

INTRODUCTION

This verse by verse study of 2 Corinthians is called “Hope for Cracked Pots,” because God uses plain, imperfect clay jars—just like us—to contain and share the precious treasure of the life of Christ living in us. In the last message I stressed that we should base our identity on who we are in Christ. One of the joys of being in Christ is that we are an ambassador for Christ.

Push the rewind button and let’s flash back in time to Sunday, January 8, 1956. There are five brave ambassadors for Christ who are wading in the shallow waters of the Curaray River in the jungles of Ecuador. Over the past few weeks they had been trying to establish contact with a primitive tribe called the Huaorani. The other tribes called them “Aucas,” a native word that meant “naked savages.” In the preceding days, Nate Saint, a missionary pilot, had been dropping gifts from his small airplane into the nearby village. He had also been calling out friendly words in their native tongue from a loudspeaker mounted under his airplane.

Jim Elliot, another of the ambassadors, had been studying the language and customs of these people for several years. Nate, Jim, and the other three men had already made contact with several of the Huaorani people and had given them gifts and food. Around noon, a large group of Huaorani approached the river, and the young missionaries radioed to their family members that they were excited about sharing Christ with them. However, before the afternoon was over, the blood of those five missionaries stained the Curaray River. All of them were killed by the spears thrown by the natives. When they found Nate Saint’s body, his watch had stopped at 3:17 p.m. The deaths of these five ambassadors for Christ drew worldwide attention and was featured in a famous article in *Life Magazine*. If you’re interested in the story, you should rent the fascinating movie, “The End of the Spear.”

Jim Elliot’s wife, Elizabeth, moved back to Ecuador and settled among the Huaorani people and eventually many of them came to know Christ as their Savior. Nate Saint’s son, Steve, who was five years old when his dad was killed, also stayed in Ecuador and spent time visiting the Huaorani. One detail often overlooked in the story is that all five missionaries had loaded pistols to protect themselves from wild animals, but they had agreed they would not use the guns against the natives.

In 1996, 40 years after that bloody afternoon, Steve Saint sat in the native village and spoke with five men who had been a part of the group that killed the missionaries. All of these native men had since become Christians. As he spoke with them, the oldest man, Gikita, told Steve there was a question that had haunted him for the past 40 years. He asked Steve WHY Jim Elliot and the others didn’t use their pistols to defend themselves. Five men with six bullets each could have easily killed or wounded many of the men who attacked them, but they didn’t shoot at them. Gikita wanted to know, “Why?” Steve thought for a few minutes before he answered the old warrior. Let me push the pause button here and ask you, “Why do YOU think Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, and the others didn’t shoot the people who were attacking them?” We’ll come back to the answer Steve Saint gave to Gikita later, but for now, let me venture my opinion that these five missionaries realized they were ambassadors for Christ and they were acting like their King—Jesus. And, like them, we are also ambassadors for Christ. If you didn’t know that, let’s read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has

gone, the new has come! All this is from 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. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 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. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

I've always been a part of a Baptist Church—in fact, I started attending a Baptist Church nine months before I was born! Growing up I went to a program called "RAs," that stands for "Royal Ambassadors." Every meeting we would quote 2 Corinthians 5:20, "We are ambassadors for Christ." But being an ambassador for Christ isn't just something for young guys, it's for ALL Christians. At RAs we also recited the pledge. I can still remember it today. We have some GABC RAs here today and they're going to come on stage and lead us in the RA pledge. I'm going to swear all of you in as Ambassadors for Christ today. Let's stand and repeat this pledge: As a Royal Ambassador I will do my best: to become a well informed responsible follower of Christ; to have a Christlike concern for all people; to learn how to carry the message of Christ around the world; to work with others in sharing Christ; and to keep myself clean and healthy in mind and body.

Okay, now that you're officially sworn in as an Ambassador for Christ, here are three important points on your job description:

(1) AS CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS: WE LIVE IN A STRANGE LAND BUT MAINTAIN CITIZENSHIP BACK HOME

If you have an understanding of what a political ambassador does today, it will help you understand who we are as ambassadors for Christ. *Webster's Dictionary* defines an ambassador as "The highest-ranking diplomatic representative appointed by one country or government to represent it in another country or government." The United States currently has ambassadors serving in 195 nations all the way from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. As a point of trivia, from 1836 to 1845 there were six U.S. Ambassadors (actually Charge de' affairs) appointed to the Republic of Texas!

An ambassador is someone who is appointed to live in a foreign country while maintaining their citizenship in their homeland. What a perfect description of those who are as Christ-followers. As the old song says, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through." The Bible teaches there are earthly kingdoms and there is a Kingdom of God, and although we live and work in this world, our real citizenship is in heaven. "Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:18-20)

As a citizen of the United States, whenever I travel to another country, I carry a passport. It certifies that I'm a U.S. citizen and it allows me to return to the U.S. when I've been gone. In the same way, we carry a heavenly passport. We are part of the Kingdom of God, and we even have the privilege of being an Official Ambassador of heaven!

It's important for a good ambassador to understand the culture, language and customs of the land where he lives, but he doesn't have to adopt those customs. As followers of Jesus, we should do everything we can understand the people of this world, but we live by a different standard. Paul mentioned that in this world we encounter enemies of the cross, and people who live according to their appetites. He graphically says that "their god is their stomach." And not only do they perform shameful acts, they glory in their shame. All you have to do is open a magazine, go to a movie, or turn on your television and you'll probably be exposed to shameful behavior—and the people are bragging about it.

Sometimes an ambassador must live in a place where there is animosity toward his home country. In 1979, the U.S. citizens who worked in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran were kidnapped and held as hostages for 444 days. Our embassies around the world have often been the target of attacks. In the same way, as you go to your job or your school, if people know you are a Christ-follower, you may be the target of ridicule and scorn. It's all part of being an ambassador.

Jesus said in John 17 that He has sent us *into* the world, but we are not to be *of* the world. Sometimes it's hard to understand what it means to be in the world and not of the world. Just think of a boat in the water. That boat operates well when it's in the water, but if the water gets in the boat, then you're in trouble. It's in the water, but not of the water. In the same way, we're sent into the world to make an impact for Christ. We are like foreigners living in a land that isn't our home. But we are here for a purpose. What's that purpose? That's the next point.

(2) AS CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS: WE ARE OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVES OF OUR KING

A U.S. Ambassador doesn't represent himself; he is always on duty to represent our government, and more specifically, our President. Before an Ambassador is sent to a country, he is trained in the proper protocol he should follow in the foreign country. Then when the Ambassador is sworn in, he is given a commission that includes the full authority to represent our government in a foreign land. What he says and how he lives reflects positively or negatively on our nation. That's why an Ambassador is always careful about what he says and how he lives. Sometimes the only impression a foreigner may have of America comes from the conduct of the U.S. Ambassador.

As ambassadors for our King, Jesus Christ, we also represent Him in this world. The only impression many people ever get of Christ is how they see us acting. We have also been given authority and a commission. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:18-19)

As you know, I love the people of China, and I'm thrilled to see how God is moving and saving hundreds and thousands of the Chinese people. One of the reasons Christianity is flourishing is because China has listened to the appeal of our government to allow more religious freedom. Since 2001 Clark T. Randt has been the U.S. Ambassador to China. He is a committed Christian, has a degree from Harvard Law School, and he speaks fluent Mandarin. Here are some of the

remarks he made in his first speech as Ambassador to China. Notice how he is careful not to speak in his own authority, but how he appeals to the authority of our President: “The President has asked me not to leave home without my American values. Let me be clear, the President has a deep respect for China and its long history and rich culture, for its talented people and for the remarkable progress China has made over the last two decades. In Shanghai, last October, President Bush made abundantly clear the importance of his religious faith and human rights to him personally. A China that is open to all forms of religious thought will be a greater and more respected nation.” (2001, first speech after becoming U.S. Ambassador to China)

The greatest fear a U.S. Ambassador has is that they will say or do something wrong that would bring shame or dishonor on our President or our nation. Ambassadors are trained in the customs and culture of a nation so they won’t commit any breach of etiquette. Some things considered harmless in our culture are offensive in others. For instance, years ago when we used to do a lot of mission work in Russia and the Ukraine, I would walk along and whistle a happy tune, but our translator, Olga, would say, “Nyet, nyet, nyet!” Whistling in Russia (and other countries) is a sign of derision. So I stopped whistling. It was also considered terribly rude to speak to someone with your hand in your pocket. I often forgot this and I as was preaching I’d slip my hand in my pocket. Without missing a beat Olga kept translating and just reached for my arm and pulled my hand out of my pocket!

We are Ambassadors for Christ. We are the only exposure to Jesus many people will ever see. That’s why we should live lives of loving kindness toward others. To show them that Jesus loves them. That’s why we should always try to live in such a way that no shame or dishonor is attached to the name of Jesus.

Sadly, too many of us live in such a way that we aren’t good representatives of our King. Mahatma Gandhi, who is called the Father of modern India once said: “I don’t reject your Christ, I love your Christ. It’s just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ.” So as Ambassadors of Christ, let’s make sure we live in a way to honor our King.

(3) AS CHRIST’S AMBASSADORS: WE HAVE THE HONOR OF DELIVERING OUR KING’S MESSAGE

“He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:19) Can you imagine a U.S. Ambassador who stayed shut up in his Embassy all the time, constantly studying books about American history and taking notes about the U.S. Constitution? Can you imagine him only meeting with the other employees at the Embassy, and refusing to go out and talk about America because he’s afraid that someone won’t like his message? An ambassador like that would be recalled and fired in a heartbeat. But sadly, too many Christians act that way. We think of our church as a fortress where we come and hide from the world and study our Bibles in our little holy huddles. This IS our Embassy, but some of us treat it like the Embassy Suites! Our job is to leave the Embassy, and go out into the world and take the message of our King—the message of reconciliation! There are at least four important facets of this message of reconciliation.

1. My sin creates my need for reconciliation with God

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself.” The word reconciliation means “to agree together.” When you are balancing your checkbook, you must “reconcile” what you say you have in your account with what the bank says you have in your account—and if those numbers don’t agree, you know whose mistake it usually is! In the case of Divine reconciliation, the fault is ours 100% of the time.

The moment we sinned, we committed a grievous moral breach of etiquette against God. Our sin alienated us from Him, and we are powerless to do anything to fix this broken relationship. But thankfully, we don’t have to do anything because God took the initiative to repair the broken relationship.

2. God came in Christ to reconcile the world (me) to Himself

“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.” When Jesus visited earth, He was God in the flesh, and the reason He came was to reconcile us back to God. We are different from God—He is holy and we are sinners. But because Jesus was both human and Divine, He could relate to both parties.

Sometimes when people divorce they give the reason “irreconcilable differences.” Thankfully, our separation from God constitutes a reconcilable difference!

As Ambassadors, we have the privilege of announcing this message of reconciliation! On December 8, 1941, one day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Joseph Grew, delivered a declaration of war to the Japanese government, and then he severed diplomatic ties between Japan and the U.S. Sometimes an Ambassador must deliver a declaration of war, but our job is to deliver a declaration of peace! It’s not Christmas, but any time is a good time to hear the words written by Charles Wesley: “Hark! The herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the newborn King. Peace on earth and mercy mild; God and sinners reconciled!’”

3. Because of the cross, God doesn’t count my sins against me

“...not counting men’s sins against them.” The word “counting” is the word *logizomai*, which was a financial term that meant to “take an inventory.” In the KJV it says, “not imputing their sins against them.” Here’s the best way for us to understand what this means, “God doesn’t credit my sins to my account.” Let’s imagine for a moment I’m a billionaire and I told you to go out and charge as much as you wanted on your credit cards, but then when you get your credit card statement, none of your charges appear—instead the credit card company puts the charges on my account. Would you like a deal like that? Sure!

When it comes to your sins, that’s exactly the offer God makes. God says all the sins I’ve committed, all those immoral charges, are no longer appearing on my statement. You may be thinking, “Someone has to pay the bill.” You’re right. Jesus has. Jesus paid it all. God takes the sin charges that we rang up and at the cross, He placed all those sins on the account of His perfect Son, Jesus, who was rich in mercy and grace. We’ll say a lot more about his in the next message, but look again at verse 21. It’s one of the greatest verses in the entire Bible. This verse describes the transaction of taking our sins and charging them to the account of Jesus. “God

made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

4. God now makes His appeal through me: “Be reconciled to God!”

“We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” An ambassador doesn’t speak his own words, or offer his opinions, he delivers the message his leader gives him. According to this passage, the message we are to deliver from our king to a world of people who are alienated from can be summarized in four simple words: Be reconciled to God. The fact we announce this indicates that man needs reconciliation. Otherwise we wouldn’t have to insist that people be reconciled, we could just say, “You are reconciled.” We cannot sugarcoat the message. A person without Jesus Christ is facing an eternity separated from God in a place called hell. That’s why we must deliver the message, “Be reconciled!”

It is also a loving message of hope, because we are announcing that reconciliation with God is possible. God has already done everything necessary to bring about reconciliation with every person on the planet.

At the same time, it is a message that requires a personal response to God’s offer of reconciliation. If reconciliation was automatic, then we wouldn’t have to add the imperative—the command—BE reconciled. Our part in being reconciled with God is simply receiving it by faith. Max Lucado said that if reconciliation is a journey of 1,000 steps toward God, then God has already taken 999 of those steps toward us, and the only step we take is to accept His free gift of eternal life.

It’s more than a decision; it is an act of faith. Five frogs are sitting on a log and four of them decide to jump off, how many are left? If you said, “one” you’re wrong. The correct answer is “five.” I said, “Five frogs *decided* to jump off a log.” I didn’t say they jumped—they just decided to jump. We used to sing a simple song, “I have decided to follow Jesus.” It’s a pretty nice song, but I’ve known lots of people who *decided* to follow Jesus, but they never actually followed Jesus. Reconciliation requires that we respond to God’s offer with an act of total trust and faith!

As ambassadors of Christ, our job description is to represent our King and deliver His message of reconciliation to the world. Are you doing that? Are you behaving properly as an ambassador?

CONCLUSION

Okay, let’s push the play button again and return to the jungle in Ecuador. Steve Saint has been asked by Gikita, a man who led the attack against Jim Elliott, and his father WHY Jim and the others didn’t use their pistols to defend themselves. After pondering the question Steve said: “I believe the reason Jim didn’t shoot you was because he knew he was going to heaven, and he knew that you weren’t.” Good answer. As an ambassador for Christ, Jim Elliot was faced with a split second decision. “Do I use this gun to defend myself, or do I face death with courage knowing that I will be with Jesus?” And, being a good ambassador, he followed the example of his King—He died so that others might live. The world looks at his decision and says, “Jim

Elliot, you are a FOOL!”

Jim really didn’t have to decide that day, because his mind was already made up. Seven years earlier when Jim was a ministry student at Wheaton College he wrote these famous words in his diary: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain that which he cannot lose.”

God has called you to be His ambassador. He may not be asking you to die for Him, like these five ambassadors in Ecuador. Instead, He’s asking you just to live for Him. We’re all living in a strange land, and the people here may be hostile to your message, but remember that our true citizenship is in heaven. Our job is to simply represent our King. So let’s all leave the embassy today and go out into the world and deliver the message of our King: Be reconciled to God!

OUTLINE

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“He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” *2 Corinthians 5:19*

1. My sin creates my need for reconciliation with God.
2. God came in Christ to reconcile the world (me) to Himself.
3. Because of the cross, God doesn’t count my sins against me.
4. God now makes His appeal through me: “Be reconciled to God!”



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes