

## **Understanding and Embracing God's Grand Mission:**

**A Missional People**

By **Rev. Michael Campbell**

### **II Corinthians 5:17-20**

*Tonight we come once again to this time, to the preaching of the word, asking You to place upon our hearts this kind of desire...the desire to know You will better. We pray that You would open our hearts and minds once again. We pray that You would help us by Your Spirit once again, for in ourselves we can be feeble. O Lord, work tonight. Give us understanding of Your word. Help us to be serious about Your word, and may You apply it to our lives and change us, Lord. Be our Teacher this evening. We would give You all the honor and all the glory and all the praise, for it is in the name of Jesus that we pray these things. Amen.*

For the first five years of my full time ministry after I finished up my time at Covenant Seminary, I worked with a mission agency that focused on some of the most impoverished nations in the Caribbean Islands and into Latin America. And two of the countries that we spent most of our time doing ministry in were Haiti and the Dominican Republic. My particular calling...ministry responsibility...my job...was to lead teams, mainly from the U.S., down to work in these national churches to help to build up these churches through the development of ministries in these churches, but also through the development of ministries through these churches and into their communities. Because of the nature of these nations and how impoverished they were, oftentimes these were ministries that had to meet very specific, real physical needs that people had, and so we had projects that would be things like clinics and schools and clean water projects, and agricultural works, and animal husbandry, and things like that. It would be an understatement for me to say to you tonight that that time impacted my life. As a matter of fact, it shaped my ministry philosophy to this very day in a number of ways.

One of the ways that it shaped my understanding of ministry and missions in the church is it gave me a grand, big understanding of world missions and how important world missions is; how important that we are engaged in world missions; how important it is that we see missionaries sent all over the world.

It also changed me, impacted me, by reminding me of how significant short term

missions is, in the sense that I had the privilege of leading these teams down and seeing the impact that these teams had on these national churches, and also see the impact that this time overseas had upon these believers who went down there from (mainly) this country, and how they went back changed people, and changed in their own churches and in their own communities.

But it also impacted me in another way. When I left Covenant Seminary, I was not sure whether the Lord had called me into pastoral ministry. It was through those five years of working as a missionary overseas and working with these churches that the Lord placed pastoral ministry in the States upon my heart, but as He did that He brought my heart towards a missional understanding of the church. As I watched these ministers and these nations think about what it meant to have a heart for the gospel and a heart for Jesus, and to faithfully preach and teach His word and to see that lived out in communities in very real ways, that impacted me. It changed me. And it gave me a heart for seeing that take place here. That's why I'm a pastor today. That's why I'm in Jackson today. That's why I'm at Redeemer: to faithfully preach and teach the word of God in a Christ-centered, Reformed, Bible-believing church that has a missional understanding of reaching into its community. That's what we're to be about.

You know it goes without saying to mention to you this evening that the Lord has mightily blessed our nation. I know we are going through a tough time economically right now, but the truth is He has blessed this country. But His blessings upon our nation are not just financial and material, He has blessed America historically. It's beginning to change, of course, but historically He has blessed us with a Christian heritage that is both deep and wide. And as a result of that and because of the resources that He has graciously placed in the hands of His people — the church — to steward, America has been and is the greatest mission-sending nation on planet Earth, and we should praise God for that.

As I looked at your mission directory, I cannot tell you how encouraged I was to see all the missionaries that you support, and all the places that you support missionaries — 31 pages! Praise God! You should be encouraged. It's a wonderful thing. But at the same time you acknowledge that and affirm that, and hopefully see the Lord expand that through even this Mission Conference, at the same time I hope you also understand and will take from this conference this truth: that being missional, being a missional church, being a missional people (which is the topic of the message this evening) is not simply that. It's not simply that. It's also and must be about what it means to be missional right here in your Jerusalem, in your Judea, in your Samaria. It's understanding and applying, fleshing out even more what our Lord and Savior said to His disciples: "As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." To know right now what it means to be a sent people not just overseas, but sent in your home and sent to your neighbors, and sent to your community and sent to this city.

This morning I quoted from Christopher Wright's book, *The Mission of God*. I

want to read something else to you tonight that he writes in that book that is helpful for us to think about this evening. He says this:

“Our mission, if it is biblically informed and validated, means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission, within the history of God's world, for the redemption of God's creation.”

That's it! That's it! And that's it for us in our immediate context and to the world. But we can never miss it here...and that's what we oftentimes do. We can't miss our context. We can't miss what it means right here in the midst of all that is around us. We are to be missional everywhere. We are to be missional here. And as we look at our text for this evening, I think Paul explores here three things that are helpful to us in really getting this. He talks about these three things. He talks about our missional motivation (that's the first thing); he talks about our missional ministry (that's the second); and he talks about our missional message — the motivation the ministry, and the message.

Now the first thing we see is our missional motivation, and if I were to take this and put it just in a very simply nutshell, it is this: that we should be motivated to missional living, to being a sent people right here where we are, because as believers in Christ all of us, if you know Jesus... all of us are recipients of God's grand missional purpose and plan. In other words, we are sent because Someone has been sent to us. We are sent because we are recipients of this. This is ours. Notice what Paul says in verse 17 and the first part of verse 18 again. He says,

“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....”

And so if you're a believer in Christ this evening, then you are a new creation in Christ.

But before I get to that — which I am, in just a minute — before I get to that I want you to understand something and not overlook something, and that is where this has all come from. Notice what he says: “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself....” So who is it from? It's from God. We are a new creation because God has done something, because God has acted, because God has worked on our behalf and He's done something spectacular.

This morning we talked about how this great thing that He has done for us is not something that we are worthy of; it is not something that we have pursued; it is something that He has given us freely in Christ — a gift: that He has reconciled us to himself through Christ. Therefore, in a way I could say this to each of us tonight, that if you're a Christian this evening, that if you believe in Jesus Christ

as your Lord and Savior, then you have been “missioned” [and that's horrible grammar, but it's great theology]. You have been missioned. See, that's the key. We've got to get that, that God's missional purposes have enveloped you and me, you see; it's grabbed us; it's not foreign to us; it's not out there and overseas in some land that's disconnected to us, in some place that we don't really understand; that it's close, and it's your life and my life; that missions defines you and me. And the truth is — I mean, if it's biblical, if it's the gospel — then in fact, even though in other cultures in other lands it may be contextualized so that the methodology may be slightly different in the communication of it, it is the one and same gospel. The same gospel that is true for us here in Jackson, Mississippi, is the same gospel for New York or the same gospel for San Francisco, or the same gospel for Asia or Europe or Africa. It is the same. It is the gospel that you have heard. It is the gospel that you have believed. It's about God reconciling sinners to himself in Jesus.

Now part of the motivation, then...when we talk about missional motivation, part of it is this: you are part of this, see? See, you are motivated to be sent because you are in this. It's not separate from you, it is you. Missions is you. You're defined by it. So we must be missional. We can't be anything else! We are this.

I love mission conferences. I love preaching in mission conferences. I love preaching at this one. I've loved getting to know you and experiencing your kindness towards me. We're having a mission conference at Redeemer in two weeks, and a dear friend of mine is going to be preaching...a dear friend of Ligon...Elliot Green is going to be preaching our mission conference. I love mission conferences! If there is a potential downside, however, to mission conferences it is this: if we allow this to happen (and we should not, but if we allow this to happen) what mission conferences can communicate even subtly is this: that the only time that we think about missions as a whole church is once a year during this special moment. And then it becomes just this week that the whole church is thinking about this, and what happens is it disconnects the activity of missions from the underlying cause and the underlying motivation, which is this: God's redemptive work. And, Christian, that's about you and you, and you and you, and you and me. This is what should motivate us. That's the daily reality of the Christian life. Without exception, if you are a believer this evening you are a missional person. You can't help it. Somebody told you the gospel.

My testimony is an interesting one because I actually had the privilege of hearing the gospel and responding to the gospel through a missionary. It's kind of an interesting story, because he is actually... This was thirty years ago. He probably went to the mission field...he was an African-American, and that's sort of unique, an African-American going overseas, because African-Americans historically in the church have not sent people overseas. Forty years ago this man was sent overseas to Africa as a missionary. Thirty years ago he was on deputation back at my grandfather's church where I grew up, and I heard this man who was a

missionary to Africa. He stood up, he preached the gospel, and I heard it. And so I heard the gospel through a missionary and responded in faith. But that's no different than you. Your missionary may have been your Mom or your Dad, or your minister, your youth leader, your campus minister, a friend, someone you work with. But in its essence it's all the same, see? It's all about this. It's all the same thing. This is missional. This is it, and it's applied to you. You're in it.

But here's something else that he says. When he's motivating us, there's something more that Paul is getting at here that we have to see. We are motivated towards missions also because we have been made new. We have a new set of priorities.

Notice what he says: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation...." In other words, a radical change has taken place and this isn't simply cosmetic. This isn't an external facelift, if you will. This is deep, lasting change. We belong to another. We are owned by another. Another has called us and redeemed us, and now indwells us by His Spirit. We are a new creation and have been given new values of this new creation.

What's interesting is what Paul says here: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." Literally from the Greek, it's just simply these words: "Therefore if anyone in Christ new creation." In other words, it's not just simply about you. It is. You are as a Christian a new creation. But it's more than that. You are brought into a new creation, a new age that has dawned in Christ, a new creation that has come in Christ not fully, not totally, not consummated, but certainly and really.

Then in Christ a new kingdom has come. A new creation has come, and He's called you out of this broken world into that new creation. You now belong to Him! There's a whole other set of values that now define you and me, a whole other way of thinking, a whole new purpose — God's purpose — which is about the restoration and redemption of sinful man, and ultimately the restoration of all things in the new heavens and the new earth. This now must motivate us, Christians! And it defines our missional reality. So, missional motivation.

But then that actually leads to the second thing that Paul talks about here, which is our missional ministry. He ends verse 18 by saying this: "And [God] gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

In other words, what we received in Christ — reconciliation with God — now becomes our ministry. This is what the church is about, this ministry of reconciliation. This is our focus. We are ministers of reconciliation. We're called to tell others what we have received in Christ. We declare what God has done.

Notice the first part of verse 20. He says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us." And what are ambassadors?

Ambassadors are those who are sent from one nation to another, and they're sent to this host nation with one purpose: that they communicate to that host nation what the originating nation tells them to communicate. That's it! What this nation says, that's what they say. Paul says we are ambassadors. Ambassadors of what? Well, a new country. What's our country? It's a new creation. We belong to Him even though we're here, and we have a purpose. That purpose is to be His ambassadors, to declare what He has declared, to say what He has done, to live out what He has done in the midst of this world that we live in. We talk about the fact that God has reconciled us in Christ, and notice what he says. He says, "God makes His appeal through us." God makes His appeal. That brings back the whole idea that's so important, that this is what God is doing; that God is at work; that He's the one doing this; that He makes His appeal to us.

And that should create two things in your mind. One of them is to give you a sense of joy and excitement that God would actually make His appeal through you! That's a pretty cool job, isn't it? But the other thing it does is this: it causes us to realize that God is the one who is doing it, and it moves us away from some of the fear that we sometimes feel, or some of the ways that we think that we're incapable of doing this. Well, we are, in fact! I don't care how capable you are, I don't care how good of an evangelist you may be, I don't care how wonderful a theologian you may be, you can't save anybody. God makes His appeal through us.

When I was in Miami and I was pastoring at Pineville Presbyterian Church, there was this man that was in our church there. He had just come to the Lord and he didn't know a lot, but he loved Jesus. And I preached a sermon one time and he got all excited about evangelism. He was one of these kinds of guys that was just bold. He decided that what he would do (because I had talked about evangelism) was that he would just get out there and start going at it. And so he parked his car in a parking lot and went over and just sat at a bus stop. (This was in Miami! He's at a bus stop.) And he decided that he would just talk to anybody that wanted to talk to him, and he did. Most people ignored him, some people were rude to him, some people said all kinds of negative things to him; but occasionally he would get in a conversation. And one time this man was interested, and here was my friend (who hadn't known the Lord for that long). He starts talking about Jesus. He doesn't really have the gospel clearly down; he's stumbling through a gospel presentation...the name "Jesus" pops in there. And he says at the end of his time after stumbling through the gospel presentation, "Would you like to know Jesus?" and the man stunned him by saying, "Yes." He was shocked! "You would like to know Jesus?" "Yes, I would." He said, "Wait a minute. Don't go anywhere!" He runs to the parking lot, gets his car, comes back, picks the man up (this was late at night...it just so happened I was working late at night). He picks the man up, drives him to my office, knocks on my door. And I said, "Hey, brother. What are you doing?" He said, "I got work for you!" [Laughter.] It was interesting, because that was one of those times where for a while before I got that brother trained I had an opportunity to do a lot of

evangelism! He did that I don't know how many times — brought people right off the street to my office!

But the point is this. God does it. The mission is His. It's His. Someone has said that the marvel is that He invites us to join Him. The marvel.... I hope that's what it is for you still. I hope you still know the joy of speaking for Him. I hope that you are still excited about talking about Jesus to others. I hope that you get pumped up about being an ambassador for Christ still. Because if not, I pray that He would give you that back.

Ambassadors for Christ in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces, in our social circles, in our city...that's what it's about. I hope that we have not gotten to the point where we think that the only purpose for the church is just to feed us. That is significant, but it's not the only purpose. It's also to invite the sinner to faith in Christ.

The nineteenth century church historian, Philip Schaff, was talking about the post-apostolic era of the church and he said this. I want you to hear this description of the church and think about ourselves sometimes. He said:

Christianity, once established, was its own best missionary. It attracted people by its very presence. It was a light shining in darkness, and illuminating the darkness. And while there were no professional missionaries devoting their whole life to this specific work, every congregation was a missionary society, and every Christian believer a missionary inflamed by the love of Christ to convert his fellow man.

That's it. My hope for First Pres, for Redeemer...your mission conference, our mission conference coming up in two weeks...is that our giving to world missions will expand and expand and expand! But that will happen even more if we get it! If we have that kind of passion, we can't delegate being missional. We can't pay a staff to be missional. We support missionaries because God has His global purpose and they're called to go there, but all of us are called and we should not miss that. And so, a missional motivation and a missional ministry.

But then, thirdly, we see the missional message. This is what we are called to boldly and faithfully declare. It is the missional message we have received. It is the message we have believed. It is the gospel message, the message of hope. This is what we are called to declare.

Paul has talked about this and I've already talked about this, but what I want you to notice is what he says in verse 19, because there he just makes it crystal clear. He says,

“...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.”

This message is about God's solution to man's fallenness. The need for reconciliation...it implies something. It implies brokenness. It implies brokenness in relationships. It implies hostility, even. And that's exactly what we see. We see our own hostility towards God, but what's even more important and pressing that we understand is that sinful man rests under the displeasure and the wrath of God Almighty. That's man's condition because of sin. That's where people stand because of sin and this utter brokenness with our Creator. And there is not one thing that man in himself can do about it. He doesn't even try. He's not interested in that. And all of our feeble, sinful efforts of trying to find spirituality in our lives is nothing more than idolatry. It is nothing more than us making a god of our own selves and our own desires. "No one seeks God, not even one," Paul says. That's man's condition. In sin. And normally, you would notice in your own relationships, if one party offends another, then what you would expect in a normal relationship is if this party offended that party, that this party that did the offending is the party that actually starts the process of trying to bring about reconciliation. Well, that's not what you see here. We have offended a holy God and have no interest in and of ourselves of reconciling to Him. But what's so glorious, what's so mind-boggling, what's so incredible about the gospel, what's so incredible about this message — the gospel message — is that the offended One, God, our Creator, the One that we have turned our back against and would spit in His face — this One has pursued us.

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. God was reconciling. God provided the Redeemer, His only Son, who took on flesh and lived a perfectly obedient life to the law of God, and willingly and voluntarily went to a cross as our substitute, taking God's wrath upon himself, paying our penalty. That life and that death, and *only* that life and that death, is our hope of reconciliation. That's it. This is the hope of the world. It's the only hope of the world. It's the hope of Jackson. It's the only hope of Jackson. This is the message. This is the reconciliation that God has provided for man. This is what has redeemed our wretched souls. This is the message that you and I are called to declare.

The great nineteenth century Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, made this statement. He said,

"The evidence that the death of Christ has been accepted as an atonement for sin, of infinite value and efficiency, is the fact that God commissioned His people to announce to all men that God is reconciled and ready to forgive, so that whosoever will may turn to Him and live."

God commissioned us. God reconciled us. This is the message. This is our message. It's what we're called to declare. It's what we're called to preach.

But it's also what we're called to live. I mean, notice what he says at the end of verse 20. He makes this interesting statement: "We implore you on behalf of

Christ, be reconciled to God.” Now on the one hand you could look at that and you could say, all right, here's what he's doing. He's telling the Corinthian church and he's telling us here is the method. Here's what we say. We say, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God,” and that would exactly be our message. “We implore you...” (that's what we're to be about) “...on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

And yet, as you look at this, one of the things that you have to come to understand and not overlook is this: Paul is actually saying this to the Corinthians. “We implore *you* on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” Now why would he say that to them? Is he saying they weren't believers? I doubt it, and the reason why is that at the beginning he says in both of these letters that they were the church of God, they were saints [they were messed up saints, but they were saints].

So what's he saying? “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” Could it be that they were not fully living out the implications of the reconciled life with God, and the evidence of that is in the way that they were acting and the divisiveness in the Corinthian church? The evidence of that is even in the way that they were treating the Apostle Paul, and this is one of those sections...the larger section here is one of those many sections where Paul is actually having to defend his own apostleship. They're not living as if they're reconciled to him.

There have been those who have misinterpreted this passage, and they've misinterpreted it by saying that what Paul is calling us to when he calls us to be ministers of reconciliation is that what he's calling us to is horizontal reconciliation. That's not the heart of this passage. This passage isn't about that. This passage is about this...when he says be reconciled to God, this passage is about calling us to be reconciled with the One, true, holy God; but, yet, Christian, that reconciliation has implications this way. It must. As a matter of fact, it gives clear indication that God is in the house! What causes all the strife and discord and brokenness and barriers that we see in our world all the time today is this break. But when we get this and we begin to live it out more and more, then what? As we understand the implications of being reconciled to God, then what happens is it's not just your words that are saying to people, “Be reconciled,” it's you! It's your home. It's your church.

You remember Jesus' high priestly prayer? After He prayed to the Father that His people... His disciples...they would be one, do you remember what He said? One of the things He said...I just preached through that John 17 passage, and over and over and over again you see these purpose statements running through there: “so that...in order that...” They just run through that passage. When the section where He prays to the Father that we would be one, what He actually said to the Father is this: that they would be one *so that* — purpose statement — *in order that* — purpose statement — “the world may believe that You sent Me.” We live in a world of hostility and discord, and it's in every possible way. And the

message of reconciliation with Him has now come. It's landed in your life and mine...this church...and it changes us and makes us His, and it makes us one another's.

And so as I stand before you tonight...and one of the things that's been very dear to me as I've been here, and I've heard Ligon say it and I've heard Jeremy say it: "Redeemer is your sister church." Do you know what that means? It means this African-American Christian man standing in front of you is yours. And you are mine. You see, this is the message. This is it.

When I was thinking about moving to Jackson...I was coming from Miami, and...you know, most of the time people don't move from Miami to Jackson! [Laughter.] Anyway, it took some convincing. One of the people that...when I came up to talk to the folks that became the core group that became Redeemer, one of the people that I met with was John Perkins. Most of you probably know John Perkins. He is a significant African-American Christian leader that has had a long ministry in Mississippi. And I sat down with him, and I asked John...I said...because I was...to be honest with you...I'll be truthful...I was afraid. Right? (Mississippi's great! Jackson's ...I love it. I love living here. But I didn't know it then, so I was afraid.) I sat down with John and I said, "John, can a work like Redeemer — a multi-ethnic, gospel-centered church committed to worship, committed to being God's people, committed to biblical preaching and teaching — can this work? Not a social ministry, a church...can it work in this city?" And he responded in a way that startled me. He said this: "I think the time is right, and I think the PCA is the denomination to do it."

Why? Why us? What he was thinking about are the theological underpinnings that drive us. The gospel drives us. This message drives us. This reconciliation that God has established in Christ drives us. See? This is it. And it manifests itself this way: This is the message: God in Christ is reconciling the world to himself. Former barriers no longer matter. Present barriers no longer matter, in Christ.

Do you believe that tonight? I do. I do. This is it. This is the gospel. May we live it out; show it and share it. Motivation, ministry, message. Amen.

Pray with me.

*Lord, we are thankful for Your word. We are thankful for Your love in Christ. We are thankful for these wonderful, glorious gospel reminders of Your goodness, of Your truth, and of what You are doing in this world. Lord, help us all here this evening to be faithful, motivated by You, understanding of our ministry, and, Lord, taking this message in word and deed to a lost and dying world. For it is in the name of Jesus we pray these things. Amen.*

Would you please stand with me.

*And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore.*

And God's people said:  
*Amen.*

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