

## **2 Corinthians 5:14-21** **The Global Mission of Christ**

### **2 Corinthians 5:14-21**

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

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

### **Let's Pray**

#### **Introduction:**

The year was 1996, the day, October 2<sup>nd</sup>. It was a normal day for most people, but it will be remembered by one man as the day he was told that he was going to die. That man was Lance Armstrong, and that day was the day he was told that he had severe stage 3 testicular cancer and was given almost no chance to live. Yet, Lance fought hard, went through many treatments and surgeries, and came out on the other side cancer free.

His life which had seemed over, was brought back from the brink of death and was changed forever. He was so changed by this experience that he wanted to help others in his same situation. This led him, in 1997, to establish the Lance Armstrong foundation with the purpose of helping people who are affected by any and all forms of cancer.

With this simple message and mission the Lance Armstrong Foundation, which is now the Livestrong Foundation, has gone from a small foundation to one that has raised billions for cancer care and research, has many programs and centers that are focused on helping people walk through cancer, and has many agencies that are working to advocate for more and better cancer research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

But the question is: How did they get there? How did they go from a small singular foundation to a large network of people and organizations that are helping to change the landscape of cancer care and research around the world?

According to Gabrey Means, one of the co-founders of Grow Marketing:

*“With the Livestrong initiative it was the will to survive and thrive in the face of overwhelming challenges, which resonated far beyond those living with cancer into a mindset that people from a range of backgrounds and interests shared.”*

**What the Livestrong foundation (initiative) did was it rallied people around something bigger than cancer itself.....the will to survive. In so doing it became a social movement.**

When asked about this, Russel Stevens, one of the men behind the Livestrong campaign noted the following about great movements like this. He said:

*“People join social movements to be a part of a community, connected to something larger than themselves.”*

**This point should not be lost on us this morning.** People will passionately rally around and fight for a cause when they realize that they exist within a larger cause driven or purpose driven community that is fighting for something that is much bigger and grander than their own personal daily existence.

This is why people joined the Black Lives Matter Movement, why protests broke out in Charlottesville, and it’s why we have NFL players kneeling for the national anthem. Right or wrong, all of these men and women see themselves as passionately working to affect change in something that is much bigger and more important themselves.

So why is this important for us this morning?

It’s important because we are also part of a movement. But instead of our movement being merely a social movement it is a global, cosmic, and kingdom movement or mission. **We are part of the mission of God to reconcile a people to and for himself, and to establish for all time a new cosmic and global creation in and through Christ.**

But my fear this morning is that we have lost sight of that movement and mission. And instead of seeing how our lives fit into the great and glorious kingdom mission that God is working out through Christ, we are trying to make God’s work about our kingdom and our plans.

In short, I am worried that we for too long have focused on how Jesus helps us through our lives and makes us happy instead of focusing on the cosmic and global work that he is doing, to which he has called us to be participants.

And I am also worried that our loss of focus is resulting in men and women who have lost their zeal to live passionately on mission for Christ within the contexts and places that he has put us.

So my hope this morning, as we walk through this passage, is that we will see the vastness and greatness of God's mission through Christ and that that we will see how Christ is calling and compelling each of us to partake of his great mission and his great kingdom purposes.

**With that I have three points this morning. The first two relate to the mission of God, through Christ (mission of Christ), and the last one focuses on our call to partake of this mission.**

**1. The mission of Christ is not to reconcile a person, but a people to himself. (V. 14-15; 18-19)**

### **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

In the book of 2 Corinthians the apostle Paul spends the first 7 chapters not only trying to give a defense for his ministry, but also trying to give a stirring picture for gospel ministry as a whole. **A gospel ministry that is less about the individual believer and is more about the global reconciling work that God is doing through Paul and other ministers of the gospel.**

This is why Paul writes in verse 14, "that one has died for all, therefore all died."

Now before we can rightly understand this verse we need to ask a few questions.

One, who is the one who died for all? **We rightly understand that to be Christ.** Jesus died on the cross and took our punishment so that we could become the righteousness of God. As 2 Cor. 4:21 says:

*"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

Two, what Does Paul mean when he uses the word "all"? Is he saying that everyone dies with Christ therefore everyone is saved? Surely not, for Paul writes in Romans 2:6-8:

*He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

So some will gain life in Christ and some will not.

Also, the word "all" in scripture rarely means everyone. Instead it is better translated in this verse to mean "**many.**" So Christ died for many, and therefore many have died.

This means that as Christ died and overcame sin and death, that all who would believe in Christ also share in the same benefits, and have been set free from the curse of sin and death.

**So now his people, throughout all of human history, not only have the hope of eternal life, but are no longer enslaved or controlled by the sinful desires of the flesh, but instead are controlled by Christ.** As it says in verse 15:

*“...and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”*

So what should we take away from this? That though Christ **didn't** die for everyone, he **did more** than just die for you and me. He died to redeem **a people for himself** who would no longer live for themselves, but would live for God.

And just in case we miss what Paul is saying he restates the same thing in verses 18-19 when he says:

*“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 (again meaning many people or many types of people) to himself**, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”*

**Listen:** The global mission of God through Christ was to save a people (many) from their sin and reconcile them to himself so that they (we) would no longer live for our own desires, but we would now live for him. This same reality is also seen in 2 Peter 2:9 which says:

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

**God, through Christ, is literally creating a new nation of people who belong to him that we would all proclaim his greatness, his goodness, and his perfection throughout all of his creation for all time.**

**Here is why this truth is so important for us this morning:** Because it reminds us that the redeeming and reconciling work of Christ is about something bigger and grander than our own small lives. The gospel is not about us, but it is about God's work to redeem a people for **himself** and for **his own glory and purpose.**

The gospel isn't about me having a better life, a better marriage, better kids, and it isn't about God helping me through hard times, and it isn't about helping me to sin less, and it isn't even just about getting people saved so they don't go to hell.

It is about God's great and cosmic work that he is doing through Christ to yes, save us, but more than that it is about a people, a holy nation that he is creating for himself for his own purposes, and for his own glory.

**Now might those other things be benefits of Christ's cosmic work? Yes. But they should never become the center of what Christ is doing.**

**Why?**

Because when we make a better marriage, or better kids, or any other life situation the center of what Christ is doing, he becomes a self-help God who only sort of gets my obedience and my worship, but only when it seems like he is doing something for me, or when things are hard and I really need him.

And if were honest that isn't really an awe-inspiring, soul satisfying, joy inducing, pleasures at his right hand forevermore God. That's a God who becomes this genie in our pocket that we will bring out when we need him. **But that isn't a God worth giving our life for, and honestly it isn't a God worth trusting our lives with.**

So Just as Livestrong cast a vision for the "will to survive and thrive" that has resonated across the globe; we need to have a vision of our God who, through Christ, is saving and reconciling a people, a nation for himself and his glory. **Only then will we rightly stand in awe of him and worship him, and only then will we be become a people who are compelled to follow him, be on mission for him, and trust him no matter the circumstances.**

**2. The mission of Christ is not just to make us new creations, but is to make a new creation. (V. 17)**

2 Corinthians 5:17:

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*

Before we unpack this verse consider for a moment the mission statement of the Livestrong Foundation:

*At LIVESTRONG, we fight for the more than 32.6 million people around the world affected by cancer now. There can be—and should be—life after cancer for more people. We provide direct services to anyone affected by cancer; connect people and communities with the services they need; and call for state, national and world leaders to help fight this disease. This is LIVESTRONG.*

Doesn't this seem like such a grand and compelling vision? But what exactly is it that makes it so grand and compelling? It's the fact that it is not only calling us to fight for something greater

than ourselves, *the 32.6 million people affected by cancer*, but it is also calling us to fight for a new reality.....*life after cancer*.

Who doesn't want to fight for that? Who wouldn't want a global reality where there is not only life after cancer for some, but ultimately for everyone? I think we would all want that and on some level are compelled to fight for that reality.

But as compelling as that is, the message of the Bible, and of 2 Corinthians 5:17 is so grand and glorious that the Livestrong vision should pale in comparison. Paul writes that anyone who is in Christ, meaning anyone who is a believer and follower of Christ, is a new creation.

This idea of a new creation signifies a radical transformation that has happened. Like, life after cancer, a new transformed reality has come into existence; one where a believer literally goes from being spiritually dead, and in bondage to sin, to free from sin and spiritually alive in Christ. The old law keeping days, which Paul called the ministry of death (2 Cor. 3:7), are gone and now we are partakers of a new life and a new covenant that was inaugurated in Christ.

**That's a pretty grand vision isn't it?**

But even as great as this new reality is for us as individual believers we need to see that there is a greater reality of the new creation that is in view here. Look with me at Paul's words in Romans 8:19-23:

*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

Do you see what Paul is saying here? It is not just that we become our own new individual creations, but that we literally are a part of God's new creation work that he is doing not only for his people but for the whole of creation; a work that will continue until it comes to completion with the return of Christ, as he sets creation and his people free from the bondage of corruption, death, and sin forever.

This is a new creation reality that is and should be far more compelling and grand than anything that any earthly foundation or company can come up with. And it is far more compelling than a God who is merely trying to make our lives and our circumstances better.

Instead our God is using all of human history, which includes our histories, our trials, our tribulations, our joys, our successes, and even the mundane moments of our existence for the purpose of doing a new creation work that includes the redeeming a people for himself, and it includes setting his creation free by making it new.

You and I are a part of a cosmic new creation work. A work that was inaugurated in and through Christ is now working itself out in history by the power of the Holy Spirit. And it is this grand work and mission which God is calling each of us this morning to joyously be partakers of.

### **3. The mission of Christ calls us and compels us to work for his grand purposes and not our own. (V. 15; 18-20a)**

#### **2 Corinthians 5:15; 18-20a**

*...and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.....*

*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.*

Now, it should be said that we need to be careful with verses 18-20, and the reason we need to be careful is because Paul's main purpose here is to point out the ministry that God gave to him as a specially called minister of the gospel. God called Paul, and the other Apostles, to a special ministry of reconciliation where they are preaching the gospel to unreached people's.

However, we should also realize that these verses rightly apply to us as well. Why?

Because if we have all died with Christ (verses 14-15), have been reconciled to God (verse 18), our trespasses are not counted against us (verse 19) and are new creations who are apart of God's greater new creation work (verse 17); than we are called to live for Christ (verse 15) and as new creations who have been reconciled to God (verse 18), we are called to represent Christ or be like Christ to the world around us (verse 19-20).

**This means that we, by extension, also have a ministry of reconciliation and are also ambassadors for or representatives of Christ.**

Now are we also set apart like Paul to go to unreached people? No. Are you all even called to preach and teach the gospel the same way that we are as your pastors? No.

But it does mean that you are meant to live, work, serve, love, trust, and speak as someone who is a representative of Christ right where God has put you.

As 1 Peter 2:12 says:

*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

Or as Luke writes in Acts 2:46-47:

*And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

This means that the ways you live, speak, and serve within your marriage, family, work, community, and church are meant to reflect Christ and proclaim the gospel of reconciliation. How you walk through sorrow and trial are meant to proclaim the gospel. How you spend your time and money are meant to reflect Christ.

All areas of our life are meant to be lived so that this new creation reality of reconciliation through Christ would be proclaimed, people would get saved, and the redeeming and new creation purposes of God would be fulfilled both for his eternal purposes and his never-ending glory.

1 Peter 4:12 says, we do this *“in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”*

So where are you this morning? What does your life say about what you believe to be true about the gospel and the mission of Christ? Are you here this morning just hoping that Jesus will give you a better life, a better marriage, better kids, or heal your illness?

If that is you I am here to let you know that I get it. So often my marriage, my family, my fears, my worries, and even my work can be so frustrating and at times crushing that all I am really hoping is that God will make it better so that my life is easier.

But what you and I are doing by thinking that way is making God less than God. Instead of being the all-powerful and all satisfying creator of the universe who has gloriously, thrillingly, and joyously made us a part of his kingdom building and new creation purposes through Christ, he becomes a small God who may or may not fix our broken situations.

But I want implore and challenge all of us this morning to think bigger and live bigger, because God’s vision for our lives and moments is bigger than any vision some earthly foundation like Livestrong can come up with. **God’s vision for our lives is a cosmic reconciling, redeeming, and new creation work that he is doing in us and through us right where he has put us. Every moment of our lives are joyously planned for that purpose.**

**It is a work that one day will come to completion as Christ makes all things new, including you.** The only question is, do you believe this soul thrilling reality, and are you willing to give your life for it?

**Let’s Pray**