadors. God, as it were, beseeching by us, we entreat for Christ be ye reconciled to God. For Christ, then, we are ambassadors.

What dignity is this? What a place is ours to stand in the world where Christ stood in this relationship [00:33:08] as being there for him who has now gone back to heaven. We stand in relation to the world where Christ stood as belonging to him. You say, you're putting us in a very high place. A very high place? No, God is. For Christ, then, we are ambassadors. May we go back to our rivers? The seventh chapter of John's gospel. Let's listen for a moment to what the Lord says there. It says, [00:34:02] In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.

What is it? Isn't this the Lord Jesus presenting himself as the very source of this living water [00:35:01] of which you, the believer, are to be the channel through which this water may flow to a sin-stricken world that needs to be reconciled? That needs to be reconciled. You know, if we could put it like this, that Eden of old was a debtor to water the earth that it might be fertilized, that that smitten rock was a

debtor to quench the thirst of Israel's thirsty hordes.

Is it true? I believe it is. But everyone who believes in Jesus [00:36:05] is a debtor to allow the streams of refreshment to flow out to others. A channel, oh yes, only a channel, but a channel through which Christ may flow to a needy world. We are a new creation, created, I believe, as a new creation, for this. Oh yes.

We have been given this ministry of reconciliation, and the challenge that comes to my heart that comes to my heart is how have I faced up [00:37:03] to that which God has given to me? I can't evade this issue. For Christ, then, we are ambassadors. I read to you the opening verses of the next chapter, because some of you may say, well, in what way and to what effect are we ambassadors? Well, it's a great list of things, isn't it? List of things, isn't it? All the sort of things are mentioned here, which I'm quite sure at some time or other, you have trumped up as an excuse for not being that channel through whom Christ can flow. [00:38:02] It's been too difficult. It's been too dangerous. It's been too exhausting. I don't know enough. Ah, my dear friend, the apostle gives us this list and he says, through every one of these circumstances, for Christ, then, we are ambassadors. Are we that kind of an ambassador? That faces what comes, not because we are strong, not because we have got any ability, but faces it in the strength that he gives and in the power which belongs to him. And I dare to say this with all the certainty that I can, [00:39:05] that if God has said to me as he has, that he has committed to me the ministry of reconciliation, for Christ, then, I am an ambassador, then God will give me the grace and the strength and the power. I can move out into this in all the glorious certainty which belong to the man who penned that wonderful 27th psalm. Somebody has described the opening verses of the 27th psalm as the hero's psalm. Says the psalmist, the Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? There is the strength, there is the source, for Christ, then, for Christ, then, we are ambassadors.

[00:40:17] I want to do something that I don't think I've ever done in my life from a platform. I want to read to you a poem. You may think it's very familiar, but I don't think it's the one you think it is. But it sums up just what I've been trying to say to you. Thou hast no tongue, O Christ, as once of old, to tell the story of thy love divine. To tell the story of thy love divine, the story still as strange, as sweet, as true, [00:41:04] but there's no tongue to tell it out but mine. Thou hast no hands, O Christ, as once of old, to feed the multitudes with bread and wine. Thou hast the living bread enough for all, but there's no hand to give it out but mine.

Thou hast no feet, O Christ, as once of old, to go where thy lost sheep in desert pine. Thy love is still as deep, as strong, as kind, but now thou hast no feet to go but mine.

[00:42:02] And shall I use these ransomed powers of mine for things that only minister to me? Lord, take my tongue, my hands, my feet, my all, and let them live and give and go for thee.

For Christ's end, we are ambassadors.