

AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST  
2 Corinthians 5:17-20 and Ephesians 6:19-20

In 168 BC, a Greek king who ruled Syria and a number of surrounding countries, decided to invade Egypt. He called himself Antiochus Epiphanes, the second part of his name meaning "God Manifest." Evidently Antiochus thought quite highly of himself. Just outside of Alexandria, Egypt, he was met by an aged Roman senator, Gaius Popillius Laenas. He was Rome's ambassador and his message was simple and straight forward. Speaking on behalf of the Senate and the people of Rome, he instructed Antiochus to withdraw his armies from Egypt and return home or consider himself to be at war with the Roman Republic. In response Antiochus stated that he would confer with his advisers, whereupon the ambassador drew a line in the sand around Antiochus and said, "Before you leave this circle, give me a reply that I can take back to the Roman Senate." Antiochus decided to return home.

In today's world of political affairs, we often hear the word "ambassador." For the most part we tend to think of these people as merely good will emissaries. However, like the Roman Senator who confronted Antiochus Epiphanes, they have a much bigger role to play in the world of human affairs. That's why Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians said that we are to be ambassadors for Christ, and that's why he described himself as an ambassador in chains when he wrote to the Christians in Ephesus. So what do ambassadors do and why should we consider ourselves to be ambassadors for Christ? Let's take a look at both of these questions this morning.

First of all, ambassadors are **representatives** of the one who sent them. They are literally the voice and the presence of the ruler or the government which appointed them. That's why an embassy, the home of an ambassador in a foreign country, is considered to be the territory of the nation from which he or she was sent. When the Iranians took over the embassy in Tehran in 1979, this could have been considered an invasion of America itself and the grounds for war. An ambassador, therefore, is the very embodiment of the government which appointed him.

And the same is true for us as Christians. We are the ambassadors of Christ. We represent him and his kingdom here on earth. Jesus himself said, "He who receives you receives me and he who receives me receives the one who sent me" (Matthew 10:40). Or as Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." You and I are the appointed representatives of Christ. The full weight of his presence and power have been bestowed upon us.

Unfortunately, I suspect that many if not most Christians have failed to recognize this. We hide in the shadows and when issues arise that threaten our allegiance to Christ we remain silent. We are afraid to speak up and to declare that we belong to Christ and are his appointed representatives in the court of human affairs. Let me give you an example. Right here in the state of Virginia, churches, private Christian schools, and other faith related organizations could be facing fines and criminal litigation if proposed sexual orientation legislation becomes law. In

other words, God's people will no longer be able to voice or express their opposition to that which is forbidden in God's Word. And that's not all. Some legislators are now telling Christians, "You keep your thoughts to yourselves. Have your nice little meetings at church, but don't tell us how to run the state government of Virginia. You're not welcome." As a student of history, I am well aware of what happens when God's people refuse to stand up for Christ and the principles of the Christian faith, and if you reflect for a few moments upon what transpired in Germany prior to and during World War II, it's not a very pretty picture. Like the Roman senator who drew a circle in the sand around a petty middle eastern tyrant, we need to remember and announce to the tyrants of this age, "We are the ambassadors of Jesus Christ, representatives of the king of kings and the Lord of Lords, and we will stand fast in his strength."

An ambassador is not only a representative. He possesses a second responsibility. He is a **messenger**. The Roman senator had a word from Rome for Antiochus, "Stop! Cease and desist from your campaign to conquer Egypt." He let Antiochus know in no uncertain terms that the full weight of the Roman Republic would come against him if he persisted in his unwarranted invasion.

As God's representatives we too have a message that must be shared. In the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, the Lord spoke to his prophet. In chapter three the Lord told Ezekiel that he had been appointed as a watchman for the house of Israel. His responsibility was to warn those who were living wickedly so that they might change their ways and escape divine judgement. He was also to warn the righteous when they were straying into sin. If Ezekiel did not fulfill his duty as a watchman, then he would be held responsible for what happened to his people. Their blood would be upon his hands and he would be held accountable.

And the same is true for you and me. God expects us to be his spokesmen and if we remain silent his blessings and his protection will be withdrawn. The message that he has entrusted into our care is contained within the Bible, and it includes promises as well as warnings. Almost all of the problems that we are facing in our modern day world could be resolved if people could hear and then hopefully respond favorably to what God is saying to them through his Word.

Throughout America, mainline Protestant churches are declining. Year by year their congregations are shrinking and a growing number of their churches are closing. They are literally dying and it would appear that God has put them on the shelf and abandoned them. Why? The answer is simple. They failed to deliver the message that had been entrusted into their care.

Let me give you an example. During the 1700's the Moravians were the premier missionary sending Christian denomination in the world. They were a small group of God's people with a big heart for the lost. They were even instrumental in helping John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, to find his way back to God. One group went to the West Indies to bring the Gospel to the enslaved people on those islands. Realizing that these enslaved peoples

worked 24/7 without even a day off for rest, these Moravian missionaries did something almost unbelievable. They voluntarily indentured themselves to the slave owners of these people so that they could go out into the fields and work beside them as they shared the gospel. However, over the years this missionary zeal waned. Moravians were content to remain within the four walls of their churches, and today they are a struggling group of Christians who are only known for their brass bands at Easter and their coffee and cakes at Christmas.

That's why we must take serious what Paul said in the passage of Scripture that we read this morning. Take a look at the second half of verse 19, "And he (God) has committed to us the message of reconciliation." In other words we are to go and tell people that there is a way that we can find reconciliation with God and then with one another. Peace and harmony and well-being is a distinct possibility, and it's not something that we can accomplish on our own. It's the gift of God through Christ. He was sent to us so that in him we might find peace. In response to this world's desperate search for happiness, purpose, and meaning in life, we have a liberating message, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come."

So we are not only Christ's representatives. We are also his messengers. Let's not be afraid to share his message, to be a watchman for our nation, proclaiming the truth of God's desire to bring peace and reconciliation between himself and his people, but also warning that there will be dire consequences if we fail to accept his invitation of forgiveness. And that brings me to the last point in this message. We are Christ's representatives, we are Christ's messengers, and finally we are Christ's **peacemakers**. That's the sum total of what it means to be an ambassador for Christ.

One of my favorite verses of Scripture comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." Wow, what an amazing statement. It truly reflects the hoped for outcome of an ambassador's ministry. His work is not complete until peace is restored. The ambassador that Rome had sent to Antiochus Epiphanes could return home and report that his mission had been successful. War had been averted. Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul probably felt the same way. Even though he was an ambassador in chains, his mission had not been a failure. Even within the emperor's household there were men and women who were turning to Christ. The message of reconciliation in Christ Jesus was having a growing impact upon the lives of thousands of people.

And the same is true today, Christians have a responsibility to be peacemakers, men and women who bring about restored relationships with God and one another. There are many examples that I could share with you, but there is one in particular that comes to mind. Fairly recently it was made into a film called *Unbroken*. It is the story of Louis Zamperini. He was a long distance runner and was on the United States Olympic team that participated in the 1936 Olympics in Germany. Then when World War II broke out, he joined the US Army Air Force and flew missions against Japan. On one of those, a search and rescue mission, his plane developed mechanical problems and crashed into the Pacific. For 47 days he was adrift in a raft before

landing on an island occupied by the Japanese. During that time at sea, he had prayed remembering snippets of prayers he had heard at the movies. I suspect those prayers continued during his years of brutal torture at a prison camp in northern Japan. He returned home a bitter and broken man, nightmares invading his sleep and driving him to drink. During this time his wife attended a Billy Graham crusade in Los Angeles and became a Christian. She encouraged Louis to attend and finally he did. He gave his heart to Christ and became an inspirational speaker. He also came to the realization that if he was to ever find any peace with his past he must forgive and be reconciled to those who had tortured him. He had said over and over again that he would never return to Japan, but now he realized that he must. In fact, he actually went to the prison where many of his former tormentors were incarcerated for their war crimes. He met with them and forgave them and even led some of them to Christ. Then in 1998 at the age of 81, he participated in the Winter Olympics at Nagano, Japan. He carried the Olympic Torch during one of the legs in the relay to the stadium, actually running near the very place where he had been imprisoned. When he was reconciled to Christ, he became a new creation, freed from the horrors of his past, an ambassador of peace to the very people who had so terribly mistreated him.

So there you have it. We are ambassadors for Christ. We are his representatives. We are his messengers entrusted with the good news of God's salvation, and we are his peacemakers, ministers of reconciliation between God and mankind. So put on your sash of ambassadorial authority, fulfill your calling, and stand true and tall for the Lord Jesus Christ.