

## Ambassadors for Christ

This morning I want to say a few words about your and my calling as Ambassadors of Christ.

(SLIDE ONE)

**Text:** “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view.” 2 Corinthians 5:16

**Scripture Reading:** 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. <sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup> So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

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**Introduction.** Seven even years ago a small paperback book entitled *The Tears of my Soul* (Monarch Books 2003) arrived in my mail. It was written by my former student, so I began to read it at once.<sup>1</sup> The story begins in a small town in Cambodia, where a boy named Reaksa lived

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<sup>1</sup> Sokreaksa S. Himm published a second book on his experiences in 2007, *After the Heavy Rain* (Oxford, UK and Grand Rapids, USA, Monarch Books), and in June 2007 the *Reader's Digest* featured his story as their 'Book Bonus,' in an article entitled, "A Healing Fire," (pp. 116–129).

happily with his family. His father was a school teacher who provided a good standard of living for his family. Life was wonderful until the country was taken over by the Khmer Rouge.

When the Khmer Rouge came to power in Cambodia in 1975, they tried to remove all western influences from the country. To do this, they killed political and military members of the former regime, and emptied out the cities and towns.

The Khmer Rouge believed that all city dwellers had been corrupted by western capitalism, so they forced them to move into the jungles and rural villages where they could be “purified” by hard physical work. Any educated person—even those who simply wore glasses—were in grave danger. Reaksa was eleven years old when he and his family were forcibly evicted from their home and marched into the jungle.

What he lived through in the next two years was terrifying. His family endured starvation, beatings, and constant humiliation as they tried to learn how to live in the jungle. His ten-year-old brother was tortured almost to death because he was found with two cobs of corn. A sympathetic farmer had given them him, but the Khmer Rouge soldier insisted that he had stolen the cobs, and made the family watch while he beat the little boy until his skin came off.

Finally, in 1977, all the family members were marched to the edge of a mass grave. There the Khmer Rouge soldiers stabbed and hacked them using hoes, axes, and knives, and then pushed them into a mass grave.

Reaksa survived by lying still under the bodies of his dead family members. At night he climbed out of the grave and escaped into the jungle where he was helped by a local villager. He survived in hiding until Vietnam defeated the *Khmer Rouge* in 1979.

Having been forced to witness the torture of his ten-year-old brother and the slaughter of his family, and because he had suffered deeply

himself, Reaksa was broken and disfigured emotionally. How could he escape his memory of all this and of the mass grave into which he and his family had been dumped in 1977?

He spent the next five years (1979-1984) in a refugee camp in Thailand. It was here that he first encountered Christians. He applied to immigrate to the United States, but was rejected. Deeply discouraged, he prayed, "God, if you exist, take me to Canada and I will believe in you."

His prayer was answered, and in May of 1989 he arrived at the World Vision Reception Center in Toronto. He was so deeply impressed by the practical goodness and kindness of the World Vision staff that he gave his heart to Jesus, and was baptized in June 1990. He then studied the Bible for three years at Tyndale College, graduating in 1993.

Then he came to Providence Theological Seminary where I was teaching. In 1966 he graduated with his MA degree in Biblical counseling. He would sometimes come into my office and just sit quietly crying. But all these years God was working a miracle in his heart.

In 1999, Reaksa returned to Cambodia as a missionary. Over the years, his insatiable lust for revenge was miraculously transformed into a deep longing to forgive his family's killers. He wrote to me and others, asking us to pray that he might find his family's killers, so that he could meet each one of them and forgive them, in the name of Christ.

In a June 7, 2003 email he reported his discovery that three of his family's murderers had been killed; one was psychologically deranged; and the others resided in villages some distance from where he lived. He prepared to visit one surviving killer, and on June 14 made the journey to complete the hard work of forgiveness. "I met one of my family's killers," he wrote; "I gave the man the Bible and I read Luke 23:34 for him, and told him that I have forgiven him. He was so nervous, but then, he felt the joy of hearing the message of forgiveness.... I gave him my shirt as

a symbol of my forgiveness, a scarf representing my love for him, and a Bible, representing the message of hope and forgiveness for him."

(SLIDE 2)

Attached to the email were photographs of Reaksa embracing the man who killed his family. "I thank God for giving me a spirit of peace to forgive my family's killers," he wrote five days later. "He was trembling when he first saw me. But after that he was filled with joy. I am feeling great now. After the rain, the sky becomes clear.... I have done a difficult job that not many people can do. I thank God for giving me strength to face this difficult task. I am now finding a way to help dig two wells for the people there."

(SLIDES 3 and 4)





**What does such a story mean for us, living out our relatively secure lives?** The way of forgiveness is neither easy nor natural, and yet we are not entirely surprised when we hear this about a follower of Jesus who prayed, as he hung on the cross, “*Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.*”

Reaksa’s story is a good illustration of Paul’s well known words, found in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. His story reminds us (a) **who we are**; (b) **why we are here**; and (c) **how we should live our lives**. In 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, Paul gives **four reasons why those of us who are “in Christ,” should no longer regard anyone from a worldly point of view:**

(SLIDE 5)

**1. Christ’s Creation:** We are a new creation. “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come ...*” (5:17)

Year after year, people around the world try to improve themselves and their societies. They use science, education, religion, laws, threats, imprisonment, executions, and even wars to try to accomplish this goal. Yet the problems remain.

Even in our personal lives, we find it almost impossible to measure up to the ideal standards of behavior. We know that we should be gentle, kind, patient, forgiving, generous, self-giving, and helpful, but instead we are sometimes harsh, mean, impatient, unforgiving, stingy, and self-absorbed—often with the very people for whom we care the most, our children, our spouse, and our neighbor.

Paul describes the root of our problem in Romans 7:14–25. Just as our physical bodies are genetically programmed to deteriorate and die, so we are spiritually programmed to fall short of God’s standards. Listen to his words:

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*For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup>For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.... <sup>21</sup>So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.... <sup>24</sup>What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

What we need is a “spiritual stem-cell” implant so that we can be *spiritually* and *relationally* renewed. This new birth gives us both the

inclination and the potential to become the kinds of people that God has called us to be.

*“If any one be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

(SLIDE 7)

2. **Christ’s Love: Christ loves every person in the world.** *“Christ’s love compels us ...”* (5:14)

Christ’s love is the greatest, most enduring reality in the universe. Only love endures, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13. The love of Christ, Paul says, makes it illogical for his followers to regard anyone *from a human point of view*.

We are **“compelled”** not because there are no other options or because we are filled with feelings of gratitude to God, but because if our Lord gave his very life in order to reconcile the world unto himself, other options are out of touch with reality and do not make any sense for his followers. It no longer makes sense *to live for ourselves* (v. 15), Paul says.

Such an outlook represents a major shift in our natural human perspective—a shift that impacts our orientation to everything and everyone.

Such an outlook sets us free from the tiny, dark dungeons of our egos, from the self-absorption that is promoted, celebrated and rewarded in modern society—the fatal attractions of self-centeredness, selfishness and greed and to which we are so powerfully drawn.

(SLIDE 8)

3. **Christ’s Self-sacrifice: Christ placed such a high value on the people around us that he died for them. And if Christ values our neighbors, our fellow workers, and all those we meet so highly, then we his followers must regard them as worth living for!** *“...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.... from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view ...”* (5:14–16)

What is *“a worldly point of view”*? It is the utilitarian view of other people, whether they are your competitors, another ethnic group, or a nation. It is the view that says we should love our friends and hate our enemies; that we should live as peacefully as we can.

But if there is conflict, we must make sure our enemy suffers more than we do. The *worldly point of view* says that my life and the lives of those who define me and support me is worth more than your life and the lives of those who define you. If necessary you are expendable, but I am not.

But we who are in Christ resist such a reductionist understanding of other men and women. In his famous sermon *“The Weight of Glory”*, preached on June 8, 1942 in Oxford—C. S. Lewis stressed this point:

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**“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization ... are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat.**

...your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor he is [almost as holy as Christ ... [since in him or her] the glorifier and the glorified, [Christ] Himself, is truly hidden.”<sup>2</sup>

(SLIDE 10)

4. **Christ’s Commission: We are Christ’s ambassadors on special assignment in this world.** God has invited us to play a profoundly significant role in the central drama of His universe. *<sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup>that 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. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us....”* (5:18–20)

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<sup>2</sup>*The Weight of Glory* by C.S. Lewis, published in *THEOLOGY*, November, 1941, and by the S.P.C.K, 1942

I have been recently impressed by stories of young men and women who risk their security, their careers their mental and physical health, their very lives for the sake of a noble cause—perhaps the cause of *democracy* if they are Americans or Koreans, or the dream of *theocracy* if they are Muslims.

How meaningless our lives can be! We yearn to be part of something bigger, grander, and more enduring! There is something in our God-given natures that instinctively prefers to die *for* a noble cause, than to merely die *of* old age or disease.

None of us would choose to live the life of Sokreaksa Himm. But we should be deeply grateful to God for him, because by the grace of God, through the terrible violence that deprived him of his family, permanently scarring him emotionally and psychologically, he has come to understand, *really understand*, that he *is* part of something much bigger than himself—the grandest, most noble cause of all time and eternity. He is God's ambassador of reconciliation. He no longer regards anyone from a human point of view, and his story helps you and me to remember that this is our calling too.

We are newly *created* by Christ, *compelled* by his love, *convinced* by his self-sacrifice, and *commissioned* by his command.

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*<sup>16</sup>So from now on we [can] regard no one from a worldly point of view.... <sup>18</sup>... God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and.... has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ's ambassadors."*

**Prayer:** We give you thanks  
-for making us your new creation,  
-for your eternal love that embraces the world,  
-for your self-sacrifice that redeems the world,  
and

-for your great commission that makes us ambassadors of the good news of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

**Conclusion (Optional):** When I attended the boarding school for missionaries' children in Ethiopia when I was a boy, one of the songs that we learned was "The King's Business", sometimes referred to as the "Royal Ambassador Hymn," by E. T. Cassell. I can still remember the words:

I am a stranger here, within a foreign land,  
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;  
Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea,  
I'm here on business for my King.

This is the King's command, that all men  
ev'rywhere  
Repent and turn away from sin's seductive snare;  
That all who will obey with Him shall reign for  
aye,  
And that's my business for my King.

My home is brighter far than Sharon's rosy plain,  
Eternal life and joy thro'out its vast domain;  
My Sovereign bids me tell how mortals there may  
dwell,  
And that's my business for my King.

**Chorus:**

This is the message that I bring,  
A message angels fain would sing:  
"Oh, be ye reconciled," thus saith my Lord and  
King,  
"Oh, be ye reconciled to God."

**Benediction:**

**Romans 16:25-27**<sup>25</sup>Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, <sup>26</sup>but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— <sup>27</sup>to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.