

Being Ambassadors of Reconciliation

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[0 : 0 0] My name's Robin Silsen. I'm one of the members of the congregation here at St Silas. And we've got a fantastic passage to look at this morning. So I'm going to pray and then we'll look at it together.

Father God, we thank you so much for your word. We thank you for how much you love us. And we thank you that you want to speak to us. And so I pray that you'd open our hearts to receive your word and that you'd change us by it by your Holy Spirit.

We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. One of the big ideas that we're going to be thinking about this morning is how do we evaluate our own life?

How do we evaluate our spiritual life? And by way of introduction, I want to start by thinking about how we use mirrors. Because we use mirrors not to evaluate our lives but our physical appearance. To check we look right before we start the day off. I don't suppose any of us have been to an old-fashioned fairground in quite a while. But I think one of the best attractions is the Hall of Mirrors.

[1 : 1 2] They're just good fun, aren't they? You know the kind of thing I'm talking about. There's loads of different mirrors that distort the way you look. Make you look thinner or fatter, short or taller.

Some even distort different parts of your body. Like they make you have ridiculously short legs but with a really long face. They're just a bit of fun. But the thing is, we know in those mirrors that our reflection is distorted.

We know it's a lie of what we're really like. We probably wish that those mirrors that take a few pounds off were accurate. But we know they're not a true representation of our physical appearance.

My question this morning really is, what mirror do we use to tell us with how we're doing at life?

Over the past few weeks, we've been looking at Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church.

And Paul is demonstrating what his life is like. What his ministry looks like. What we've seen is that his way of doing things is different to the world's.

[2 : 2 1] Paul is holding up what faithful gospel ministry looks like. And what his life looks like. And what the message of that ministry is. His life is the true reflection.

But there are others around Corinth who've been influenced by the world. The world's evaluation. And they present something different. Paul states what they're like.

Even in our passage today, in verse 12, he talks about them saying, Those who take pride in what is seen rather than what is in the heart. It's a view of life and ministry that revolves around outward worldly achievement.

And so, what we have is that there are two mirrors to which we can evaluate our own lives. Paul's mirror or the world's. How will we evaluate our own lives?

By looking at Paul or by looking at the world. And if we do align with Paul, which is what he wants for the church, what does that life look like?

[3 : 2 8] You might remember from the last few weeks that it's not easy. It's full of difficulty. And there is the temptation to try the world's methods. Paul is consistently telling the church there not to lose heart with his way.

The difficulty they face now is temporary. That's what Darren said last week. Our vision at St Silas is reach, grow and send. And so we pick up our passage as we continue to look at his argument as to why they should not lose heart.

And align themselves with his ministry and message. And we're going to look at three aspects of that ministry. We're going to look at his motivations. The task he has to do.

And the hope that he has for the church. Motivations, task and hope. So firstly, Paul's motivations. And we see two motivations in this passage. The fear of the Lord in verse 11. And the love of Christ in verse 14. So we're just going to take each one at a time. Fear of the Lord to begin with.
[4 : 37] So just look with me again at the first half of verse 11. Paul writes, Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord.

We try to persuade others. His motivation for his ministry of persuading others of his message is clear. It is the fear of the Lord.

Now before we jump in, we need a little bit of context to help us. And just look with me before in verses 9 and 10 of what we finished with last week. We're picking up the same argument up. So we make it our goal to please him. That's to please God. Whether we're at home, in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

So that each of us may receive what is due us. For the thing is done while in the body, whether good or bad. That's what's in his mind when he's talking about the fear of the Lord.

[5 : 33] Paul is imagining standing there. Standing in front of the judgment seat of Christ. And he wants to be commended. He wants, verse 9, to have pleased God.

For the things he did whilst in the body. How he used the gifts, the opportunities that God gave to him. It's in light of that that we come to verse 11.

Persuading others falls into that category. You could say, since then we know it is to fear the Lord. Since we know that we're going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

We try to persuade others. He doesn't want to miss any opportunity. Have we ever pictured that moment? You stood before the judgment seat of Christ.

Close your eyes and imagine you're there. The glory of Christ is before you. And you're about to receive what is due to you. I ask the question of myself.

[6 : 37] How have I used the gifts and the opportunities God has graciously given to me? There is a right way of thinking about this.

I think it's similar to the way we think about the good servants in the parable of the talents. If you were to look in Matthew 25. Who put their talents to good use.

And when the master returns, they've grown them. They've grown what he gave them before he left. And what do they hear? What does the master say? He says, well done, good and faithful servant.

You've been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness. That's what Paul wants to hear.

Isn't that what we want to hear? It means being faithful with the opportunities given. What opportunities? What gifts has God given you to persuade others of his good news?

[7 : 40] Are we taking them when he comes? Does the fear of the Lord motivate us so that when we stand there we think, no I haven't missed any opportunity? The second motivation is the love of Christ.

Verse 14. Paul knows that Jesus loves him.

And the reason he knows is by looking at the cross. At his death. His death tells him that Jesus loved him so much that he died for him. The one who died for all.

It's the free offer of the gospel. The most supreme act of love the world has ever seen and will ever see. But I think there's slightly more to what he's saying here.

Because Jesus' death did more than we often realise. When someone puts their faith in Jesus for the first time they become spiritually united to him.

[8 : 44] That means that everything that happens to Jesus happens to them spiritually. When Jesus died there is a part of every Christian that dies. We call it the old self.

The old nature. And it is crucified with Jesus. With Christ. The love of Christ therefore motivates Paul on multiple levels.

Why? Because the love of Christ means that old Paul is dead. But now because of his union with him he has new life with Jesus. What has happened to Jesus has happened to Paul.

Because Jesus rose to new life. Paul also has new life. Verse 15. And he died for all but those who live. Meaning those who have new life.

Should no longer live for themselves. But for him who died for them. And was raised again. Christ's love stops Paul from living for himself.

[9 : 44] And causes him to pour out his life for others. To no longer live for himself but for Jesus. Jesus' love has transformed him.

And he lets us in on a particular way of how it's transformed him. It's how he sees people. It's like he has spiritual glasses that have been put on him. That makes him see everyone from a new spiritual perspective.

Verse 16. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. He sees people differently. He assesses Christ differently. And I don't know about you but as we're reading this. It almost feels as you're reading it. You can sort of hear Paul getting more and more excited. As he meditates on what Christ has done for him. And what he's done for the church. We get. There's almost like an explosion of delight. In verse 17. Therefore if anyone is in Christ. The new creation has come.

[10 : 45] The old has gone. The new is here. He is compelled. Motivated to keep on going with his life.

And with gospel ministry. Because he's not the same person anymore. Two motivations from Paul. And both of these are true for us.

One day we'll give account for everything we've done. For all the opportunities that God has given us. Does knowing that. Does the fear of the Lord.

Does it motivate us to persuade others of the message. And then the love of Christ. What he's done for us. Compels us. Because we're new creations too.

If you belong to Jesus. The old you has gone. The new has come in your life. Christ's love has done that. Why would we not want to live in light of that.

[11 : 47] And so. We've talked about Paul's motivations to keep going. Not to lose heart with his ministry in his life. But let's move on. We're going to move on from that. To look at what Paul has been given to do.

What is the task that he needs to be motivated. To keep on going with. The task we read. We see in verse 20. He is Christ's ambassador.

With a message of reconciliation. Verse 19. He is Christ's ambassador. With a message of reconciliation. Paul's task is to deliver the message.

And ambassador is. It's a fantastic title. Because what we notice is the message. The message of reconciliation. Reconciliation. It actually starts with.

It originates. It belongs to the living God. Verse 18. All this is from God. Who reconciled us to himself through Christ.

[12 : 45] And gave us. The ministry of reconciliation. That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. Not counting people's sins against them. The need for reconciliation.

It implies estrangement. Doesn't it? Estrangement between two parties. Yet there is something remarkable here. Normally.

If you think about estrangement. And the need for reconciliation. It's the offender. Who makes peace with the offended. God is the offended party.

The hostility. The estrangement. Is because of our sin. And yet the initiative comes from God. He's the offended party. And yet he moves towards us.

He reconciles us. Through Jesus. Not counting our sins against us. Paul's task. Is to be an ambassador of that message.

[13 : 49] Now. We know what an ambassador is for. Don't we? We know their job. And their role. I suppose. In the world today. All the embassies.

Where I think ambassadors live. And in the UK. I think most of them are in Kensington. And in Belgravia. In London. And if you walk around.

That area. In London. You can see all the flags. Hanging out. Outside the buildings. And you think. The job of the ambassador. Is to speak. On behalf of the country.

They're from isn't it? When they speak. It's not their message. But comes from. The government. Or the leader. Of that country. That they come from. Paul.

Is Christ's ambassador. And whilst it. It is delivered by Paul. And in that sense. It is Paul's message. It doesn't originate with him. But with Christ.

[14 : 43] With the living God. Verse 20. We see that. God. Is making his appeal. Through us. Through Paul. Paul. Paul has been.

He's been uniquely gifted. To do this. And uniquely placed. To deliver this message. Not only is he himself. A new creation. But he carries with him.

The new creation message. We carry that message. With us as Christians. Each of us. Is an ambassador. For Jesus Christ.

We represent him. Wherever we go. In your workplace. Your family. Friendship group. Maybe even. The street you live on. You might be.

The only. Christian. That people. In those situations. Have a relationship with. Each of us. Is uniquely. Placed. By Jesus Christ.

[15 : 38] To be his. Ambassador. And. Now. It's not the mandate. Of another country. But it's the mandate. Of the new creation.

We've touched on the substance. Of that message. But in verse 20. What we see is. Paul gives us the concrete basis. Of why reconciliation. Is possible. Just look.

Second half. Of verse 20. He writes. We implore you. On Christ's behalf. Be reconciled to God. God made him.

Who had no sin. To be sinned for us. So that in him. We might become. The righteousness. Of God. Be. Reconciled. Make peace.

With the living God. He has made it possible. For everyone. To make peace with him. It is by the gospel. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. That this wonderful reconciliation.

[16 : 34] Is made possible. And let's. Let's want to. Let's unpack that verse 21. Because it's just. It's just such an amazing verse. What does it say? That God. Made him.

Jesus Christ. Who had no sin. To be sin. He had no sin. Let's just think about that. The earthly life of Jesus. He had no sin. That means.

He was flawless. Without blemish. Without fault. Without stain. No careless words spoken. No self-righteousness. No idols.

In his heart. He didn't have any ulterior motives. No pride. No lust. No content. No malice. His heart was free. Of all guilt.

And shame. He did everything God. Wanted him to do. All the time. Totally obedient. His heart was totally pure.

[17 : 29] The most loving. Caring. Compassionate. Selfless. Happiest person. To walk the earth. At one with the father.

He knew. No sin. But he was made to be sin. By God. For us. All the things that he was not. The things that we are. God dumped on him.

All our shame. Our loveless. Self-righteous. Idolatrous. Actions. But more than that. Not just the actions. But our sinful nature itself.

Because. The sins that we commit. They're just the tip of the iceberg. They all originate. From our sinful condition. The roots.

Of our heart. That go deep. That was dumped on to Christ too. Why? So that all the muck. All that stuff. Would be gone. So that we could be friends with God.

[18 : 25] So that all our sin. Could be wiped away. So that we could be reconciled. All that stuff. Went away in Christ's death. Everything that kept us. Apart from God. At odds with him. At a distance. Has gone.

And the sinless life. Of Christ. Given to us. So that we could be declared. Righteous. We become the righteousness. Of God. This is the basis.

Of our reconciliation. That's why it can happen. You and I can be friends with God. Because of Jesus Christ. Isn't it so wonderful? This is the gospel.

It's from God. It's his message. And Paul's task. Is to deliver it. To a dying world. To be an ambassador. Can we take up that mantle?

Can we take up. That mantle. And so we've looked at. Paul's motivations. We've looked at his task. And we're going to move on. To what his hope is.

[19 : 23] For the church. What his hope is. But before we. We look at the hope. Paul has. I just want to. Take a brief aside. To look at one thing. Because. It struck me.

Just notice. The. The sort of. Urgent language. We've seen. Through this passage. We read that Paul is compelled. To be motivated. By the love of Christ.

He appeals. He implores. And he urges. I've never seen. An ambassador. Urge. Or use that kind of language.

Like he's begging. That tells you. What Paul. Is seeing here. That's the posture. He's seeing with it. He's begging. The Corinthian church. He loves. The church. So much. That he's hoping. That this word. That he writes. Lands. In their hearts. And his hope. Is for genuine change. Genuine.

[20 : 17] Salvation. Just look with me. What he's. When he uses. One of these words. In chapter 6. Verse 2. As God's co-workers. We urge you. Not to receive.

God's grace. In vain. Don't receive. God's grace. And be flippant. About it. Like it's nothing. Or meaningless. And to spell out. What he's really.

Getting at. He quotes. The prophet. Isaiah. Look down with me again. It's from Isaiah 49. In the time. Of my favour. I heard you. And in the day.

Of salvation. I helped you. And that verse. From Isaiah 49. It's referring. To a time. When God. Acted. And answered. Prayer. For Israel's salvation.

That they'd be rescued. From exile. Paul. sees a parallel. Between his ministry. And that of Isaiah. Isaiah's message.

[21 : 11] Was met with a. Let's say. Less than. Enthusiastic. Response. They thought. That because. They were God's people. They could live. However they wanted. Isaiah even says.

In verse 4. Of the same chapter. I have laboured. In vain. Something that Paul says. What Paul does then. Is he. He sort of. Provides a commentary. On what. Isaiah's passage.

Means now. That's what he says. I tell you. Now is the time. Of God's favour. Now is the day. Of salvation. And so. What does he want?

What's his hope? His hope. Is that. He doesn't want the church. To mirror. The Israelite vanity. He doesn't want the church. To mirror.

The Israelite vanity. And the only way. For that to happen. Is if they. Align. Their life. And ministry. With his. There is a consequence.

[22 : 08] In the life. Of someone. Who does that. I want. I want us to circle back. To that verse. We looked at. Earlier. In. As I was. Talking. That verse 17. Therefore.

If anyone. Is in Christ. The new creation. Has come. The old. Has gone. The new. Is here. And let's. Dig a bit. Deeper. Into that.

Recently. We've been. Watching. At home. David Attenborough's. Latest nature. Series. A perfect planet. And as a treat. On the weekend. We've let Heidi. Stay up.

And watch an episode. With us. It's amazing. Watching. The stunning. Creation. That's on that series. And think. That God. Made it all. Just with a spoken word.

But let's. Stop and think. The new creation. Will be grander. Than anything. That you see. Or any place. That you go visit. What's breathtaking.

[23 : 04] About this passage. Is that. Paul says. If we're in Christ. We're a new creation. The new life. You have. In Christ.

Is comparable. With creation. Itself. This. Is how Paul. Sees Christians. Sees himself. Worldly achievements.

Have no bearing. And in fact. And this is. I think this is staggering. We. As new creations. In Christ. We are a foretaste.

Of that consummated. World to come. When people. Interact. With you. Living faithfully. For Jesus. People. Are experiencing. Something. Of. The new.

Creation. Salvation. So what does. Paul want. What's his hope. For them. It means. That genuine. Salvation. It means. Living. As a new creation.

[24 : 00] He's saying. Don't receive. God's grace. To you. And then. Resist. Being changed. By it. Or live. Like he used to be. Before. It would be weird.

If Paul. After his conversion. Carried on with his old life. People would say. He's not genuine. We are new creations. In Christ. Let's live.

As new. Creations. Not receiving. The grace. In vain. But showing. That grace. Has really. Genuinely. Changed us.

Live. Like the old. Has died. And the new. Has come. That's the evidence. That you really. Have been reconciled. That's the evidence. You've been.

Reconciled. And so. As we start. To round things up. There are two mirrors. That you can hold. Your life up against. The world's. Or Paul's.

[24 : 56] The world's mirror. Will give you. A distorted reflection. It's. It will lie to you. It'll tell you that. Happiness. And joy. And fulfillment. Is by meeting.

These temporary desires. That you have. With worldly achievements. And worldly. Success. Paul's mirror. Tells the truth. Hope. Let's hope. We need to hold up.

Our lives. Against his. So that we're motivated. By the fear of the Lord. By standing at the judgment seat. Of Christ. Christ. And you. How have we used.

The opportunities. God has given to us. And motivated. But I'm compelled. By his love for us. That the old you has died. And the new has come. Let's take up Paul's mantle.

To be ambassadors. Of reconciliation. The new creation message. That we carry. With each of us. Where friendship. And peace. With God.

[25 : 51] Is on offer. Be reconciled to God. You might be the only person. In the life. Of the friends that you have. That has an active relationship.

With Jesus. You're uniquely placed. To share that message. And let's not receive. The grace of God in vain. We're new creations in Christ.

Let's live as the people. Jesus. Has transformed us to be. That's me putting others first. Before ourselves. Just like Paul. It's the evidence.

That we really are new people. The old has gone. And the new has come. Let me pray for us. Father God. We thank you so much.

For your grace to us. We thank you so much. For the way that you've transformed us. We thank you. That you've made us new creations. That the old has gone.

[26 : 46] And the new has come. We thank you. That you've made us ambassadors. Of this wonderful message. Of reconciliation. We thank you. That you've reconciled us.

Through Christ. And so I pray Lord God. That you'd help us. To be ambassadors. To speak of your wonderful good news. To others. Pray that you'd help us.

To live as new people. In Christ. And so we commit this into your hands. Pray that you bless us. As we go into the week ahead. And that we live to praise. And praise you.

In everything that we do. We ask for this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.