

Communion

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 November 2012

Preacher: Bob Akroyd

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, and there we'll read at verse 17.

If you have the NIV, there's a heading called the Ministry of Reconciliation, and verse 17 begins in this way.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. 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 men's sins against them.

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.

We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[1 : 2 2] There's always a catch. If something seems too good to be true, it must be too good to be true. There must be something, some small print, some exclusion, some exception.

Now on the scale of gullible and cynical, I'm on the gullible side of that scale. I tend to believe what people tell me. So when somebody comes to the door, as they did a week or so ago, and was telling me about loft insulation, I would have to say that at that point, up until that point, I had not given that subject much attention in my life.

But after a five-minute conversation, it seemed to be very important. And I was quite interested in both the level of loft insulation that I had and also the level of loft insulation that I required.

And these nice people were telling me that for no cost whatsoever to myself that they could amend this obvious problem in my house. And I was quite intrigued and quite interested.

And before I knew it, the clipboard was out, the details were being given. And if I'm on the gullible end of the spectrum, my wife is on the more cynical end of the spectrum and she saw what was happening and she intervened.

[2 : 3 4] And so anyway, the gentleman with the loft insulation had to go to the next door neighbors, hopefully to find somebody to take up his very kind offer. But you know, there was a catch.

The free loft insulation wasn't really free. There was a fee. There was a cost. It was kind of hidden. You weren't paying for the insulation, but you had to kind of pay some sort of registration fee.

So it technically wasn't really free. There was a catch. They wanted me to sign up. They wanted me to sign on the dotted line. And when you sign on the dotted line, then all the terms and the conditions are given to you.

So the free offer isn't really free. There's always a cost. There's always a catch. It seemed too good to be true. And it was too good to be true.

However, we come to the passage before us. And I can genuinely tell you that here is an offer that has no catch. There is no exception.

[3 : 35] There is no small print. There are no exclusions. Now, two, three weeks ago, Hurricane Sandy hit the east coast of the United States.

And my sister and myself, we have a home, a family home very close to the water. And we were very concerned about the house. Thankfully, the waters didn't, they reached the house but didn't go into the house.

Unfortunately, the insurance policy that we have is a comprehensive insurance policy with one exception. It doesn't cover flood damage.

So if the house blew down, we could get it replaced. But if the house floated away, we couldn't get it replaced. It was there in black and white. So exactly what we needed wasn't there.

The small print, the exclusion. Now, when you sign up for the policy, you don't think of catastrophic floods. You don't think necessarily of once-in-a-century hurricanes.

[4 : 36] But when that crisis comes along, you do very much think, are we covered? And the answer was, unfortunately, we're not covered. But today, you have an offer.

Today, you have an invitation. Today, you have a promise. And you are covered. Every eventuality is provided for. There's no one excluded. There's no situation excluded.

And there's no catch to this offer. In verse 17, we're told that there is a great change that is promised.

Verse 17, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone. The new has come. So the offer is unqualified.

This word, anyone, literally means anyone. Doesn't matter whether you're from a particular background. Doesn't matter what age you might be. It doesn't matter how old or young.

[5 : 36] It doesn't matter whether you're from this country and culture. Whether you're from the north or the south or the east or the west. It doesn't matter what language you speak as your first language.

There's no qualification here about education. There's no standard here that is required. If anyone, if anyone is in Christ.

Now, there is a condition. But that condition is regarding your relationship with Jesus. It's not regarding who you are. But it's regarding how you are responding to him.

So anyone and everyone is included and invited. But the question is, are you in Christ? And to be in Christ means that there is a vital connection, a vital link between the Son of God, who has created all things.

By the Son of God who sustains the Son of God, who sustains the world by the power of his word. By the Son of God who is all-powerful. By the Son of God who is all-righteous. By the Son of God who came down to this world to live a perfect life.

[6 : 40] To die a sacrificial death. And to experience a victorious resurrection from the dead. Ascension into heaven. And is sitting at the right hand of God. That is who Jesus Christ is.

But the question of the day, and the question that you must answer, is what is your relationship to him? Not what do you know about him. Not what you have heard about him.

But is there a vital connection? Because this small preposition is absolutely critical. In. If anyone is in Christ. If Jesus now is in your life.

If he is now part of your experience. If he has come, as the Bible says, to dwell in our hearts by faith. That means that you are in Christ. You are part of his family.

You are included in his kingdom. And you are the beneficiary of all of his promises. And the particular promise that is described here.

[7 : 38] Is that if anyone is in Christ. What now is true is that he or she is a new creation. The old gone. The new come.

So it doesn't matter what your life included. It doesn't matter what you did. Or what you didn't do. It doesn't matter necessarily how you came to this point in your life.

How you came to know about Jesus. You may have heard about Jesus in your home. You may have been invited to church by a friend. You might have somehow picked up the Bible and started reading.

So the method or the means by which you came to know Jesus is immaterial. But the promise is such. That if anyone is in Christ. The promise without a catch.

Without exclusion. Is that you now are a new creation. There's a woman called May Nicholson. I'm not sure if she's spoken here in Aberdeen. But she's from the city of Paisley.

[8 : 33] She's from the district or the neighborhood called Fergusley Park. And she's now written two books. The first. The title of her first book. Which was largely autobiographical.

Was Miracles from Mayhem. And it's a play of words on her own name. May Nicholson. But her lifestyle. And her life experience. Was summarized in that word mayhem.

Chaos. Uncontrolled. Unpredictable. And God came into her life. Jesus came into her life. And performed a miracle in her heart.

So now you meet her. And the life that she describes. Is unimaginable. You can't picture how this woman. Was like that. Because the woman that's speaking to you.

Is somebody who is in her right mind. Who is sensible. Who is sober. Who is responsible. And who is concerned for others. We can only describe it as the title of the book says.

[9 : 29] Miracle. It's a miracle. It's God working powerfully. It's God working unexpectedly. It's God working definitively. You see social work.

And GPs. And the prison service. And all different organizations. Had tried to help. But none of these organizations. Was able to help. Despite their best efforts.

But it was only God. Through the person of his son Jesus. When she came to know Jesus for herself. That her life was changed. She has become a completely different person.

She still speaks with the same accent. She still has the same family. She still has the same personality. But instead of the chaos of the old life. There's now order. Instead of the destructive.

Self-destructive behavior. There's now a lifestyle of care and concern for other people. The second volume is entitled. More Miracles from Mayhem. And goes on to tell the stories.

[10 : 28] Of lives that have been touched. She set up a foundation. It's called the Prishal Trust. Prishal which means precious. Which reminds us that we are precious in God's sight.

Each person. And each person that you meet. Not just in church. Each person that you meet on the street. Each person that you meet in your place of work. Each person you meet in school. Or in university.

Each person is special and precious. Because of being made in God's image. And if we remember that. Inevitably we will treat people differently.

So the change is a dramatic change. A definitive change. The old is now gone. And the new is now come. And the reason is. Because we are in Christ.

We have a relationship with Jesus. So the Apostle Paul begins with the personal change. And he's one who can talk. Because he can tell you what he was.

[11 : 25] And he can tell you what he is. And he can explain why the change took place. Here was a violent man who was dedicated to destroying the Christian church.

And now we have a man who was planting churches. Who was preaching. Who was writing. Who was teaching. And who was telling people the way of Jesus.

How do you get somebody who was dedicated to destroying the Christian church. Now becomes its greatest ambassador. And its greatest advocate. Well the answer is Jesus. He met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus.

He had the intention of going to destroy. And Jesus had another intention. He said Paul you are going to be for me. My ambassador to the nations. To those who are generally outside of God's plan and purpose of the Old Testament.

They will now be part of God's purpose. And they will be included and invited. And you are the one who will go and tell them about Jesus. So there's the great change.

[12 : 27] And there's no catch. There's no exclusion. And there's no exception. In verse 20 we're told that there is a great invitation. So if today you are in Christ.

Verse 17 tells you what you are. A new creation. But if you are not yet trusting in Jesus. Verse 20 speaks to you. Because notice how the one who is a new creation.

Is now becoming an ambassador. Verse 20. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. So not only does Jesus make old people new people. Not only does Jesus change the inside of people.

And transform them. But Jesus commissions people in his service. He's the great king. And his people now become his ambassadors. And this word ambassador is critical.

Because an ambassador is one who is commissioned. And empowered. By an authority. So for example. The president of the United States. Generally.

[13 : 31] Doesn't get on the phone. And speak to the queen. Or speak to the prime minister. But generally the relationships. Between the United States and Great Britain. Occur through ambassadors. The UK has an ambassador in Washington DC.

And the United States has an ambassador in London. So that the two governments. Can communicate. Through these individuals. Who represent. The nation or the people. In a different country.

And Paul is saying. Therefore. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. As though God were making his appeal. Through us. So God now commissions his people.

To speak. God now commissions his people. With a message. And he calls us ambassadors. And he says that your message. Is a simple message. It's a message of reconciliation.

Now this word reconciliation. Means that there's a problem. You see you don't need to reconcile friends. You don't need to reconcile a couple. That are happily married. You don't need to reconcile nations.

[14 : 31] That are at peace with each other. You need to reconcile. A couple that has separated. You need to reconcile friends. That have fallen out. You need to reconcile countries. That are at war.

So if we are our ambassadors. And our message is reconciliation. We have to recognize there's a problem. And if you're not yet a Christian. There is a problem. There's a problem that you and God.

Are not on speaking terms. That you and God. Are not on a relationship. Of harmony. Of peace. Or of friendship. There is a war.

Now you might say. I don't see that. Well God sees it. God sees the human heart. And he sees your heart. If you're not trusting in him.

As a heart that is a heart filled with sin. Which means not doing what God tells us to do. Or doing what God tells us not to do. Or we can describe that in a term called rebellion.

[15 : 29] Rebellion where we do our own thing. Our own way. This is God's world. And we say. Well actually God. I'm not interested in your world. Or your word. Or your orders.

I want to live in your world. By my rules. Well that's what sin really is. Isn't it? Living by our rules in God's world. And God says that's rebellion. That's war.

And if you're at war with God. You need to be at peace with God. You need to be reconciled. And that's where this invitation comes. So that if you're a Christian today. You're an ambassador. You have a new message of peace to give to people.

And if you're not yet a Christian. Here's the message. We implore you on Christ's behalf. Be reconciled to God. Come in from the cold.

Come in from the outside. You've been fighting a battle. It's time to lay down your arms. You've been living outside of God. You've been living apart from God. It's now time to enter into.

[16 : 29] A new relationship with God. God has commissioned his people to say. Be reconciled to God. And notice the language here. We are Christ's ambassadors.

As though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf. Be reconciled to God. This word appeal. And this word implore.

These are terms that are not traditionally associated with ambassadors. When ambassadors are speaking on behalf of a country. They might use diplomatic language.

They might use polite language. But they also use very direct language. So if President Obama says to his ambassador. You need to tell the British to do this.

He goes and he tells the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary. This is what my President tells you to do. It's authoritative. It's powerful. It's definitive. But notice that the ambassadors that Jesus commissions.

[17 : 28] He says that you are to plead. You are to implore. You are to beg people to be reconciled. Yes it is a powerful message. But it's to be delivered with emotion.

It's to be delivered with passion. It's to be a plea that you are saying to people. Don't continue on this path. Don't continue in this direction. The ultimate end of this path is destruction.

The ultimate goal of this rebellion. Will be finding yourself in the hands of a righteous and an angry God. That one day you will have to confront.

And the messenger, the ambassador saying. Don't do it. Don't go down that path. Stop in your tracks and turn. Be reconciled to God. There is a separation. There has been a divorce.

There is a rebellion. But God is declaring peace. We have the ability as people. Individually and collectively. We can declare war.

[18 : 25] One nation can say we are no longer at peace with you. We are now at war. But God has the unique ability to declare peace. He is the one who is offended. He is the one to whom this rebellion is directed.

And he says we are now at peace. I declare peace. And the terms and conditions of his peace treaty are quite simple. He says I present to you my son.

I am sending my son to you. You're the guilty ones. You're the ones who have rebelled. You're the ones who have sinned and done your own thing your own way. And I am the offended one.

I am the one who has attracted your rebellion. And yet I am now the one that God says. Who is providing the solution. Who is providing the means for reconciliation.

So there's a great invitation here. If you're not yet trusting in Jesus. He says the terms and conditions are simple. Be reconciled to God. Christ has come.

[19 : 25] So that you might be forgiven. That you might be restored. That you might be at peace with God. This is his world. The world that he has created operates according to his law.

And we are made to know him. We are made to follow him. And we again are best suited to live by God's law and according to God's word.

Those are his terms and conditions. We've broken that law. We've disobeyed our God. And he says I'm coming to you with a message of peace. With a message of reconciliation. But the details come to verse 21.

Where we have now the great exchange. How is it possible for God to be reconciled? How is it possible for God to declare peace? How is it possible for us to be new creatures?

New creatures in Jesus. How can it be that the old goes and that the new comes? There has to be something. And there is something. Verse 21 tells us of a great exchange.

[20 : 31] God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. That's the cross. That's what we are remembering in a few moments when we sit at the Lord's table.

That there on the cross. Jesus. The sinless son of God. The one who satisfied God's requirements perfectly. He lived 33 years on this planet.

And he did exactly what God told him to do. And he avoided all that God told him to avoid. He faced temptation. And he overcame temptation. He came to serve.

And he served. He came to speak. And he spoke. He came to heal. And he healed. He came to help. And he helped. All that was given to him to do, he did. And the culmination of his work occurred on that Friday.

Where he gave his life willingly and purposefully for you. So God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. So that's where the solution comes in.

[21 : 29] That your sin, your guilt, what you have done and said and thought, that is not in keeping with God's word. The way that you've lived your life according to your rules on God's planet.

All that sin is now being heaped on his shoulders. So that in God's sight, somehow, some way, the sinless son of God now becomes sin in God's sight.

Because he's carrying your sin. And he's carrying your debt. And he's liable for your punishment. But that's just half the equation. Because there's an exchange here.

He becomes sin, but what about us? So that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. All the credit that belongs to him. All the obedience that he achieved.

All the good that he actually did is his righteousness. And this exchange means that all that's good in Jesus comes to me. And all that's bad in me goes to Jesus.

[22 : 31] That's a pretty good deal. That's a great deal. That's a great exchange. All that I have done wrong now is dealt with by him. And all that he has done right is now credited to me.

With those terms and conditions, how can you refuse? How can you fail to accept such an exchange? Where everything that you've broken, God says, I'll take.

And everything that he has achieved, he says, you can have. What an exchange that is taking place on the cross. And what an invitation that is occurring here today.

This great exchange. God who is holy, righteous, and true. And we who are crooked, impure, and false. And he says everything.

All that's wrong. All that's broken. All that's false. You give it to me. And instead, I'll give you all that's true. All that's right. And all that's good. So the change that takes place in your life, if you're a Christian, occurred because of what took place on that cross.

- [23 : 37] The great spiritual exchange that took place where Jesus willingly and purposefully gave himself. Remember how he himself put it in Mark's gospel. He said the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.

And to give his life as a ransom for many. He says, I came to pay a price for many people. I came to pay a price to set many people free because they are enslaved to sin.

They are in bondage. And they can't free themselves. And that's what we are. We have a problem that we can't solve. We have a situation that we can't change. And Jesus has definitively come into this world to solve that problem and to transform that situation.

And he says, these are my terms and these are my conditions. You must simply accept what I have done on your behalf. You can't add to it. You can't take away from it.

You can't make some type of contribution towards it. It's all his work. And it's all our benefit. Now, I'd like to just make two observations here.

- [24 : 44] First of all, the terms of credit. Who gets the credit? Well, the answer is given to us in verse 18. All this is from God.

This is God's word. This is God's plan. This is God's purpose. This is God's action. This is God's solution. None of this comes from us.

We didn't come to God and say, look, we're in trouble here. Why don't you do this? Why don't you provide this? Why don't you somehow fix this problem that we ourselves have caused?

This is all from God. So when you come to know Jesus, all the credit belongs to Jesus. You can never say, look what we have done. But you say, look what he has done.

And that's what it means to sit at the Lord's table. You are saying, let me tell you what Jesus has done for me. Not what I've done for Jesus, but what he has done for me.

- [25 : 42] You're not boasting. You're not bragging. But you're saying, look, all the credit belongs to one person. And all the credit was achieved in one place. The person is Jesus.

And the place is the cross. I'm now teaching in the college. And one thing we have to do for all the essays, and this is something new for me because of the technology.

If you're in university, you probably understand this. If you write an essay, you now have to submit this essay. And the computer can tell if you've stolen other people's ideas.

So if you think that John Calvin put it really good, but you figure rather than saying John Calvin said, you sort of say, well, Bob Aykroyd said. Well, this computer can tell that actually that's not your words.

Those are John Calvin's words, or that's from Warfield, or that's from Luther. So there's what we call that plagiarism. You're taking credit for something that somebody else said. Or in a workplace, you know, if you try to claim credit for something that somebody else did, you might infringe on somebody else's patent or whatever it is.

- [26 : 48] But the idea is that you've got to give credit where credit is due. If John Calvin said it, put a footnote and say Calvin's Institutes. If somebody else invented it, you have to give credit to them who invented it.

When it comes to the gospel, we have to give credit where credit is due. Jesus deserves all the credit. Jesus deserves all the praise. Jesus deserves all the honor because he did this for us.

He, the righteous, sinless son of God, became sin deliberately, purposely, so that you and I could be declared righteous by God, that we could be given all of his credits, we could be given all that he would otherwise deserve.

All this is from God. A.B. Simpson, who was the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance at the turn of the 20th century, he defined the gospel in these terms, and I think this is quite helpful because it shows how big the gospel message is, how all-encompassing it is, and it shows how big our problem is, that apart from the gospel, this is what we have to contend with.

Simpson put it this way. He said, That's the gospel.

[28 : 36] That's what Jesus has achieved on our part. But if you take the gospel out of the equation, let me just repeat that quotation and adding the appropriate negatives. Without the gospel, God is not reconciled.

Justice is not satisfied. Sin has not been atoned for. The judgment of the guilty may not be revoked. The condemnation of the sinner is not canceled. The curse of the law is not blotted out.

The gates of hell are opened. The portals of hell are closed. The power of sin remains unsubdued. The guilty conscience is unhealed. And the broken heart remains un comforted.

And the sorrow of the misery and the misery of the fall remain. That's the choice that you have today. The stark contrast between being in Christ and being out of Christ.

Accepting what he has done and rejecting what he has done. If you think of sin as injury. Injuring God. Doing something that causes him pain.

[29 : 39] Rejecting his son is an insult. So rejecting the gospel, you are adding insult to injury. That's never a good way to proceed. If there's a problem, don't insult the one that's come to help you.

Don't reject the one that's come to solve the problem on your behalf. So when we consider the change and the invitation and the exchange, we first of all give credit where credit is due.

But secondly, I'd like you to notice that there is a timetable. The timetable occurs in 2 Corinthians 6, verses 1 and 2. As God's fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

Vain simply means empty or without effect. For he says, in the time of my favor I heard you. And in the day of salvation I helped you.

I tell you now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. We not only have to accept God's terms and conditions, but we have to accept his timetable.

[30 : 46] So tonight I can't go to the Aberdeen station and say, here I am, where's my train? I have to plan my trip according to the schedule. I have to say, well there's a train leaving at 20.10 and I need to be on the station platform at 20.10.

I can't tell the company when to put on its trains. I can't determine the length of that service. I have to follow in with their timetable. And we're accustomed to this.

You wait for a bus to get to work. You go on a plane to go on holiday. You accept the timetable that you're given. And you plan accordingly. Well God has a timetable and we must plan accordingly.

He says his timetable is now. And his timetable is today. Whereas our natural response is not now and not today.

So you might not be saying to me, I reject your conditions. I reject your presentation. I reject your invitation. But I have trouble with your timetable. If you have trouble with God's timetable, you have trouble with his invitation.

[31 : 50] Because his invitation comes now, today. It doesn't necessarily come tomorrow, or next week, or next month. So you must accept his terms and conditions, both the invitation to come to Jesus, and the timetable that he gives.

He says, in the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. And if that's not sufficiently clear, he says, I tell you now is the time of God's favor.

And now is the day of salvation. You may have put this off for many years. That's regrettable in itself. But why add another day to those many years?

Why continue to do what you recognize was a mistake? If you've put off trusting in Jesus until now, it makes no sense to put it off till tomorrow.

Because God says today is still a day of favor, and today is still a day of salvation. The terms and the conditions are there. There is no catch. There is no small print.

[32 : 51] There are no exclusions. This offer seems too good to be true, but it is true. Completely true. And what's more, it's even better.

When you come to know Jesus, you realize that what Paul says is true, and you realize that it's even better than you anticipated. It's even better than you expected. It's even better than you imagined it could be.

So today, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. That is the only qualification for you to sit at the Lord's table. Are you in Christ?

Let's pray.