

**Downward and Outward**  
**II Corinthians on Walking in the Way of Jesus**  
**Part Five: 5.14-21: Sharing the good news of Jesus**  
**September 15**

Some of you may have seen the delightfully quirky short film called *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*, starring Ralph Fiennes, Ben Kingsley and Benedict Cumberbatch, and based on the short story by Roald Dahl.

If you've not seen it, I encourage you to have a go. It's a unique, off-angle, thought-provoking little 40-minute gem.

At one point in the story the main character, Henry Sugar, finds himself suddenly having acquired a massive stack of money. At first he thinks of this treasure as his own possession. It belongs to him.

But the more he considers his new wealth, the more he realizes he doesn't want to keep it for himself. He wants to share it. Here's how Dahl tells what happens next:

He picked up the bundle. It was all in twenty-pound notes – to translate that into its value in US currency today – it was all in thousand dollar bills, three hundred and thirty of them to be exact. He walked onto the balcony of his [apartment]. There he stood in his dark red silk pajamas looking down at the street below him.

Although it was a Sunday there were quite a few people strolling about on the sidewalks.

Henry peeled off a single [thousand dollar bill] from his wad and dropped it over the balcony. A breeze took hold of it. . . . It fluttered and twisted in the air and eventually came to rest on the opposite side of the street, directly in front of an old man.

The old man was wearing a long, brown, shabby overcoat and a floppy hat, and he was walking slowly, all by himself. He caught sight of the [bill] as it fluttered past his face, and he stopped and picked it up.

He held it with both hands and stared at it. He turned it over. He peered closer. Then he raised his head and looked up.

"Hey there!" Henry shouted, cupping a hand to his mouth. "That's for you! It's a present!"

The old man stood quite still, holding the note in front of him and gazing up at the figure on the balcony above.

“Put it in your pocket!” Henry shouted. “Take it home!”

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Last Sunday in our walk through II Corinthians we reflected on what it means for us that we have Jesus and Jesus has us. Speaking of the presence of Jesus within those who are his followers, Paul wrote in II Corinthians 4.6-7:

God . . . made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

This morning, as we come to II Corinthians chapter 5, Paul takes it one step further and moves us to consider what it would look like for us to begin to fling that treasure off the balcony –

to reach the treasure of Jesus across the fence and into the lives of our next door neighbors,  
and carry it with us down the aisle of the grocery store and into our conversation with the person at the checkout line,  
or into the bleachers at our kid’s soccer game,  
or at the counter of the credit bureau,  
or standing behind the podium in front of your class,  
or sitting at your desk at work or at school,  
or lacing up your cleats for the game,  
or wherever it is that God takes you throughout the day.

In the passage we’re looking at today Paul describes how he has come to see sharing the love of Jesus as his one great purpose wherever he goes, and he invites us to join him in that pursuit.

### Starting with **II Corinthians 5.11**

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.

What exactly does it mean to fear the Lord?

I’ve been reading an incredible book called *The Emerald Mile* by Kevin Fedarko. It’s about the Grand Canyon river running community during the 70s and 80s, and the attempt on the part of one of them, a guide named Kenton Grua, to make the fastest run ever down the Colorado River.

Grua’s nickname was The Factor. He is called that because he impacts everything and everyone without exception. You always have to take him into account, to factor him in.

When I fear God, it means I recognize that God is *The Factor* in every aspect of my life. He is the person, the force, the presence, whose impact is far greater than anything or anyone else when it comes to the whole of my life.

I exist because of him and I exist for him. He is the One from who my life comes and to whom my life is answerable.

He gave me my life. He sustains my life. He established the circumstances of my life. Every part of my life is connected to him in some way.

He is The Factor, the defining reality of my life. Recognizing that and living out of that truth is what it means to fear God.

Since then, we understand that we exist because of God and for God, we try to persuade others.

Persuade others of what?

Well, the word in Greek actually tells us. It means convince someone they can *trust* someone. It's directly related to the word "faith."

Sometimes when the word "faith" or "belief" is used among us evangelicals it is whittled down to the idea of believing certain things to be true about Jesus: he was God in our midst, he lived a perfect life, he died for our sins, and so on.

While those facts are crucially important, the word "faith" is not a conceptual word, it's a relational one. It's much more about whether we trust a person, not merely whether certain things are true about that person.

If I say that I have faith Sharon can wave traffic around me while I am changing a flat tire on the side of the highway, I'm not just saying I believe she is capable of doing that. I am saying I put my confidence in her, I trust her, I entrust to her my wellbeing.

So Paul starts off by saying that, because of the central place that Jesus has in his life, this Jesus *he* has come to trust he now goes through life seeking to persuade *others* that they can trust too.

So a quick pause. Two questions.

First, what do you fear – in the biblical sense? What do you recognize as *the* Factor, the Defining Reality, of your life? What explains and shapes your life more than anything else?

And second, what does that actually mean for you, and for the things you give yourself to in life – how you spend your time, how you see your relationships, how you think

about the interactions you have with others throughout the day? To what extent does your defining reality define what your life is really all about?

Paul says, for me there is a one-to-one connection between the place God has in my life and how I see those who God places in my life. What about for you?

Now Paul pauses in the flow of his thoughts and circles back to the concern that sparked this letter in the first place. The Corinthians have given Paul's ministry the once over and they've decided that as a spiritual leader Paul is pretty much a wash-out.

That's because they are looking at Paul through the up-and-to-the-right, power-and-flash success grid of the world around them instead of evaluating Paul's ministry on the basis of the life and ministry of Jesus.

So Paul says, **II Corinthians 5.11-13**

What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

Then Paul comes back to his opening point – that his life is about seeking to persuade others that Jesus is worth trusting. And now he tells them *why* that's what his life is about.

**II Corinthians 5.14-15**

For 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.]

Why would you take the scary step of sharing the gospel? Why would you risk talking to someone about Jesus when you know they could misunderstand you or feel offended by you or want nothing to do with you and reject you?

Because Christ's love compels us.

It lays hold of me. Seizes me. Grabs me in its grip. Constrains me.

What is it exactly that grabs Paul in its grip and compels him?

The love of Jesus.

More precisely, the *self-sacrificial* love of Jesus. This is that Greek word *agape*, which always has a costly or sacrificial quality to it.

The sacrificial love of Jesus compels me to tell others about him.

Certainly Paul is thinking here of the love Jesus has shown to him personally, of how he came to Paul and laid hold of him on the road to Damascus, and rescued him from the destructive trajectory of his life of hate, and folded him into the loving arms of God, and transformed the shape of his heart, and redirected the course of his life.

But Paul is also thinking here of the love Jesus has for everyone else as well, including whoever is standing before me in any given moment.

The sacrificial love of Jesus compels me, for we are convinced that one died for *all*.

The love of which Paul speaks, and which it has become his life mission to make known, is a love that starts in the heart of God the Father, who loved this world so much.

That same love fuels the life and ministry and death of the Son, who empties himself of his heavenly glory and endures the shame of the cross for one purpose – to bring us into that love.

That's what compels me, Paul says. I have been on the receiving end of that love. How could I not want you to be on the receiving end of that love too?

In the wonderful book *The Singer*, Calvin Miller's poetic retelling of the life and ministry of Jesus, Miller imagines Jesus encountering a woman of the street.

"Are you betrothed?" she asks him.

"No, only loved," he answered.

"And do you pay for love?"

"No, but I owe it everything.

The Singer sings to the woman his song of love.

She listened and knew for the first time she was hearing all of love there was.

Her eyes swam when he was finished. She sobbed and sobbed in shame.

"Forgive me, Father-Spirit, for I am sinful and undone."

The Singer touched her shoulder and told her of the joy that lay ahead if she could learn the [love song] he had sung. He left her in the street and walked away, and as he left he heard her singing his new song.

And when he turned to wave the final time he saw her shaking her head to a friendship buyer. She would not take his money. And from his little distance, the Singer heard her use his very words.

“Are you betrothed?” the buyer asked her.

“No, only loved,” she answered.

“And do you pay for love?”

“No, but I owe it everything.”

Paul says, His love constrains me. I owe it everything.

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.

As an expression of that love, one died for all. And think of what that has meant for us, Paul says, for those who have come to know him. He died for us, and, swallowed us up in his life and death, and we died with him.

The old, self-centered life I used to live, bent in upon myself, that old life that was about me has come to an end, and a new God-and-others-centered life has come to life in its place.

Paul's life headed off in a completely different direction after his encounter with Jesus. But so does that of everyone who ever comes face to face with him. It's not about me any more. I no longer live for myself but for him.

## **II Corinthians 5.16**

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

Before he met Jesus, Paul went through life in a way that taught him to divide up the people in front of him on the basis of external differences. Jews from non-Jews. Educated from uneducated. Roman citizens from non-Romans. And among Jews: dividing them into the twelve tribes, and into the various sect: Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodeans, Zealots, sinners. And among Pharisees, by which rabbi they followed: Gamaliel versus Hillel. And so on.



We've been trained to do just the same thing, to divide humanity on the basis of observable differences: male and female, old and young, white and persons of color, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, Purdue fan or fan of one of the other 85 schools in the Big Ten.

Paul says: not any more. His transformative encounter with Jesus has not only changed the way he sees Jesus, it has changed the way he sees everyone else.

This is how he sees humanity now.

First, there are three things that are true of every person he ever meets.

Every person I see is someone made in God's image.

Every person I see is someone loved by God.

Every person I see is someone created by God to be in relationship with him, to live their life with him and for him, under his loving rule.

However loudly their externals may shout to us of other qualities by which to define them and divide them, those are the truest things of all about every person we will ever sit next to, or stand in line with, or talk to, or live beside, or work with. Created by God, loved by God, made for relationship with God.

And then second, amid all the differences that could possibly separate us, from Paul's perspective there is only one difference that matters.

Some made in God's image and loved by God and created by God to be in relationship with him and to live their life under his loving rule, know it. They have responded in faith to Jesus as King, entrusting their lives to him. They have entered into that relationship.

And others made in God's image and loved by God and created by God to be in relationship with him and to live their lives under his loving rule don't know it, or know it and have rejected it, and have turned their backs on God and live their lives for themselves instead.

So Paul says, when I walk through the world, and encounter men and women and children on my route, there's only one thing that informs the way I see them and relate to them. Whether or not they have opened their lives to Jesus.

And whenever I encounter someone who doesn't know him, I take the treasure out of my pocket and begin flinging twenties into the air. I seek to make him known. I wouldn't dare miss the joy.

**II Corinthians 5.16-17**

Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

When a life opens up to the love of God, that life can never be the same. Love changes everything it touches.

Paul says, the love that has so radically changed me, it will change you too. You will become a brand new creation! And I want that for you! So wherever I go I stand on the balcony and fling my treasure to the world.

Picking up the story with Henry Sugar:

By this point, many people had stopped and looked up.

Henry peeled off another note and threw it down. The watchers below didn't move. They simply watched. . . . Everyone followed the piece of paper as it went fluttering down, and this one came near to a young couple who were standing arm in arm on the sidewalk across the street.

The man . . . picked it up from the ground. He examined it closely. The watchers on both sides of the street all had their eyes on the young man now. . . .

"It's [a thousand dollars]!" he said, jumping up and down. "It's a [thousand dollar bill]!"

"Keep it!" Henry shouted at him. "It yours!"

"You mean it?" the man called back, holding the [bill] out at arm's length. "Can I really keep it?"

## II Corinthians 5.18-19

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

Why did Jesus come? Why did Jesus die? The answer the church has typically given for the past five centuries is, "Jesus died for our sins."

And while that is essentially true, it also misses the essential point. ***Jesus came and Jesus died to bring us into relationship with God*** – the relationship with God for which we were made. That is the whole reason for the incarnation.

As I Peter 3.18 says – a verse I think we should all memorize:



Jesus died to bring us home to God.

Jesus came to reconcile us to God. At God's initiative, because he loves us, Jesus came to restore rebellious humanity to relationship with God, to change them from enemies of God into friends of God.

And our sin, our rebellion, our turning our backs on God – all that stands in the way of the relationship with God for which we were made. So Jesus took that sin upon himself on the cross so that the door to relationship with God could be reopened and we could walk through.

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

God wants to be in relationship with us, and Jesus is treasure flung by the Father from the balcony of heaven to make that possible. That, says Paul, is why *his* whole life is about going out into the world and flinging that same treasure wherever he goes.

## **II Corinthians 5.19-20**

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

God has made us his representatives in this world. Just like ambassadors, living in one kingdom but serving and representing the king of another, we have been sent into the world to invite the world to become friends of God.

If we are followers of Jesus, whatever else may be our calling – student or physician or entrepreneur or factory worker or company president or at-home mom or dad or patient in a wellness center – this is our job description as well.

We are his ambassadors, carrying the treasure of Christ into this world.

Picking up the story of Henry Sugar again . . .

Henry peeled off another five or six notes and threw them down. There were screams and yells as the pieces of paper fanned out in the wind and floated downwards. People were laughing. Here was a man standing three floors up, in his pajamas, slinging these enormously valuable [bills] into the air. Quite a few of those present had never even seen a [thousand dollar bill] in their lives before this moment.

Now something else was beginning to happen. . . . The new of what Henry was doing flashed like lightning up and down the length of the . . . street, and into the smaller and larger streets beyond. From all sides people came running.

At this point Henry simply raised his arm and swung it out and flung the entire bundle of [bills] into the air. More than [three hundred thousand dollars] went fluttering down on the ... crowd below.

We are Christ's ambassadors, but if we're honest, when it comes to having spiritual conversations, many of us feel ill-equipped. We feel awkward and self-conscious, a bit like we're standing out in public in our pajamas.

We've got this amazing treasure, but how do we get it in the hands of those God has put around us without making fools of ourselves? What if they ask a hard question I haven't really thought through? Or what if I say something that causes offense and pushes them away?

In order to help equip our church family for our work as Christ's ambassadors, this year we are planning two equipping weekends. First, on the weekend of November 9 and 10, Doug Pollock, the author of *God Space*, will come back to Covenant to give us a refresher course on how to engage in spiritual conversations with the people God puts on our route.

*God Space* is the best book on evangelism to come out in the past ten or fifteen years. You won't want to miss the time with Doug on the weekend of November 9 and 10. He'll preach on Sunday morning, plus meet with our senior highers and our college students over the weekend, and then he'll lead in us in a Sunday evening equipping event.

Then on the weekend of January 17-19, Paul Gould, a wonderful guy who got his PhD from Purdue and was part of this church family for a time, and now teaches philosophy of religion at Palm Beach Atlantic, will be returning to Covenant with his colleague Paul Copan, the author of books like *That's Just Your Interpretation* and *When God Goes to Starbucks*. Paul Copan is a wonderfully gracious man who is also a friend of Covenant. Some of you will remember when he preached here; he is one of those rare apologists who is as humble as he is bright.

The two of them will be leading a Friday-through-Sunday weekend equipping event to help us answer many of the most common questions and objections that people raise about the Christian faith. We really want to encourage you to clear those weekends so you can get equipped and become more confident when it comes to flinging your treasure out into this world.

In the kingdom of God, treasure is meant to be shared. And the greatest treasure of all, and the one most worth sharing, is Jesus himself.

We hope you'll plan to make an investment over the next few months so that, as Peter says in I Peter 3:15:

we can be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have, but with gentleness and respect.

The moral of *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*? Treasure is meant for flinging, not clinging.

God has stuffed our pockets with treasure that is Jesus, and then he flings us out into the world. And now he invites us to fling that treasure wherever we go, seeing the people God places around us as ones loved by God and pursued by God, and making ourselves available to help them discover that the Jesus we have come to know and trust is in every way deserving of their trust too.

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While those of you who are followers of Jesus reflect on that, I want to speak for just a moment as we wrap up to another group. Because there's a second moral of the Henry Sugar story: flung treasure is meant for treasuring.

Maybe you are someone who stands outside the Christian faith and is exploring it, and you're trying to figure out what to make of the claims that are being made about this Jesus who came as treasure from heaven to earth.

You might find it interesting that at this point in his letter Paul makes a really interesting shift. He goes from talking about "us" to talking about "you." And the "you" he has in mind is actually you – someone who has heard of Jesus and knows and respects people who love Jesus and is considering the claims of Jesus but hasn't yet opened the door and invited Jesus in.

To them, to you, Paul writes:

## **II Corinthians 5.20**

We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Jesus opens the door into a relationship with the God who created you. Have you stepped through that door?

If not, what is keeping you? What stands in the way? Why not take that step today?

If you have an objection that stands in the way, address it. Talk to a Christian friend, or come join us for our next Conversation about Christianity in three weeks, which is a safe setting in which to talk through your questions and objections.

Having been an atheist for a number of years, I know from my own experience that sometimes it isn't an intellectual objection that ultimately stands in the way. It is giving up control and trusting someone else to lead your life that gives us pause.

What if today was the day when you laid aside your fear and laid hold of this treasure falling from heaven and treasured it as your own?

What if you received it with both hands, and raised your head and looked up, and heard the voice of God saying, "That's for you! It's a present! Put it in your pocket! Take it home with you!" I gave my son for you, in order that I could know you and love you and be part of your life forever.

## **II Corinthians 5.20**

We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

What has God been saying to you this morning?

And how do you want to respond?