

Spiritual Ambassadors

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Date: 18 August 2013

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[0:00] This morning I want to share a little bit, you know, when you do expository preaching, of course Pastor Don is the expository preacher extraordinaire. You can either, you can approach it two different ways. You can say a lot about a little, or you can say a little about a lot.

I don't know if that makes sense or not, but what I mean is when you look at the number of texts, when you're doing expository preaching, you can take one verse and go so deeply into that text that you leave church thinking, wow, I can't believe he said all that about that verse.

And another way you can do it, which is what I'm going to do this morning, is to kind of take a larger text and to say a little about a lot of those verses. And so much of our time we'll just be reading through 2 Corinthians 4 and 5. There's some fantastic texts in here, and I want to talk about a theme that has become, really grabbed me about 12 years ago, but it's become increasingly important for me. And even recently it's become hugely important in my role with the Voice of the Martyrs. And that is the theme of being a spiritual ambassador. What does it mean to be a spiritual ambassador? And so our primary text is 2 Corinthians chapter 5, if you want to turn over in that neighborhood. But about five years ago, I was honored to lead a group of 50 pilgrims to Greece. Now that was an experience in and of itself, trying to manage 50 people in Greece. But we wanted to do a footsteps of the Apostle Paul kind of trip. Now we opted to take an air-conditioned bus instead of actually walk everywhere he walked. But it was really amazing to be able to see some of these places, and wonderful to learn about these cities that he impacted in incredible ways. Really some of the foundational aspects of our Christian faith. And in one of those days, we gathered at the top of Mars Hill. This is a picture of the group. And we talked about Paul's engagement of the Greek culture. And it was really fascinating, if you remember the story in Acts 17, what Paul was able to do in that place. Because he walked into this city or this town of Athens, and he saw idols everywhere. And as he looked around the idols, he even, you know, just in case they missed one, they even had an idol to, or an altar, to the unknown God. That was sort of the safety altar that they had. Just in case we forgot somebody, we got to have one to the unknown God. And so this massive engraving at the bottom of

Mark's, Mars Hill, kind of records this account from Acts 17. And it tells a story of how Paul went to meet with this group of religious guides and leaders called the Oropagus, or Oropagus. And he talked with this group about some of their own philosophers. So he connected with their culture. But then in a in a masterful, a creative, compelling way, he began to proclaim to them the good news of Jesus Christ.

So it's really a beautiful text to study. And of course, he had all sorts of reactions. Some of them ridiculed him. Others believed. And everywhere else on that spectrum. But the point was, though, that Paul was an outsider who had come into this culture to engage this culture. And I think we can learn a lot about how he did this, because he represented God with diplomacy, and with tact, and with grace, in such a way that it was very effective for the glory of God. It doesn't mean that everybody believed, but God was certainly glorified through this interaction. It was a beautiful thing to be on top of Mars Hill. We had a service up there. It's kind of funny, because on top of Mars Hill, we decided to do a service. And we had sort of the same reaction. Some people walked by. There were a lot of foreign tourists, as you can imagine. And some of them kind of laughed at it. Some of them listened for a while, and then walked away. And it was just very interesting to think about how much times have changed. But then again, not really. Kind of the same type of dynamic that we face.

[4:25] Something I'll never forget for sure. Well, a few days earlier, we were in the ancient city of Corinth. And I wanted to kind of set the stage with our text today, because that was another fascinating experience. There we had an opportunity to learn about Paul's tent-making ministry

approach.

And Paul lived, and he worked among the Corinthians for 18 months. So it's a pretty significant amount of time to be in one place for this itinerant evangelist. And all the while, he lived out his faith. He worked. He encouraged those who came to faith. He disciplined them. Incredible ministry. But once again, he lived in this pagan culture. And being there, you can sense this, because the whole area is dominated by this Acrocorinth. There was a temple there that was really a pagan culture. Of course, the Roman influence brought a lot of money and a lot of trade to this area. And so it was a very luxurious kind of place, but it was very immoral. It was the temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, you know, dominated the scene there. And over 1,000 temple prostitutes worked in that place. So think about that. What kind of influence would that have on a region? There's a picture of the temple of Apollo, which also dominated the city center. Everywhere you looked in Corinth, there were evidences of this pagan culture and this idolatry. And really, if we think about it, we were just talking in Sunday school this morning, it's not much different than our lives today.

[5:51] When you think about all the idols, all the distractions, the messages, the lies that were being fed today from so many sources. So Paul ministered in Corinth and then decided to move on, but he held a special place in his heart for these people. They were special to him. And so he wrote them two letters, which we have today. Maybe more letters that he wrote that we don't have, but for sure, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. And we can kind of read and sense some of his heart for them.

So let's look at a few verses from these letters and really consider what we can learn from him and from God's word about how we can live strategically as spiritual ambassadors in our culture.

So just to give a little context, let's look at chapter 4. Paul begins by attacking this secretive, mystical ways of the pagan religions. This is what he said in verse 2. He said, we have renounced secret and shameful ways. We don't use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.

On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. He says, the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. And in verse 5, for we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as servants for Jesus's sake.

And then he says in verse 7, but we have this treasure, where? In jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God, not from us. Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

[7:46] Look at verse 16. Therefore, we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Verse 18. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.

For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Wow, that's some good, man, that's some good stuff. We could do a lot of expository preaching on that text, but like I said, we're saying a little about a lot. So, think about this clay jar. This is from Saudi Arabia, and actually, we removed my office around the other day and dropped it, and it broke. It chipped off the bottom there. I mean, it's not very strong. I mean, it's been around a little while. I don't know exactly how old it is.

It's not like an ancient artifact. I think if you can buy it in the bazaar in Saudi Arabia, it's probably, you know, not that ancient. But the point is, though, I keep this in my office as a reminder that, you know, there were jars of clay all over the ancient world. This was kind of the vessel of choice, and Paul says that we're like jars of clay. We're falling apart. Do you ever feel like you're falling apart? Oh, my goodness. I mean, I don't know. You know, I'm just 40, so I'm not that old yet, but but I feel like I'm falling apart. There's things that just aren't working like they used to work.

You know what I mean? And I mean, man, little, you know, sprains that you can feel when the weather changes. I mean, and I know that some of you could say a lot more about this than I could. Our bodies are temporal, and they're falling apart. They're like this jar of clay. If you drop it the wrong way, it's gonna shatter. But what's Paul focus on? He says he doesn't focus on the physical body. He's not looking at the outside. He's looking at what's inside, and I love this when you think about the power of Christ in us. That's a powerful thing, and it doesn't matter. In fact, this is the amazing thing about how God works. He works in our weakness, because then he's made strong, and he's glorified. Isn't that amazing? Have you seen God do that in your life? When you feel at

your weakest, at your most vulnerable, at your most broken, and then a few weeks later, someone says, you know what? You minister to me in a powerful way during that season of pain and brokenness. And then who gets the credit? Do you say, well, that's what I meant to do. You know, that was all about me. No, you say, praise God. God gets the credit for what he's doing. Paul also goes on to say, now we focus on what is unseen, not on the things around us, but with an eternal perspective. There were amazing edifices in Corinth. There were architectural wonders, you know, these mind-boggling, you know, creations for the time. But now, you know what? It's just a pile of rocks.

[10:52] That's all it is today. And nobody's talking today. We're not talking about the powerful governor of the region. We're not talking about the architect who put the building together. No, we're talking about the faith of a very apparently insignificant man who pointed to Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul. That's what we're talking about today, because it's God's work through him. And then he goes on. Listen to the beginning of chapter 5. Look at verse 1 there. He says, now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed. I love that he refers to tents here, because he was a tent maker. Remember that? And that's what he was doing in Corinth. He says, if this tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. And look down at verse 6. Therefore, we are always confident, and we know that as long as we are at home in the body, in this body, we're away from the Lord.

We're not home yet. So verse 7, we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Can you identify with that? Does that resonate with you? I'm ready to go home. I'm excited. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus. I'm ready. This world is not my home. I'm just passing through, and I don't want to pass through much longer. I'm ready to go when God's ready. I'm ready. That's where our hope is.

We live by faith and not by sight. So this is where it gets complicated, because when you think about being a spiritual ambassador, you are representing an unseen kingdom. So you can't look at the map and say, I'm representing this nation or this area. You can't do that. You're representing an unseen place.

So we represent a God who can't be touched by human hands, who can't be captured into boxes, like we all sometimes try to do. And so he's chosen for some bizarre, unexplainable reason to let humans represent him. That's pretty amazing. I mean, every once in a while an angel will engage, and you'll see some miraculous interventions and things like that. But most of the time, we are his mouth. I mean, his word, and then he uses us to proclaim it. Wow. I look around at you guys. I'm just going to be honest. I don't know why he would choose us. Now, I did say us. But seriously, think about that. Why would he choose us to be his representative? But that's what he says. He's chosen us. Look at verse 9. We'll read the following. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord. What do we do? We try to persuade others.

[13:59] For Christ's love, verse 14, Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again. So look at verse 16. Look at how this shifts the perspective. So now, from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Verse 17, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come, and all of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the message of reconciliation. And here's the message, verse 19.

The heart of the gospel here. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. Look at this, verse 20.

We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors. As though God were making his appeal through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. Here's another great soteriological verse, a verse about salvation. Verse 21. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that, my favorite two words here, in him. So that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Did you catch the two components? If you go back to verse 9 that really talk about our life mission, look at that. Verse 9, you can see that verse 9 says, we make it our goal to please him. And then in verse 11, we try to persuade men. Those two verses are huge. It's really our life mission. Our life mission is to please God and to persuade men. I mean, it's pretty clear from the text. Please God, persuade men.

That's what he's called us to be and to do as spiritual ambassadors. So how are we doing with that? This is something I'm increasingly convicted by in our culture. As I shared, some of us have the opportunity, and I know many of you got to go to Ukraine recently, and when you go into another culture on a missions trip, it's kind of easy to understand what you're doing and why you're going. [16:30] But what about here? This is something I've been thinking about. Kimberly and I have talked a lot about our neighborhood, for example. What is there about us in our neighborhood that's really being distinctly Christian? What is it? I mean, I'm asking these questions because this is where it brings it home. For example, you know, when you think about your interactions at work, would people say, you know what, Frank is an ambassador of Christ? He's representing this unseen kingdom and this God that you can't really touch but we know is so active and real. Would they say that? I don't know. I'm concerned that in our lives, our family, in our neighborhood, I'm not sure what, because there's this cultural Christianity that we're all cool with and everybody's got, but really this authentic, you know, like following heart after Jesus kind of life, how apparent is that? What are the indicators for that? So I just want to challenge us as spiritual ambassadors to start right here in prayer. Say, God, how can I in my neighborhood be different for your glory and for your kingdom?

It's interesting. We meet with people around the world who like go out and do evangelism in really remarkable ways and creative ways and I look at that. We were at the dog park yesterday just watching our dog getting fights with other dogs and it was great fun. But anyway, just sitting there watching the dog and there was a couple that was sitting there and I told Kimberly after we left because we talked a little bit with them. But I told Kimberly, I said, you know, I just can't help but think that there might be something more we can do in these brief interactions with random people to glorify God. You know, how were we in a basket? They might say, oh, that was such a nice family.

They're friendly and but but that's not enough, is it? You know what I mean? What and I don't know. I don't have the answers. I'm just saying I know that God's called us to please God and to persuade men. So I'm working on that. Well, I'm always working on the pleasing God. That's that's that's tough, right? Just character development, just pleasing him. But what about this persuasion aspect? So that's what I wanted to focus on a little bit. How do we represent him well, wherever he calls us? Verse 10 helps us a little bit because it shifts our focus heavenward and it says, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad. So we have this motivation that this life is not what it's about. We're going to be with the Lord someday and we're going to stand before him and we're going to feel his gaze, that piercing gaze, and we're going to immediately know what mattered in our life for him and what was just excess baggage and just the dross that's just going to be wiped off.

That's that's pretty motivating. In a city of Corinth, there was a stone platform and it was interesting. They built this to support the bema seat, the judgment seat. You can see a picture of it there and this was the place that gave out awards to athletes for their competitive performances and that's kind of funny because usually it was a wreath of laurel that just disappeared like in a couple weeks. You know, isn't that funny? I mean, you think about, oh, I won the Olympics and you get a little wreath that's just gone. I mean, that that shows how fleeting all this stuff is that we we we chase after sometimes. The bema seat was also where they addressed legal charges that were brought against individuals. So it was a seat of judgment and the the great apostle Paul was familiar with that seat. I don't know. Maybe he was dragged before that seat himself. I'm not sure but but I know that this Galileo, it appears that the somewhere in Corinth, the proconsul of Achaia was at the bema seat in Acts 18.

So maybe that's what it was. I don't know but I know that in 2 Corinthians 5 when he talks about the judgment seat of Christ, this is what he's talking about. This is the bema. So he says this is where Christians will receive an evaluation of the works done in the body, whether good or bad.

[20:44] Now, is our only motive the judgment seat of Christ? Absolutely not. That, no, Paul goes on to address that immediately. He says our motive is love. Look at just a couple verses later. He says the the motive motive is Christ's love. That's what compels us. That's what drives us. And verse 15 says that because Christ died for us, we have no right to live for ourselves. The best picture I have of this, I remember, is from Robinson Crusoe. Anybody remember that book? Great story. Remember his man? What was his man's name?

Friday. And I don't know if you remember, but Friday after he rescued him from being eaten by cannibals, he, I think, if I remember correctly, Friday like laid down and put like Robinson's foot on his head or something along those lines and said, I'm yours for the rest of my life. You saved me, I'm yours. Now, isn't that, that's pretty remarkable commitment. But we do the same thing. We say, Lord, you've saved me, I'm yours. Everything I have, everything I will have, it's yours. I'm compelled to live for you, not myself. So the question is, how much of our lives is about us? How much are we willing to sacrifice to follow him? Are we willing to die to ourselves so that we can live for God? Verse 16 says, now with our new perspective, we don't look at life in the same way. I love this. He says, we don't regard people the same way we used to, not from an earthly point of view. Now, how do people regard one another from an earthly point of view? I'll tell you some things in our culture, they're indicators. One is power. One is success. One is money. One is attractiveness. One is fame. I mean, these are all indicators that when we regard people from an earthly perspective, that that's what we notice.

That's what we see. I can't tell you how bizarre it is to think about like movie stars. I've been in some crazy third world countries with movie star posters of American movie stars, you know, and you're thinking, wow, how bizarre must that be? If they're traveling in, you know, let's just say Bangladesh, for example, and they see a poster of themselves. I mean, just incredible, the influence, and our world values that, don't we? I mean, we, we, wow, that's power. That's fame. That's, wow. He says here, we don't look at it the same way. Now, we used to look at Christ that way. We used to have that earthly perspective on Christ before he saved us, but we do so no longer. Look at the next verse, 2 Corinthians 5, 17. Therefore, if we're in Christ, we are new creatures, a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come. So if we're new creatures, what are the implications of that in our lives? That's the question. One implication is that we don't have to live in the old ways. We don't have to, to speak in the, the kind of, as we did in the old country. You know, we're, we're different. We're not from there anymore. So we've, we've been brought into this new realm, and now we get to represent that realm.

It's pretty exciting to think about being an ambassador for a spiritual kingdom. And yes, God calls each one of us to represent him as that spiritual ambassador. Verse 18 and 19, he goes on. He says, this is all from God. God reconciled us through himself, or through Christ to himself, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. So imagine this. This is what it says. It says that God did this amazing work of sending his son to earth to reconcile man and God through the bridge of Christ. And then, look at that next part, though. It says, so that happened, but then he gave us. Then God just gives that ministry of reconciliation to us. Isn't that remarkable? I mean, God takes his work, and he gives it to us to participate in that for his glory. It's incredible. And he says, now, you know, we get the message, and the message is that God's not counting your sins against you if you're in Christ. Do you realize, do we realize what a privilege it is to share this message of reconciliation? Maybe the older we get, we start to recognize more how pretty remarkable this message is. That in a world where everything is performance-based, that we can talk about grace, and we can embrace God's forgiveness. Of course, the longer you live, the more sin you've got to offer on that altar of God's grace and forgiveness, right? What an honor to share that message. You know, to say to somebody, God is not counting your sin against you. If you're in Christ, if you're enveloped in him, he's not counting your sin against you. So much freedom, so much hope in that. And we just take it for granted sometimes. So he wants to forgive us. He wants to embrace us, to be close to us. And we get to share this message of hope in a broken world. If we're believers, we're ambassadors for Christ, and we're going to tell others this message. But you know what? We've got to make sure we're living it. We've got to be credible. If you're an ambassador, you've got to be credible.

[26:06] You've got to live it. So you can't talk about God's hope and love and forgiveness and then not give it to someone, right? It doesn't work that way. It's not very effective. It works when we are perpetually maturing and growing in our faith, when we're spending time in the Word, when

we're ministering out of the overflow of our lives, when it just kind of bubbles out of us. That's what the best ambassadors are like. Is there any country in the world that would deploy an ambassador who had only been a citizen for a few weeks? No, that wouldn't happen. You've got to be a credible representative. The demand is that an ambassador be a mature representative of the country that he's representing. That's, you know, no newcomers are invited to apply for the ambassador job.

You can't come over to a country, get your citizenship, and the next week be an ambassador. It just doesn't work like that. You've got to be a credible representative. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:20. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. And what's the heart of the ambassadorial theme?

As though God were making his appeal through us. That diplomatic theme is huge. And this really came home to me. We lived in Washington, D.C. for three years, and I had a chance to get to know some attaches. Attaches are sort of like junior ambassadors.

And so I met regularly with these guys. We had breakfast once a week with a couple of them and another guy I got to know. It's amazing. These guys were really going to some interesting places. One went to Cyprus, one went to Germany, and the other went to Jordan. But they were sharp guys. I mean, these guys have been hand-selected and groomed as younger men and groomed to become representatives of the United States in these countries. So they underwent language training. And then they went through cultural training. They were taught how to dress well. They were taught how to host sores and parties. They were taught how to interact with senior leaders of foreign governments. And they learned how to represent the United States well because they were going to be ambassadors. And you may be shocked to hear this, but of course you may not be. Large portions of your tax dollars are invested in State Department budgets for this function. Staff is hired. Menus are planned. Parties are thrown.

Houses are furnished. Why? Because we're representing the United States. And it's an important function, diplomatically. Our ambassadors represent us well. Well, here's something interesting one of these guys shared with me. He said, you know what's really cool about being the attache or a junior ambassador?

[28:55] He said, there's diplomatic immunity. You've heard of this, right? Diplomatic immunity. So I said, well, tell me more about that. He said that the country that I'm in has no control over me, really.

No ability to imprison. We can't be fined. We can't have civil suits brought against us. There's no power. They have no power over me. I started thinking about this. I said, you know, well, what's the worst they could do to you? Check this out. This is the worst thing that they can do to an ambassador. They can send you home. That's it. Worst thing. Now think about this.

What does this mean for us? Well, we know Paul ultimately met a martyr's death. They sent him home. What are we afraid of? We're afraid of getting rejected. We're afraid of not being very acceptable in our circle, being different, being thought a fool because we believe in Jesus.

What freedom we should have because they can't touch us. This world cannot touch us. The worst thing they can do is to send us home. And like I said already, and like Paul said, we're ready. We want to go there.

We want to go home. So bring it. Bring it on. We want to go. Lois Barrett in his book, Missional Church, says this, disciples like ambassadors sometimes become captive to the dominant culture into which Christ sends them.

[30:39] See, there's a term for this. You know, the result is only natural because you are asked to become fluent in the ways of your culture that you're visiting. You're asked to translate your mission in an intelligible way. So it's easy for us to, look at the term there I highlighted, the disciple or ambassador who has gone native. That's what they call it.

Oh, that ambassador went native. What does that mean? It means that they've gone native.

They've bought into the culture that they're in instead of the culture they represent. They've gone native. And that's what happens to us. I love that. Gone native. What are the ways that we have gone native? What are the ways?

We got to remember, we're not going to fit in with the mainstream culture. We're sharing this eternal perspective, which is blatantly counterculture because the culture is valuing everything here and now. So it's counter that. And that's what we're sharing. And I like how James Wilholy put it. He said, we are nothing less, the church today is nothing less than an outpost in an alien society. We're aliens. We, or we're, we're heavenly representatives in an alien society is what he said. But it's the same idea that we just don't fit in. We, so how do we do this? But, but we've also got to

maintain contact. So we don't want to cloister ourselves and say at church, well, it's just us four and no more. You know, we don't want to do that. That's not a good ambassadorial response.

No, we've got to engage with the culture. But, but how do you do that without going native? I think this is the challenge. So as ambassadors for Christ, we've got to be able to articulate clearly what we understand God has said through his word, the essential doctrines of our faith and our identity as Christ followers. We've got to be able to articulate that. And there are many who know generally what they believe, but they've never really dug in there. And maybe you find yourself there. You say, well, if I started engaging with the culture, I'm not even sure I'd have enough ammo in my, in my, you know, my arsenal. I, I don't know what the next step is for you, but maybe it would be an intentional course of saying, I want to get to know some of the foundational beliefs of my faith and so that I can communicate it. Maybe some of you say, oh, I got that. I've been in church for, for 30 years. Maybe for you, it would be that stepping out of your comfort zone and reaching out to somebody who's very different than you and maybe sharing with them, inviting them to church. I don't know what God's going to call you to do. I'm not here to pronounce that on you.

[33:24] I'm, I'm here as a prophetic voice to say we've been called to be Christ's ambassadors. That I know. How it plays out for you practically, I don't know. I'm, I'm working through this in our family and I just can't seem to, to get over this struggle of just how does this work in our culture?

Peter noted, uh, we must always be prepared to give an answer. We've got to be ready for anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have, but do it with gentleness and respect. So Peter had that diplomatic feel to him as well. Be ready, say the mission, don't back down, but, but do it with gentleness and respect. Earliest days of Jewish history. If you look in the Bible, you see this diplomatic theme again and again. God chose his people to represent him and they were to do it well. They were to be his spokespersons. They were to communicate his truth to the watching world. In fact, the definition of a, of a prophet literally has the idea of being a mouthpiece for God. It's conveying a divine message through a human instrument. It's remarkable. That's what God's called us to do. So it's clear as we can see from this text that Paul wants us to be ambassadors. He thought of himself as an ambassador. He defined himself in Ephesians 6 as an ambassador in chains.

That was a whole nother level of being an ambassador. Going to prison. And of course, this text, which is definitive. So as we've been thinking about this, I've, I've discussed this with a lot of people and there's another interesting little parallel that I wanted to share. And that is that when you think about the, these diplomatic professionals, these ambassadors, and, and they, they have a job to do, which is to communicate a message, sometimes in a hostile culture. One of the most striking parallels, we saw diplomatic immunity. That's a pretty amazing parallel. Another one is the day marsh. I don't know if you know what the day marsh is. The day marsh is an official diplomatic communication. And it's interesting because it's this universally accepted form of official diplomatic interactions among countries.

So if you talk to an ambassador and he says, I'm going to take a de marsh over to the, this embassy next week, then you, you know, this is what he's saying. The ambassador prepares the de marsh to communicate a, a policy or a perspective of the government that they represent. And then they go and they present it to the host country. But this is very interesting. The official day marsh always begins with this phrase, I am here on instructions. That's how this begins. This conversation begins. I am here on instructions.

So it's understood by all the parties that the message is the focus, not the messenger. Because all he has to do is say, hey, uh, this is my country I'm representing. Don't make this about me.

[36:25] I'm here on instructions. I'm bringing you a message. It's not about me. It's about something much, much bigger, but I'm bringing it on instructions. Look at verse 20. The end of it says, we implore you on whose behalf? On Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. This is the message. Verse 21.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. So that, again, my favorite words in this text, in him, in him, we might become the righteousness of God. So when we, as Paul suggests, make an appeal on behalf of God, we ought to be there on instructions. And this is another little interesting dynamic that happens in the church today. Let's make sure it's God's instructions and not ours.

Okay? Because that happens, right? Sometimes we say, I'm here on instructions. And then someone says, really? Show me that in the Bible. And they say, well, yeah. You know, it's tradition. It's just what we've always done. And it's just part of being a Christian. And no, let's make sure

we're on instructions. The biblical instructions. So we got to, as ambassadors, move ourselves as much out of the way as possible and focus on the message to let the truth of God be transferred through us.

So let me ask you this morning, are we willing to answer this call? Are we willing to say, I'm willing, Lord. I don't know what this is going to look like, but I want to step up and be faithful as a representative for you. I hope that we are. I hope we're willing to answer that call. And my greatest prayer is that we would all be better prepared and motivated, inspired, really, to stand up for the truth, to represent our Lord well, and to do it by his grace alone. Because if we try to do it ourselves, we're going to mess it up. But to do it by his grace and to do it for his glory, that's the ultimate aim that I have. And I pray that we can transfer that to our children. And I pray that we, as a church, can really embrace that. So as I close this morning, I want to share some striking parallels that a guy named Gregory Kukul did. He called it the Ambassador's Creed. And so he looked through Scripture and he made some parallels here. So take a look at these real quick. He said an ambassador is ready. What does that mean? It means an ambassador is alert for chances to represent Christ and will not back away from an opportunity or a challenge. Number two, an ambassador is patient. An ambassador won't quarrel, but will listen in order to understand. Then with gentleness, see how much gentleness is a part of this diplomatic mission? With gentleness, we'll seek to respectfully correct those in opposition.

Number three, an ambassador is reasonable. An ambassador has informed convictions, not just feelings. He gives reasons, asks questions, aggressively seeks answers, and will not be stumped by the same challenge twice. We have no excuse if we've been challenged and we haven't done our homework to go back for that.

[39:45] Number four, an ambassador is tactical. This means it's at that lowest level of just engagement and adapting. Adapting to every unique person, every unique situation, maneuvering with wisdom and independence on the Holy Spirit to challenge bad thinking. A lot of people are just, they're just confused. And it's amazing when the Holy Spirit leads us into their life to help clarify something, they begin to look at their own bad thinking and say, wow, that doesn't make any sense.

Can't believe I thought that. It just doesn't add up. Challenge bad thinking and then present the truth in an understandable and compelling way. Number five, an ambassador is clear.

You know, be careful with language. Don't rely on Christian lingo or try to gain an unfair advantage with just empty rhetoric. That doesn't help anybody. Let's be clear as ambassadors. Number six, an ambassador should be fair. We should be sympathetic and understanding towards the opposition and to realize that there are merits to opposing views. We need to be honest about that. You know, don't throw out the baby with the bathwater as the proverbial saying goes. There's some good points. And you might have to say as an ambassador, you know, that's something to think about. I'm going to go think about that and pray about that and research that and be fair. Number seven, be honest. An ambassador is careful with the facts. Will not misrepresent his opponent or overstate his own case or understate the demands of the gospel. Don't you love that when that happens? Well, if you follow Jesus, then A, B, C, D, and this will happen for you. No, let's not overstate or undersell the demands of the gospel.

Jesus said, follow me and you will be persecuted and you will suffer for my name's sake. Number eight, an ambassador is humble. An ambassador is provisional in their claims. They know that their understanding of truth is fallible, so you don't take a point and try to press it beyond what the evidence allows. Got to be realistic and humble in this process. Number nine, an ambassador is attractive.

This just has the idea of just acting with grace, being marked by kindness, by good manners. God help us if one day we find out that somebody was deterred from the kingdom of God because of something, you know, ridiculous that we did. Wouldn't that be just devastating? We want to be gracious and be kind, not dishonor Christ in our conduct. Number 10, an ambassador is dependent. The only way we're going to do God's work is in God's way. That's the bottom line. So you think about this. I was just in the Philippines recently and I talked to the pastors about this idea, which is there's really three things we can do in our lives. We can do the devil's work, which is pretty clear. That's the devil's work.

[42:43] We can also do the Lord's work in our way. Or we can do the Lord's work in the Lord's way. What do you think is most effective? You know, it's funny because you would think that the greatest divide would be between the devil's work and the Lord's work in our way. You'd think that

would be the greatest division.

But no, no, no. This is the truth. The greatest division is between the Lord's work in our way and the Lord's work in his way. That's where the divide is. Because it's so easy for us to do the Lord's work, but not do it in dependence upon him. We've got to ask that he'll help us to walk being led by the spirit, absolutely dependent on him for every step. Well, I hope you're encouraged to be an ambassador.

That's my goal, is that all of us will start to look and say, okay, Lord, what are you calling me to do to be an ambassador for you? Because I think that if we can understand some of these diplomatic parallels, it will help us be more effective for God's glory. And I think that's what Paul was getting at. He says, remember, you're an ambassador. I'm an ambassador for Christ. He's given us this message of reconciliation. What are we doing with that?

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