

When You Recognize Hope
Isaiah 65:17-23, 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
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Having a clear goal or objective is important! When I was in college, I had an internship working as the Interim Youth Director at the YMCA. One of the first tasks I was given was to make Rice Krispie Treats for a Youth Gathering we were having. Now, I had never made Rice Krispie Treats, but I wanted to impress my boss so I figured I would just figure it out...

And I nailed it! They were perfect, and I would argue that it would be difficult for anyone to top the delicious treats I was able to create! But I did end up going one step too far.

I thought it would be great to take the created squares and build them into a large tower to be displayed at the party. So I spent HOURS creating this display, cutting//placing//securing each individual square to make sure the final product was perfect.

The next day, as my supervisor walks in I'm just beaming! I am so excited to see their reaction to this incredible task I had just completed. He stops, stares at the tower and says, 'Why would you do this?' Apparently, there was one small detail he either neglected to tell or I neglected to hear (to this day we still argue over this discrepancy) but the Rice Krispie Treats were to be put in individual bags so that each student that attended could take it with them as a party favor at the end of the event...

So down came the tower, along with my creativity...

But having a goal is important... And one of the things that stands out in our New Testament passage this morning is that Paul shares what our mission is as Followers of Christ.

v. 15- 'Christ died for the sake of all so that those who are alive shall live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised.'

v. 20- 'We are ambassadors of Christ...'

We are called to live our lives in a such a way that represents the Love//Devotion//Care that Christ had for God's People...

Through Christ's Death on the Cross, we are free for a New Way of Life... To Be Reconciled with God, to seek Justice & Mercy FOR ALL PEOPLE, and to Live (each and every day, in all that we do) as Christ's Ambassadors in the World...

One of the verses within our passage this morning is one of the more widely known passages in ALL of Scripture. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that, 'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!'. This 'New Creation' is the redemption of people who now live for Christ by living for others.

In this verse, Paul is literally telling the Corinthians, and ultimately us as readers of this text, that by living for Christ WE WILL EXPERIENCE TRANSFORMATION!!

One of the exciting things that comes out of reading the Bible in large chunks, as we are doing this summer together as a church, is that you potentially begin to realize the arc of the biblical narrative in clearer ways. What I mean is, when we tackle the Bible verse by verse, and really dig deep into the individual verses of scripture we start to take notice of the little minute details of the text... But when we look at the wide arc of the story, different elements stand out to us.

Take Peter for instance: In the Gospels, on the night Jesus was arrested, we read about the Disciples scattering, and we specifically read of Peter who denies Christ **THREE TIMES**, one of those times being to a child who recognized Peter as ‘one who had been with Jesus’. Peter, this same guy, this man who denied even knowing Christ, would a short time in the future be proclaiming the message of Jesus’ Death & Resurrection, and ultimately the **HOPE** that it brings to **ALL PEOPLE** in the Book in Acts in Front of **Thousands of People!!**

From Denying Christ in Front of **DOZENS** of People, to Proclaiming Christ in Front of **THOUSANDS** of People... Now that's Transformation!!

And then there's Paul, who some of you may be aware was once known as Saul, who at one point had the sole purpose of tracking down ‘followers of the way’, individuals we today would refer to as Christians, in order to capture and persecute them. But then Saul had a ‘Conversion Experience’, along

Damascus Road, as detailed in Acts Chapter 9 in which Saul encountered the Living Christ. After which Saul became Paul and is widely considered one of the most influential Christian Leaders throughout Human History, someone that planted many churches for the Glory of Christ and whose writings make up a large portion of our New Testament.

From persecuting the church, to growing and spreading its Mission...

Now that's Transformation!!

Both Peter & Paul and many others throughout History have been impacted by Christ's love, trusted in God's provision and dedicated their lives to furthering the Kingdom. Paul, in this letter to the Corinthians outlines our mission as being 'Christ's Ambassadors' and encourages us that when we are in Christ, there is a NEW CREATION...

Words are So Powerful - - It's incredible how Words have the Power and the Influence to either make or ruin our day.

I read a Facebook Meme Once that said...

If you had \$86,400 in your account and someone stole \$10 from you, would you be upset and throw all of the remaining \$86,390 away in order to try and get back at the person that stole your \$10, or would you move on and live? I believe most of us would choose to move on and live. But you see, we have 86,400 seconds in every day so don't let someone's negative 10 seconds

ruin the rest of the 86,390. Don't sweat the small stuff, life is bigger than that.

This has stuck with me because it highlights the influence that others can have on us. And how important it is that we need to be careful how to address, and respond to all those that we encounter...

When I accepted my first job out of college, as the Youth Pastor at the Army War College in Pennsylvania, I was hesitant to tell my parents because I didn't know how they would respond. Now I never doubted that my parents were proud of me or that they would support me, but we hadn't gone to church as a family so having a child take a ministry position was new territory for all of us. To put it bluntly, I didn't know what they would say or think...

But as I was telling them, the topic of my starting salary came up... And before I could answer and tell them what I would be making, my Dad said, 'Well, whatever they are paying him they are getting a bargain...'

That comment meant more to me than I will ever be able to truly articulate...

And yet here's the thing, my Dad doesn't remember saying it... Here is this foundational comment in my life, and a moment I reflect on often... And my Dad doesn't remember it. Because it was a natural response that he didn't need to think about...

Words are powerful... And we never know when a comment we make is going to be one someone else clings to - - Positive or Negative...

When I first read v. 21 (*‘For our sake, God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’*) it was the first time I understood. What I mean is reading this verse provided me with a lot of clarity!

First the why: Christ died for us because He loves us... And What a GREAT Love that is!

Second the Purpose: Christ’s death, Christ horrifying death on a Cross, served the purpose of reconciliation! Christ’s earthly ministry was detailing the importance of us being reconciled to one another. And Christ’s death provides us the opportunity to be reconciled with God.

‘For our sake, God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’

Have you ever thought about that word, ‘righteousness’? “The quality of being morally right or justifiable”... Christ’s death atones for our Sin.

The first time I read this verse, was the first time I truly understood the HOPE our Faith brings us. Christ’s life and teachings provides us direction, provides us purpose. But Christ death provides us Hope.

Hope = a feeling of expectation. How different would our perspective be if we clearly knew where we were headed!?!

The first time I read these words, ‘That we might become the righteousness of God’, I was sitting on a hand-me-down couch that Jill and I were given in our tiny little living room that wasn’t much bigger than this pulpit, but when I read these words I WAS FIRED UP! I felt like, for the first time, I finally got it. I understood the importance of the mission Christ gave us. I understood the importance of faithfully sharing and obediently trusting. Something about that Word, righteousness, provided me with a vision of the goal we are trying to achieve by living our lives for the Glory of God.

‘That we might become the righteousness of God’

2nd Century Bishop Irenaeus once said, “Christ became what we are, in order that we might become what He is,”. This is what Paul is revealing in v. 21 - - When we trust in God, there is an exchange taking place. Our Sin is replaced with God’s Righteousness.

‘For our sake, God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ - -

These are powerful Words. Words can ruin our day, Words can make our Day...

May these Words not only encourage us, not only motivate us, but may these words allow us to experience Hope, and may these Words empower us to seek God, and God’s goodness, for the rest of our life... Amen!