

Ambassadors of God

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading comes from 2 Corinthians. Please follow along in your bulletin or on the screen. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.

Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

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.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

[1 : 1 8] For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. This is the word of God. Great. Thanks, Christina.

Let's pray together for a few minutes. Sovereign Lord, great and glorious God, the majestic and mighty one, we come before you this morning, not presuming on your grace, but we come before you, Father, with humility, with a sense of fear and trembling, aware of your awesomeness and our depravity, aware, God, of your glory and our great need for you.

Father, where we do come self-confident, we ask you to forgive us, God, to humble us, Lord, to find grace in you.

God, you say that you oppose the proud, but you give grace to the humble. Oh, God, make us a humble people, and therefore those that receive your grace, God. What a dreadful thing it would be to be opposed by the sovereign God.

[2 : 3 5] Father, we humble ourselves before you today. God, we so need you. We come this morning full of weakness and limitations. God, we carry in our hearts the brokenness of this world, the brokenness of our own lives, and God, we are so aware of our desperate need for you.

We've come to worship and adore you, to praise your greatness, but also, God, we've come to find our hope and our rest in you, to find our strength and our peace in you. Christ, come and minister to us this morning, we pray.

Even as you have already, we pray that you continue to minister to us. God, as we read your word this morning, we see the wonder of the gospel, the beauty of the gospel, God.

We also see your great calling for us to be your agents of hope and healing in this world. And so, Lord, we pray that as we don't just read this word, but as we ponder over it the next half an hour or so, as we open up your word, we pray that you will write your gospel deeply on our hearts.

We pray that as a church at Watermark, we will be deeply, deeply moved by the truths of the gospel, God, that it will set us free. It will give us hope in our hearts, Lord, in the city.

[3 : 51] But we pray, God, that also you will cause us to be agents of your gospel, as we see in this word this morning, Lord. God, help us to see what you're doing in this world and to join you, as that incredible verse said, to work with you in what you're doing in this world.

God, we pray that as a church family, we will be faithful to what you've called us to. God, may you look on us as a church family and say, with you I'm well pleased, my good and faithful servants.

Speak to us, we pray. Lead us and guide us, God. Show us how to follow you and obey you, Lord. Lord, as a city, this last year has seen so many challenges and help us to know how to respond correctly, how to neither feel sorry for ourselves nor to be overconfident in ourselves.

God, help us to humble ourselves before you. And so we do pray, God, that Hong Kong will be a great city again. Not great in earthly terms, not great in necessarily wealth or sophistication, great before you, God.

A city that takes care of its people, a city that is humble before you. Make us a great city in your eyes, Lord. Finally, Father, this morning, we want to pray again for our city, for our continent, Asia, and for the world around the coronavirus.

[5 : 09] For those that are sick, we pray, be with them. For those that are stuck in quarantine, God, pray, minister to them. For those that are at home this morning, because they cannot leave, Lord, minister to them, we pray.

Father, for those that have lost loved ones, and are grieving the loss of loved ones, Father, minister to them, draw near to them. God, we pray for our parents and scholars and students, those that have had school and university closed, those that are needing to homeschool their kids, we pray, strengthen them, minister to them.

We pray this next month will be good for families, God. We pray for your grace. Father, we pray finally for countries that are experiencing large surges in the virus. Pray for South Korea, God.

Pray for Iran and Italy. Pray for the governments and the medical staff and doctors. God, pray for the churches in those countries. May they be salt and light, God, as we pray for ourselves.

We pray these wonderful things in your magnificent name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, once again, welcome.

[6 : 14] My name is Kevin, if you don't know me. And if you're visiting from one of the other churches in Hong Kong, I've met some of you this morning. A warm welcome. Great to have you. You know, a number of churches have needed to close down their services.

And so if you're part of the larger body of Christ in Hong Kong, welcome. It's great to have you with us this morning. Being part of the people of God means being part of the mission of God.

And what is the mission of God? It's to bring hope and healing to a lost and broken world. That was the main point of the sermon two weeks ago. And as I try to show you us, that is not just a point of a sermon.

That is one of the main points of the Bible. That God is at work in the world. God has not abandoned his world, but he's moved towards his world in grace, bringing hope and healing and redemption.

But he's doing that, not arbitrarily. He's doing that through his people, through his church. And then last week, Ed unpacked the Great Commission, Matthew 28.

[7 : 24] Jesus says, go into all the world and make disciples, followers of Jesus, teaching them to obey everything that I've taught you. And then Chris looked at Peter chapter 3, who said, always regard Christ as Lord.

And when you do that, then be ready to always give a reason for the hope that is within you. Now this morning, Ed and Chris are preaching in Yunlong at Paul's church.

Paul, who was with us a few weeks ago. And they are taking that message there. And so this morning, we continue with this theme of God's call for us as a church to be on mission, to join him in what he's doing in the world.

Now this morning, we're going to look at this passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 16 and onwards. And if you're here at the end of January, this passage should be familiar, because Oscar preached from this very passage a few weeks ago.

I hope you picked that up. And Oscar magnificently unpacked the gospel, the fact that in Christ we are a new creation. This morning, I want us to look at this passage again, not because Oscar didn't do a good job, but because it is so rich and there's so many facets to it.

[8 : 34] And we're going to look at the gospel briefly, but then we're going to look at the main implication that Paul draws from the gospel. So Paul establishes the gospel and then he says, okay, the implication of this is, therefore, be on mission with God.

And so we're going to look at that together. So let's look at this passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. And the context is this. The apostle Paul goes to Corinth many years before and he plants this church.

And while he's away, some other people come to the church in Corinth and they say, you guys listen to that Paul fellow? Come on. He's not very impressive. He's not very sophisticated.

I mean, just look at him. He doesn't even talk that eloquently. And if Paul is not that impressive, then maybe his message isn't that impressive. And so these people are coming to this church in Corinth, and they're downplaying the wonder of the gospel because they're saying, Paul's not a very impressive man, and therefore maybe his message and his ministry aren't that impressive.

And so Paul writes this chapter to show them, he says, yes, maybe I'm not impressive. I'm fallen and I'm fallible as a person. But the message of the gospel and the ministry that we've been given is magnificent.

[9 : 50] Okay, so that's what this chapter is all about. So look what he says here in verse 16. He says, What's Paul saying here?

He's saying that there was once a time when we assessed people, sized people up from a purely humanistic perspective, a purely worldly perspective, or in the words that Paul uses here, he says, According to the flesh.

In other words, we would look at people and work out their value or how significant they were from a worldly perspective, what careers they had, how successful they were in their job, where they stayed in Hong Kong, what their culture or their background or their ethnicity were.

And so some people we would be in awe of and enamored by them. And some people we would look down at them. And then he says, But something changed. He says, From now on, no longer do we regard people according to the flesh.

Something's changed. And what's changed? Well, Paul encountered the gospel. And when he encountered the gospel, that changed the lens through which he saw other people and himself, and in fact, the whole world.

[11 : 05] He says, Now the gospel helps us to see all people, including ourselves, in a different light, which is that we're broken, we're lost, that we're sinners in need of grace.

But also, if we've come to Christ, if someone has come to find their hope in Jesus, that we are eternally loved and accepted and esteemed and valued by the God of all creation.

You see that? Previously, we used to size people up and judge people according all sorts of criteria. But now the gospel has given us a different lens. Now we see all people, whether working in the red light industry or the CEO of a big bank, all of us in the same light.

We are sinners in need of grace, but if in Christ, loved and esteemed by him. As that great preacher, Oscar Chow once said, The gospel is the great equalizer.

And it really is, right? It really does, it just levels the playing field for all of us. And then he says, we even once viewed Christ this way. Once upon a time, we looked at Jesus and we thought, he's this poor peasant from the backwaters of Nazareth.

[12 : 17] Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Can he teach us anything? Hey, born to an unwed mom, is there anything good that's going to come from Jesus? But now the gospel has helped us to see us as we really are.

But it's also helped us to see Jesus for who he really is, the savior of the world. And so ever since encountering the gospel, everything has changed.

And so Paul says, a Christian is someone who's come to see Christ for who he is, also come to see themselves for who they are, and in light of that sees the world as it really is.

Now, in verse 13, Paul's going to elaborate, elaborate on what a Christian is. And in fact, he's actually going to give us two definitions of a Christian, somebody that's encountered the gospel.

The first thing is, he says this, a Christian is not just someone who's trying to be religious. A Christian is not just someone who's trying to improve their lives, make their lives better.

[13 : 15] A Christian is not just someone who's trying to honor God and serve God in the hope that maybe when they die and they get to heaven, God will be forgiving towards them. No, a Christian is someone who in the most fundamental part of their lives has been recreated, renewed.

Look at what he says here in verse 17. It says, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come.

Friends, a Christian is someone who was once dead to God because of our sin, but has been made alive in Jesus. A Christian is someone who was once controlled by our own self-centered desires, living for me, but now is free from that.

A Christian is someone who wants to live for themselves, but now since coming to know Christ has been won over for Christ and now lives for God and his glory. Friends, a Christian is someone who's in a being, the control center of our lives, our hearts was once self-orientated, but now has been made new and changed.

In fact, a Christian is someone who is so different that Paul says, it's like a new creation has been born. John Newton, the famous guy who wrote Amazing Grace, he said this, I'm not what I hope to be.

[14 : 31] That's true for me. I'm not what I one day will be when I get to glory, but by the grace of God, I'm not what I used to be. See, God's grace comes and changes us.

And as Paul says, it's like making us a completely different person. How many of us have heard stories of, of people who in coming to Christ, family members have then come and said, what have you done to my husband?

What have you done to my children? They're like a new person. I remember I was once in, Claire and I, when we first got married, went to Czech Republic and we met a pastor there. And I said to him, how did you become a Christian?

And you know, Czech Republic is one of the most atheist countries in the world. Less than 1% go to church. He says, I was a university student. Atheist didn't believe in God whatsoever.

I was riding on the trains to university and I met this guy from Zambia. And every day he would share the gospel with me. And so one day after hearing the gospel, I'm quite moved by it.

[15 : 30] I'm challenged by it. And so I go home to my girlfriend and I say, do you know what this guy's been telling me on the train? And he shares the story of the gospel with her. She believes she goes to her room, gets on her knees and says, God, if it's true, make yourself known to me.

She becomes a believer that day, but he's still not so sure. And so over the next week or two weeks, he sees such a radical change in her that he suddenly believes it must be true.

And he gets on his knees and he says, Christ, come and have your way in my life. He becomes a follower of Jesus. He said to me, I led my first person to Christ before I even believed. Let his girlfriend to Christ. But the point was she changed.

There was such a dramatic change in her life that had led him to see there must be something different. Friends, the gospel is a power that changes us. And what brings about this change?

Where does it come from? Well, look at verse 18. All this is from God. Friends, God is the great orchestrator of this. If God is at work in your life, if God is changing your life, if you've recently become a follower of Jesus, if you've seen the evidence of God's spirit at work in you, it's not because you have amazing pastors.

[16 : 43] As wonderful as this church is, it's not because of this church. It's because the great God of the universe changes people. He's at work in your life. God, by his spirit, is working in people.

All this is from God. He's the one who gives life to the spiritually dead. He's the one who gives sight to the blind. Friends, if, as we pray often, as I prayed at half past five this morning, when I was praying for Hong Kong, God, send revival to Hong Kong.

Renew the city. Friends, if that happens, that won't be because of any strategic brilliance of any humans. It'll be because God in his sovereignty has ordained it.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. All this is from God. But now, look at verse 18 and 19. Because here Paul is going to give us the second description of a Christian.

So the first thing is, a Christian is someone who has been made new in their heart. But secondly, look at what he says here. A Christian is someone who has been reconciled to God. Verse 18, all this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself.

[17 : 53] And again, verse 19. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's trespasses against them.

So here's the second description of a Christian. A Christian is someone who was once estranged from God, once alienated from God, on account of his or her sinful nature, but now has been reconciled or reunited.

A Christian is someone who was, where once there was animosity, now there is welcome. Where once there was enmity and strife, now there is friendship.

Where once there was alienation, now there is reconciliation. And friends, that prior state of being alienated from the God that made us, and loved us, and created us, and gave us everything that we have and need, being estranged from God, that is the natural state of every human being, apart from the gospel, apart from the grace of God.

But now, in Christ, because of Jesus and his death, reconciliation between God and man is possible. Friends, that is the very heart of the gospel. That is the central message of what the Bible is all about.

[19 : 07] This is what God is doing in the world. That though human beings, in our natural condition, are cut off from God, under his judgment, under his wrath, because of our sin, God has not abandoned the world.

He's moved towards us in incredible grace and love. By sending Jesus to die on the cross, to take upon himself, our sin and our judgment, now poured out on Jesus, in our place, so that our sins aren't counted against us, but are now counted against Jesus.

As Paul says in verse 21, we read it earlier, for our sake, I need a, I need a handheld mic, I mean a wireless mic. I practiced this this morning with my hands. For our sake, God made him, that's Jesus, who knew no sin, to become like a sinner, to take on sin, so that in him, we who are sinners, might become the righteousness of God.

Do you see what happens there? There's this double exchange that takes place. Christ takes on our sin, and we become righteous before God. Friends, all this is so that we can be reconciled to the God who made us.

Friends, isn't reconciliation such a beautiful thing? I don't know if you've ever had this, where a relationship that's really meaningful to you, maybe your spouse, maybe your children, maybe your parents, maybe a dear friend, where there's some tension, there's friction that takes place, misunderstanding, and you just, it feels like it's jarring, it feels like you're not seeing eye to eye, and you lie awake at night, you're tossing and you're turning, you can't sleep, you can't rest, and suddenly one person says, hey, can we talk about this?

[20 : 52] I'm sorry. And the other person says, I'm sorry. Now, please forgive me. Friends, isn't reconciliation one of the most beautiful things in the whole world? Friends, now God says, the God who made us, the God of the universe and the cosmos, the God who knows you better than you know yourself, the God who loves you, that God has made a way for, where there once was friction and animosity, intention, and under his judgment and his wrath, now reconciliation is taking place.

Now there is welcome and embrace. Now he says, I love you, my son and my daughter. Dear friend, have you been reconciled to this God? Do you know him?

Do you know his love and his tenderness? Do you know his warm embrace? Friends, are you still trusting in yourself to save yourself? Are you trusting in your righteousness or your good works or your moral performance?

Are you trusting in your religious devotion? Friends, we've said it many times and we'll say it again. Apart from Jesus, you have no hope. You cannot save yourself.

There is nothing you can do in this world to rescue and redeem and to be reconciled to God. Put your hope in Jesus. Friends, the one who loves you the most and knows you the best, the one who went to the cross for you, he went to the cross that you might be reconciled to the God who made you for a relationship with him.

[22 : 22] Friends, do you know him? Do you know him? As Paul says later on in this chapter, I implore you, be reconciled to God. Friends, maybe for some of us who have been running away from God, maybe you're still coming to church, but in your heart, you're drifting away from him.

Maybe in your heart, you're making decisions that you know the relationship is being strained. Friends, be reconciled to him. Don't go another day. Don't go another hour. Friends, don't go another minute.

Be reconciled to God. For in Christ, he who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God, that we might be reconciled to him.

Friends, this is the heart of the Bible. This is the heart of Christianity. This is what the gospel is all about, that in Christ, God is reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's trespasses against him.

Isn't that good news? It's great news. If you're not convinced, it's great news. Now, that is part one. Okay? Now, in the second part of this passage, he gives us part two.

[23 : 29] Part one, you could say, is the ground, or the foundation, of Paul's ministry. Paul's entire ministry is grounded on this. The gospel, right?

That's the message. In part two, he's now going to give us the implications of that message, which is his ministry, or his mission. So, the ground, or the foundation of his ministry, is the message of the gospel.

The goal of his ministry, is the mission of Jesus. And in the next couple of verses, he's going to oscillate, between the message, and the mission.

Okay? These two things. He's going to go left foot, right foot. It's like, it's like an airplane. You need two wings to fly an airplane. It's like pedals of a bicycle. You need two pedals. Okay? And Paul's going to keep on jumping, between one and two.

The message of the gospel, and the mission of the gospel. Let's see how he does this. Look at verse 18 with me. All this, is from God, who through Christ, reconciled us to himself.

[24 : 34] Okay? That's the message. Now the mission. And gave us, the ministry of reconciliation. So God is reconciling sinners to himself. That's what he's doing in the world.

By sending Jesus to die, on the cross. He is now at work in people's hearts. But those that he has reconciled, if you're a follower of Jesus, this morning, that's you.

Those that he has reconciled, he is now given a ministry of reconciliation. In other words, when God saves somebody, ransoms somebody, rescues somebody, reconciles somebody, he also brings that person into his reconciliation mission, into the world.

In other words, being reconciled to God, being a Christian, is not distinct or separate from being part of his mission of reconciliation into the world.

In other words, being those that have received the good news of Jesus is not distinct or separate from his calling to be those who carry the good news of Jesus into the world. Being those who have been changed by the gospel is not distinct from being those who tell others about the gospel.

[25 : 44] Or in the words of Genesis 12, those that have been blessed by the gospel are called to bless others with the gospel. And so Paul says the exact same thing in the next sentence.

Look at verse 19. He says, that is, in Christ, God is reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against him. Okay, that's the message, the gospel.

Now, entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So do you see that? Paul's saying these two things, being reconciled and being agents of reconciliation, these two things go together.

Now, you could say, okay, Kevin, but isn't that just the apostles, right? Maybe Paul's just talking about himself. Maybe he's saying, I, Paul, you know, the apostle who wrote half the New Testament, I have been reconciled and I have been given this message of reconciliation.

But the rest of you, well, you know, you just go on doing what you want. Well, look what he says. the same people that he talks about being reconciled is the same people who are given this ministry of reconciliation.

[26 : 53] He says, God, who through Christ reconciled us, okay, to himself, gives us, those same people that he's reconciled, the ministry of reconciliation.

Who has he given the ministry of reconciliation to? Those that he's reconciled. Who is he sending out as his missionaries? Those that have received the gospel. Friends, it's not just the pastors and the elders and those that work at the church as staff.

It's all believers. So we could say it like this. Central to the gospel is that those that were once alienated from God have been reconciled and central to what it means to be a Christian is to be an ambassador of reconciliation in our world.

Friends, just think about what incredible responsibility and privilege this is. The gospel is so precious. It's the hope of the world. It's the hope of our city.

It's the hope of our lives. Friends, the gospel is the thing that's going to bring hope and peace to our city again. It's the thing that can bring together fractured and warring parties. It's the thing that can quieten the anger and the frustration and the restlessness of our city.

[28 : 07] The message of the gospel is a power that changes people's lives and it can change a city. And this precious treasure, which is more precious than all the gold in the world, this treasure God has entrusted into our hands.

I know it sounds foolish. I wouldn't have done it if I was God. But somehow in his wisdom he has entrusted this message into our hands to take into the city to people like you and I.

And so in verse 20 Paul says the same thing. He uses a different analogy. He says, therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal to this world through us.

Friends, what do ambassadors do? We have some friends from Ambassador Church here this morning. What do ambassadors do? Ambassadors speak on behalf of their government.

Now, in the 21st century often ambassadors engage in negotiation. In the Roman world there wasn't a lot of negotiation. The Roman Empire they just annexed somebody and then they sent their ambassador to tell their colony what to do.

[29 : 16] So when you're an ambassador from Rome there wasn't a lot of negotiation. You just told somebody what to do. Friends, God says that he's called his people to be ambassadors.

To speak on behalf of the king of heaven to a rebel world that there is hope for the world. He's called us to speak on behalf of him as his spokesperson to represent his interests.

Friends, this morning we're ambassadors not of Rome, not of Hong Kong, not of the family business or the family name but of the reconciling God of the universe.

And what is the message that he's given us to deliver? That in Christ reconciliation for rebels is possible. That in Christ God is reconciling the world to himself. Not counting mankind's trespasses against them.

That if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. Friends, that God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might be the righteousness of God. This is our privilege.

[30 : 18] We are entrusted with this message as his ambassadors. God making his reconciliation appeal through us. Is that not an incredible privilege? Oh my goodness, it is.

Now, friends, how does this transform your week and your life? Imagine every day waking up with this sense of conviction.

Today I am an ambassador for the king of heaven. Today I am God's agent to bring reconciliation to the world. Friends, how would that change the way that we live our lives?

Yesterday morning I was going to pick up a bed from Kennedy town to our house youngest daughter and wanted a bunk bed and so got this bed and ordered the go-go van and so while I am in the go-go van I am having this conversation with my new friend Sam the go-go van driver and he asks me what I do so I say I am a pastor and what do you think about faith?

Well, he says I don't believe anything. Oh, why is that? Why don't you believe anything? And then we were both wearing face masks and actually he was wearing a face mask and so I said oh, you know, the coronavirus what do you think about that?

[31 : 32] Well, Hong Kong's gone through a difficult time this last year what are your thoughts about Hong Kong? Where do you find hope, Sam? And so we have this conversation in the go-go van about the hope of the world where you can find hope.

Now the reason I did that was because I was preaching this message this morning and I was aware that there in a go-go van God has placed me to be an agent of reconciliation. Here's my friend Sam who does not know the God who made him the God who made him for a relationship with him the one for whom Jesus died on the cross and had his blood poured out the one who Jesus said Father, it is finished.

Christ hung on the cross for my friend Sam and he doesn't know the great love of God and maybe there's nobody else that he's going to meet in this next year that knows Jesus and God has put me there in the van as an agent of reconciliation to help Sam get to know this God of the universe.

Friends, when you go to work tomorrow, you go there to do a job and we do that job properly. Okay? It's good to work hard but you don't just go to a job. You go as an ambassador of the king, as an agent for reconciliation to help those that do not know the love of Christ come to know him.

Friends, how would this change the way we do parenting? We don't just think of parenting as raising our kids to send them to a good school, to go to a good university, to get a good job. We raise our kids that they will know the problem of sin in the world and the wonder of Jesus and what he's done on the cross.

[33 : 04] To teach our kids how to fear God and to love him deeply. Friends, what happens if we saw our social engagements, not just as having a drink with a friend after work but as a time to listen to the pain and the hurt in people's hearts and to help give a reason for the hope that is within us and to show them that there's hope in this world.

Friends, God has called us to be agents of reconciliation. For those of us that are followers of Jesus this morning, those that have been reconciled to God, can I ask us, how is our ambassadorship going?

Friends, how faithful are we being with the task that the sovereign God has entrusted to your care? Have you neglected this task? task he's given you? Are you faithfully discharging your duties with diligence and care?

The last few days I've done a lot of repenting as I've thought about this. How so often I neglect the great call that God has put on our lives as followers of Jesus. On Friday night we were flying back from Thailand and I was sitting in the airplane and I was frantically typing away trying to finish off the sermon and on the way back from the airport half past 11 on Friday night I realized there was a lady sitting next to me fully donned in coronavirus gear, right?

The rain jacket and the plastic gloves and the mask and the laboratory goggles and everything and for two and a half hours I sat next to her on the plane typing out a message about reconciliation and did not have one conversation with her.

[34 : 37] And so in the taxi I was like God I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. You've called me to be an agent of reconciliation. I was more concerned with my own work than this person knowing you.

Father forgive me. As we come to a close I want us to finally look at what does this mean practically and the way to do this I want us to look at the book of Acts and look at Acts chapter 5 and we want to look at how the early church did this and then draw a couple of practical applications.

So in Acts chapter 5 the story is this Jesus sends out his apostles to be his witnesses he says wait until you receive the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit of Pentecost comes upon them empowers them and they go out witnessing for Jesus and as they do that many people are coming to faith in Christ.

It's just the city of Jerusalem is being turned upside down and people are following the apostles and listening to their teaching and the religious leaders are getting jealous because more people are now following and flocking to the apostles than listening to the religious leaders and so the religious leaders have the apostles arrested and thrown in jail to try and quieten down this uproar in the city.

Well the apostles are in jail and that night an angel miraculously opens the gates of the jail and sets them free. Now if you're a spiritual seeker this morning you might think come on that stuff doesn't happen right who believes those kind of things but just take note the book of Acts was written by Luke who's a physician and Luke was commissioned by a Roman official called Theophilus to write to investigate the claims of Jesus and to investigate the early church and then to write a report for him.

[36 : 24] So the book of Acts isn't like a PR stunt or written from an angle it was an investigative report commissioned by a Roman official to this physician to write for him.

So you can trust the facts of the book of Acts. So this angel opens the gates and if I was in the prison I would have said thank you God time to go home and to look after myself.

But that's not what the angel says. He says go into the town square go to the temple and go and tell people about Jesus. Now they've just been arrested for doing that right? And he says go back and tell them the words of life.

So they say okay. So they go to the town square they go to the temple and they start telling people about Jesus. Very soon the religious leaders find out exactly what's happening and they have them arrested again.

And they bring them before the council called the Sanhedrin and look at what they say. They say this in chapter 5 verse 28. It says we strictly charged you not to teach in this man's name and yet here you are filling Jerusalem with your teaching.

[37 : 33] Church is it possible that one day people could accuse us of that in Hong Kong if we link up with other churches and work with other great churches in our city and plant new churches in our city that one day people could say you guys you're filling Hong Kong with your teaching about Jesus.

May it be so. If you're a guest here this morning just so you know that's what we're trying to do. We're not trying to build a big church or a fancy church. We're trying to fill Hong Kong with the message of Jesus.

That's what we're on about. So that's what they do. They're filling Jerusalem with the wonder message of Jesus. Except that's exactly what they were told not to do.

And so the authorities come to them and they say what are you doing? We told you not to do this. So look what Peter says in verse 29. Peter and the other apostles answer them and say but we must obey God more than man.

Okay? He says we know you've said that but God's told us otherwise. We're going to obey him. Well look at how well this is received. Verse 33 it says when they heard this they were enraged and decided to kill them.

[38 : 41] Things have escalated a little bit. From going to jail to now being killed. So they have this council meeting and at the council meeting one of the leaders Gamaliel says guys this is not a good idea.

Let's not kill them. Just charge them and just this thing will die out. If it's not of God it'll die out. So they agree with him. Verse 40 says this when they called the apostles they beat them they charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and then they let them go.

Then the apostles left the presence of the council rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus. And every day in the temple courts from house to house they did not cease teaching and preaching that Jesus is the Christ.

Okay what do we learn from this? Three very quick things and we're done. First is this being an ambassador for Christ is hard and often unwelcomed. Friends if you are a follower of Jesus this morning you've got to reconcile the fact that what Jesus calls you to may not make you the most popular person in town.

Sometimes it's hard sometimes it's unwelcomed. No way in the Bible does it say that being obedient to Jesus is a bed of roses or going to be easy. If you're a follower of Jesus this morning he's calling you to be a missionary and ask any missionary sometimes it involves suffering sometimes it involves persecution sometimes it involves rejection often involves heartache.

[40 : 04] It means giving up certain privileges to things that you previously thought were just normal or entitled to. It means being misunderstood being accused of ulterior motives. It means persistence.

I love how the apostles here they preach about Jesus they get arrested they get released they go back and do the same thing they get arrested again and then the last verse is so every day they did not cease they did not stop going from house to house in the temple courts telling everybody that the Christ is Jesus.

This unbelievable persistence they just would not give up in the face of opposition. Friends being an ambassador for Christ is often hard often unwelcomed but it's a wonderful and a privilege.

Second thing is this being an ambassador for Christ requires us to know where our allegiance lies. When they're arrested the second time the authorities come to them and say what are you doing?

We told you not to do this and Peter doesn't say oh sorry we misunderstood you. He doesn't say oh gee we didn't hear you. Sounds like parents right?

[41 : 12] You ask your kids seven times to do something and say sorry I didn't hear you. That's not what Peter says. He says we know but I'm sorry we've got a higher allegiance. His name is Jesus and he has asked us to do this.

We've got to listen to him. Friends you know if you're a Christian today Jesus doesn't just save us to forgive us he calls us into his kingdom with Christ as our king.

Before you Christians the Bible says you're a slave to your own desires now you're a slave to Christ. Before we are Christians we follow our own desires now we follow Christ. In becoming a Christian you switch allegiance from your own kingdom to the kingdom of Christ.

Jesus is a savior reconciler but he's also king. He's also lord. And so that means that we have a higher allegiance allegiance to Christ who's our king.

Third thing is this being an ambassador for Christ requires that we know the gospel deeply and love Christ lavishly. that verse we looked at last week 1 Peter 3 regard honor Christ in your hearts as Lord always being ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you.

[42 : 25] Friends when opposition comes your way when persecution comes your way when it's tempting just to buckle down and just be quiet when it's tempting to just live a life of comfort and convenience what's going to help us turn the tide?

What's going to help us not live for ourselves but live for others? Friends it's going to be when our hearts are reminded of the wonder of Jesus when our hearts are warmed by what Christ has done for us when we remember that once we were alienated from God under his judgment and his wrath but now have been welcomed as his sons and daughters friends when the love of Christ washes over our hearts and floods our hearts that is when we'll be ambassadors for Christ that's when we'll be missionaries friends if we're going to turn this city upside down if we're going to fill the city of Hong Kong with the message of Jesus the first thing we need is for our own hearts to be in awe and overwhelmed by what Christ has done for us that once we were sinners still sinners once we were lost and broken once we were alienated and cut off once under his judgment and his wrath and now welcomed as his sons and his daughters friends Christ has called us to be his agents of reconciliation Jesus is calling us to stay to go into the public square to be ambassadors for him so let the city and our world know that there is hope in Jesus let's pray let's pray just before we pray

I said earlier that as I consider a message like this and this scripture from my own heart I'm compelled to get to my knees in repentance as I consider how often I live for myself and not for Christ I cannot help but calling out to God for his mercy and his forgiveness friends maybe some of us here we need the best way to respond is by acknowledging God we've not heeded your call to be your ambassadors God we've enjoyed the reconciliation you've given us but we've neglected being agents of reconciliation in our city let's come before our father and ask him to forgive us great and sovereign

God we do God your word exposes us your word God is like a mirror to our souls it shows us what's really there father so often we enjoy the benefits of the gospel but we neglect the calling that you've given us to be agents of hope and reconciliation in our world father forgive us father as we ponder the wonder of what you've done by sending your son and Jesus you sending the Holy Spirit to change us to make us a new creation and you've reconciled us to yourself God we want to become agents of hope for our world Lord and so we pray God send us out we pray God that tomorrow morning when we wake up we wake up with a sense of your calling your divine calling on our lives

God may we know what this means and looks like for us God may we say yes to you Father for those of us that have been over the last few weeks or months slowly shrinking back from you maybe we've been making decisions or engaging in sin hardening our hearts towards you God we want to be reconciled to you this morning we want to come and say we're sorry God Father thank you that the gospel reminds us that you took the first step you're not waiting for us to take the first step you've taken the first step towards us by sending Christ the Son to die on the cross and now God you've sent us your word saying be reconciled to me Father we're sorry won't you take us back forgive us

[47 : 14] Lord Christ come and have your way in our hearts and our lives we pray come and don't just be saviour come and be our Lord come and be our King we pray these things in your name Amen