

I want to share with you a story. A couple of years ago I was walking across the parking lot to the Martin building to get my phone. I had left it over there. I get there, and I had several missed calls from my dad and several missed text messages. My dad does not text message, so I knew something was up. It was one of those feelings where I just thought, "This is not going to be good." So I call and my dad said, "Josh, I hate to share this with you. I have awful news. Tom Bailey has just passed away." Tom was a dear friend and mentor of mine. He was in his early 50's and had had a heart attack earlier that afternoon. And so I was shocked, a bit devastated and a little taken aback. So I came over here and met with Bleecker, because Bleecker was being discipled by Tom. Tom was spending time with Michael and pouring into him. He was investing in a lot of guys and had invested in a lot of guys. So Michael led the 7:00 Sunday night service as he wept through his playing. We went over to Brenda's house to be with her and the family as they were making their way in. And Brenda asked if we would do the funeral.

I was honored to do it. I was absolutely honored to do the funeral of a guy that I loved and a guy that I knew loved the Lord. So I was praying and wondering what God would have me share. What was it that I needed to convey at that time? And there was really one sentence that served as the launching pad for what I wanted to share. It was that Tom Bailey was not radical. You see, when people looked at Tom's life, his door was never locked, it was always open. People would come over or call at all hours of the night. He always had room at his table for somebody. There was always room in the fridge and drinks in the fridge for somebody else, because he knew that somebody was going to come by. Tom was just called radical, but the thing about Tom Bailey is that Tom was not radical. He might have been rare, but he wasn't radical. Tom was just biblical. He just lived according to the Scriptures. Tom was a guy who had been reconciled to Christ, and so he lived a reconciled life. And so what I did was looked at a man like Tom Bailey and said, "That guy is radical, because he's just different from me by a degree." I'm just not going as far as he's going in the craziness of his life. But you see, if Tom Bailey is biblical, if he's living his life according to the Scriptures, then his life is an indictment on mine. And I found myself standing there sharing that with about a thousand people that Tom Bailey's life was indeed an indictment on so many of ours. It was an indictment that he had been reconciled to God had caused him to live a reconciled life that we felt safer and more comfortable calling him radical. It was rare, but it wasn't radical. It was just simply biblical.

And so we're going to pick up right where we left off last week. Paul the apostle is going to live this same kind of radical life. So turn to 2 Corinthians 5. And just by way of reminder for some of you and by way of introduction for others, the book of 2 Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church. He writes it for a couple of reasons, but his main theme throughout the book is the interplay between the Holy Spirit and suffering. So Paul is teaching this church and showing this church that suffering is not a sign that God is unhappy with you, but it is in fact God using suffering to make you long for the next world and teaching your through this world that His power is made perfect in weakness. So throughout this book, he's just doing these things. He also writes this book to defend his apostleship because here had been opponents who came against him saying saying that he's not genuine, he's not a true apostle, he's not the real deal, therefore discrediting the gospel he was preaching. Throughout this book, he is going to say, "Indeed I am a true apostle, called by Christ Jesus Himself on the Damascus road." And where we were last week in the beginning of chapter 5, Paul talks about his confidence and his longing for heaven, that he deeply desired to be there with Christ. And the fact that his body was wasting away, his earthly tent, as he called it, being destroyed was nothing more than a sweet reminder that God was working in him and building for him a house not made with human hands that's eternal in the heavens. And he longed for that house. He longed to be there. So Paul grew in confidence and

groaned confidently for the things that were coming. He longed to be further clothed, he longed for this resurrection body, the fullness of all things. And the reason that he longed for this was because it meant that he was able to finally see in full what he only now experienced in part, and that was looking at the face of his Lord. He longed for that.

You see, a right view of heaven only increases and swells your heart for Christ. And a right view and a right doctrine of Christ only increases and swells your view of heaven. And that's exactly what was happening to Paul. So he had this confident vision for what was to come. And we said that because Paul was future oriented, because he had an understanding of what was coming, he lived differently in the present. His life was different now because he knew what was coming was so sweet. So he lived courageously. And then he transitions and says that his confidence is rooted and grounded in the very character and solidarity of God Himself and that He's leading him to live a life that is different now. He says, "I make it my aim to please Him. Whether I am home with Him or in this body, my goal is to please the Lord first and foremost."

And we also said last week to consider the judgment. Because in verse 10, Paul says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. . . for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." So we talked about the reality of standing before the judgment seat of Christ, that this is something we don't often talk about, we don't like to think about and we like to pretend isn't there because it might create or conjure up some view of God that you have perverted by thinking that God is a vindictive dictator who rules over and seeks to crush your life. But He is both the Lion and the Lamb, so we want a balanced view of who Christ is and who God is. He is both the One who gives grace and executes justice. To forget about the judgment seat of Christ is to do an disservice to the church. So Paul says to consider the coming judgment. In fact, as Paul considered the judgment, he said yet again that it affects the way that he lives and that his life was different because of the coming judgment, his life was different because he has a future orientation and he longs to be with the One who has set him free and redeemed him and he longs to be in His presence. And he says he considers that fact that he will stand and give an account, so what he does in the body matters. So we said last week that a right desire for the future leads to right ambitions in the present.

And Paul is going to pick right up here in verse 11 to the end of the chapter and he's going to carry the same message. He's going to tie in verse 10 right in with verse 11. So it's going to flow and it reads like this, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." So Paul picks up right after verse 10 and continues to talk about what motivates him to serve. Why does he live the way he lives? He says right out of the gate in verse 11, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others." Knowing the fear of the Lord. And this fear for Paul is not dread, it's not terror. He's not cowering in a corner afraid of what is to come. Because you see in the earlier verses that he longs to be before God, he longs to be in His presence. So this fear here is better understood or better translated as a reverential awe. It is a healthy fear, a deep and profound respect.

Respect is probably too light of a word to capture what is going on here. It's awe, it's reverence. He says, "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others."

So I tried to think of an image or an illustration that captured this idea of deep reverence or respect. I don't know that I found the best one, but I found one that moved me. I'm assuming almost all of you have read the book or seen the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The American Film Institute (AFI) has created these top 100 lists. They've got the top 100 movies of all time, the top 100 villains, the top 100 heroes, the top 100 movie quotes of all time. The number one hero of all time is Atticus Finch, played by Gregory Peck. Atticus was a lawyer in a small town who was a widower and never remarried. He had two children: Scout and Jim. Scout's name was Jean Louise, but she went by "Scout." He was representing a man who was falsely accused, an African-American man named Tom Robinson. Tom Robinson had been accused of raping a white woman when in fact the evidence and testimony was clear that this man was innocent. And so it went before the jury, and the whole town, racial divides and all, was wrapped up in this trial. And Atticus Finch, a man of integrity, character, dignity and honor, pleads with the jury, and it ends with just a rousing closing argument. He says this, "For the sake of God, let this man go." And he appeals to their conscience, and he appeals to what is right and just.

He pulls back the curtains on tradition and says, "Don't let this blind you from doing what is right and good." Sure enough, they come and render the verdict of "guilty." So Atticus, who is dejected and somewhat ashamed of all that has transpired, just grabs his satchel and starts walking out of the courtroom. The bottom half of the courtroom is filled with all of the white people in town, and the upper chamber is filled with all of the African-Americans. And as Atticus starts to walk down the center aisle of the courtroom, the whole upper chamber stands. His daughter Scout was up there with Reverend Sykes, and Reverend Sykes taps her on the shoulder and says, "Jean Louise, stand up. Your father is passing." It's just moving. I get goosebumps thinking about the power of that scene, that so much was wrapped up in that, so much was captured in that. Here is a man of honor, a man of dignity, a man of respect, a man of character, a man of integrity, and those who knew it stood and honored him. "Your father is passing. You will stand and honor this man." It's powerful. And so for Paul, knowing the fear of the Lord is not terror or dread. It is more welled up in the fact that the One who has saved him, redeemed him, set him free, forgiven him and reconciled him to the Father, this is the one he looks at and ascribes all worth and dignity. And this changes Paul. He says, "Know the fear of the Lord, not that I will stand before the Judge in terror or dead, but I stand before the One that I so deeply love, the One who has deeply transformed my life. And therefore I live differently. I live to persuade others."

And there's two things here that Paul is trying to persuade the Corinthians of. The first one is the authenticity of his apostleship. You'll see that in the second half of verse 11 all the way to verse 13. But he's going to move from there and talk about how he's not only trying to persuade that he is a true and authentic apostle, but more importantly he's trying to persuade others to be reconciled to God. So in verse 11b, he says, "But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you." So he is saying, "You know who I am, Corinthians. You know that I am an apostle. And those who are my opponents, I'm not trying to commend myself to you, I'm not trying to brag and boast about who I am before you, but you know how I've lived among you. If I've been out of my mind, it's been for Christ. If I've been in my right mind, it's for you. But regardless, it's never been living for myself. So you go and you tell those who only look at the outside appearance, you go and you deal with these people, you boast about me before them so that I don't have to spend my time defending myself, that I might go to persuade others to be reconciled to God." That's what he's saying. He's saying, "God knows. God, when He came down through Christ Jesus on the Damascus road and saved my soul, knows. And the authenticity of my apostleship is linked to the authenticity of my gospel, and my gospel is true, so you go and defend me."

He's going to move in verse 14 and start talking about what this gospel is and why he lives this way. He says, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." The love of Christ controls Paul. This verb "control" may be better translated "hemmed in." The love of Christ has hemmed in Paul. It has restrained him and come around him. What's interesting about this verse and is something that you and I have to get is that Paul lives the way he lives not because he loves Christ; Paul lives the way he lives because he has finally understood the depth and reality that Christ loves him. And so many of us have it backwards. We are trying to desperately demonstrate that we love Christ but have never truly sat under the waterfall and reality that Jesus loves you. That's what changes a man, that's what changes a woman, when you and I understand that Christ loves us. Warts and scabs and all, he loves me. He doesn't love a future version of me. He doesn't love what I can become if I reach my full potential, but Christ loves me. And he says, "The love of Christ controls me. It has hemmed me in." It's the picture here that two walls have come around the apostle Paul and he has no wiggle room, nowhere else to go but this way – straight, steadfast, forward, moving on with this message, "Be reconciled to God." Because Christ has given him the ministry of reconciliation and a message of reconciliation. So he moves forward with it, and he has nowhere else to go. The love of Christ has controlled him. And he says exactly why this is the case. He says, "because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." So he's saying that the death and resurrection of Christ has to affect you. It is not an impotent reality, it is not some ethereal idea, it is a true and working deal in your life. He says, "The love of Christ controls me, it manages me, it directs me, it shapes me, it forms me, it presses me to move on, to move forward. "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

So he's going to talk about what this looks like in verses 16-17, giving two consequences, two implications, two reminders of what the death of Christ means for those who believe. Look how he introduces the first one. "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer." Paul here is saying, "I have a new perspective, I have a new way of viewing. I view humanity in different categories now. I once regarded all people according to the flesh, but I don't do it that way anymore. I regard people according to the spirit, according to the heart, whether or not they have been reconciled to God. In fact, I'm trying to understand who knows Christ and who does not." And look at his admission here. He says, "I even once regarded Christ according to the flesh." And if you remember Acts 7, he stood there as Stephen was stoned, giving permission to those who did it. And that gave him more rage to go out to stamp out a movement called Christianity. This man named Saul was marching forward to end what he thought was a baseless, senseless, false Messiah. He said, "I regarded Christ according to the flesh. I had no idea that He was in fact the Messiah. And I didn't know that until the Messiah Jesus came down on that Damascus road and blinded me. And once I was blinded, I finally saw that He was indeed the Messiah and I cried out, 'Lord, you are my Christ.'" And forever Paul has been different and changed in his whole life because he is controlled by the love of Christ. He has been forever marked by this reality. Paul regards no one according to the flesh anymore but according to the spirit, according to whether they know the Savior or not. He then goes to Philippi, to Ephesus, to Rome, to Colossae, to Corinth. Missionary journey after journey after journey, shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, imprisoned, starved, none of it stops him. The love of Christ compels him on and on and on, moving him forward and forward and forward. Why? Because the love of Christ controls him and he regards no one according to the flesh anymore. He sees people differently. He understands that people are in bondage, people are weak and impoverished in their spiritual state. And so he knows that Christ is the hope of the world. And for Paul to waste his life on anything is to waste it on Christ and the glories that are to come. Because he's confident about the future, because he's controlled by the love of Christ, he lives differently. So in verse 16, he says, "I regard no one according to the flesh anymore. I regarded Jesus this way, but I don't anymore." So he has a new way of seeing.

And then verse 17 is one of my favorite verses. There's a whole new condition. He says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Maybe more than any other verse in my life, I've hung on this verse. If there's been a verse that I've looked at more, that I've gone to more, that I needed to sit under more, it is this verse. Depending on how long you've been coming here, you may have heard various details of my past. My past is just filthy. I was just riddled with sin. It's despicable, full of shame, regret and guilt. It's full of awful deeds and selfish acts. For the first 19 years of my life, I lived for me. There were words that I said, things that I did, people that I trampled on, people that I gave no thought about. It was just awful. And so there is not a verse that I have gone to more, that I've needed to wash over me than this. "Josh Patterson, you are a new creation in Christ Jesus. The old is gone, and behold, all things are becoming new." The old is gone. And just as many of us need to realize that Christ loves you, you also need to realize that if you are in Christ, you are a new creation. The old is gone; all things are becoming new. It's gone. You are new in Him. What marvelous news; what freeing news. So as I look back at the shadows of a past that is full of guilt and regret and disgust, I look back with a new set of eyes, I look forward with a new hope. I'm a new creation in Christ Jesus. The old is Gone. Praise Christ. So Paul says, "I don't look at humanity the same way. I don't look according to the outward appearance. I look at the heart. And the second consequence, reality, benefit, implication of Christ's death is this, that I am a new creation and He is making all things new." And it's not just that Josh Patterson stands up here as a new creation, but as I look out and know you and I know your stories, you are a new creation in Christ Jesus. And then corporately we come together as a gathered group, a new creation, forming the church, which is a new creation moving forward, pushing back what is dark in the world to bring in an usher in the newness of Christ. Christ Jesus has inaugurated a new age, a new covenant, a new situation where the old is gone; behold, all things are becoming new. And for Paul, this inflames him, this causes him to move forward, this causes him to live differently. Reconciled people live reconciled lives, and Paul has caught this.

So in verses 18-21, he's going to talk about a whole new ministry. He's going to talk about a new task that has been given to all believers, a new title that has been given to all believers. He's going to talk to us about what the message of reconciliation is. Verse 18, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." You see, this is good news. It isn't good advice. The advice isn't, "Hey, you know what? You should go out and think about how you could reconcile yourself to God." It's good news in that God has already made a way. God has initiated this. The One who was offended has also initiated reconciliation. And it says in verse 18 that all of this is from God. God has reconciled the world to Himself through Christ and God the Father has given those who have been reconciled the ministry of reconciliation. So it's not good advice that at some point I need to think about how I can reconcile myself to God, as if I could reach up to Him. The good news is that He has already condescended Himself and reached down to us. He has reconciled us to Himself through Christ Jesus, His Son. It's done. He has made a way. It is complete. There is a way to be reconciled to God, and it's through Christ. That is fantastic news.

And reconciliation is more than simple forgiveness. It's not that Christ or God just looked over sin or just forgave sin. Forgiveness is that. Reconciliation is a restoration of relationship. He brings something together. The word "reconciliation" here is the idea that those who were enemies have been brought together through a peace treaty. And the idea of reconciliation is that Christ mediates a treaty between the Father and humanity and all who believe might be reconciled to God. That is fantastic news. So he says there has been given a task to all who believe and all who have been reconciled. That task is that you have the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciled people live reconciled lives. You have been given charge, commissioned with this ministry that you are to go and speak on behalf of God. Verse 20, "God

making his appeal through us." And the appeal is this to the world, "Be reconciled to God." And you go under a new title as an ambassador of Jesus." That means you go under His authority and His name, in His power, under His care. You go and speak on behalf of the Lord. Be reconciled to God. Christ has made a way. There is a way to be reconciled to God.

And so what is the message of reconciliation? It's verse 21. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." As I studied for this message, I came across a phrase that said, "There is no sentence more profound in the whole of Scripture." Think about that. Think about all of the Scriptures. Think about your coffee cups. Of all the verses, of all the sentences, of all that is contained in the Scriptures, the wonder of the incarnation, the resurrection and all that there is, there is no sentence more profound than this. And I don't know that that's true, but to make that claim means that you and I need to wake up and think on this verse. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In this verse is the idea of the theological term of imputation, the idea of propitiation, the idea that God has given or placed upon Christ our sin, not only our sin, but Christ Jesus bore God's wrath on behalf of you. He is your propitiation; He is the One who stands between you and God. Christ is the mediator; he is the peace treaty. It's Christ who has done this. It says, "He made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin." The sinless, spotless, blameless One, He made Him to be sin. Sin was extrinsic and fully external to Christ, but He made He to be sin who knew no sin. That means all of my filth, all of my wickedness, all of my perversions of which there are too many to even recall were placed on Him. They were placed on the One who doesn't deserve it, placed on the One who is blameless and spotless, placed on the One who is perfect. All of my junk, all of my disgust was placed on Christ. "He made him to be sin who knew no sin."

And then all of the merit, righteousness and worth of Christ Jesus Himself is placed on this undeserving sinner. He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that Josh Patterson might become the righteousness of God, that you might become the righteousness of God. You see, your sin wasn't just swept aside, it wasn't just glossed over or looked over and God just says, "I'm just not going to deal with it. You're forgiven. Let's move on." Your sin was dealt with. My sin was dealt with. Your sin was punished. The full justice and the full wrath of God punished sin. You see, the only difference is the One who was punished was the One who didn't deserve to be punished. The One who took your punishment and mine was Christ Jesus Himself. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin. And the one who deserves to be punished, the one who deserves the full wrath of God stands before the Father now innocent, because Christ Jesus bore the wrath, bore my sin and has given to me, reckoned to my account, credited to me His righteousness.

And getting that changes the whole game. Reconciled people live reconciled lives. The reason the apostle Paul lived the way he lived was because he understood verse 21. This week I was in Memphis, Tennessee meeting with the Second Presbyterian Church. It was a great opportunity to be with a bunch of brothers and sisters in Christ. We were walking into this banquet hall on a Wednesday night as they were doing their church-wide vision banquet. There were about 500 or so people there. I walk in, and through the crowd, this guy comes up to me and says, "Josh Patterson." He was an older man. He said, "My name is Mike. I'm glad you're here." I was thinking, "Who are you? I don't have a name tag on." And then he says, "Oh, hey Jeremy Pace. Hello, Joe Ader." And we were kind of freaked out and said, "How do you know who we are?" He said, "Well, I knew that you guys were coming, and I got on your church website and wanted to memorize your faces and understand all that I could know about who you were so that I could help you find your way around here and answer any questions and understand how this relationship might work." I was like, "Well that's amazing. Thank you for doing that." I come to find out that this guy came to faith 20 years ago but has been driving a FedEx truck for the last 30 years. And this man, because he's been reconciled and he understands that his sin has been placed on Christ and Christ credited to his account His righteousness, lives his life differently. Reconciled people live reconciled lives. So Mike Warner drives a FedEx truck and turns the radio off, leaves the iPod at home and has a list of about 175 people that he prays for by name. And each person doesn't have just one request but multiple requests. He is going before the Father day in and day out as he delivers your packages. He is praying for the city of Memphis, the churches in Memphis,

the leadership in Memphis and anyone who would say, "Mike, would you pray for me?" So he dies to himself. He doesn't live for himself anymore. He regards no one according to the flesh anymore. Do you know what Mike does? He lives differently now. He lives for the One who died and rose again for his sake. He understands that on Christ was laid Mike's sin and Mike was given the righteousness of God. So he lives differently. He faithfully prays and intercedes for the kingdom.

There is a man in our church who is 72 years old. His name is Monte Lawless. I love this man. He moved to the area about 3 years ago to be closer to his grandkids and had no idea that the Lord was going to completely blow up his world. He just pulled back the veil and he's starting to see the treasures of Christ. He's studying and he's in the Word like he's never been before. He is filled with hope. He has deep desires. And so Monty, who has been a judge and a lawyer his whole life, is now spending days when he's not on the bench up early and up late in the text, and he's reading because he's a teacher. He's going to lead a home group for you here. He wants to teach and share what Christ has done for him and for you through the Scriptures. More than that, Monty is going to pray. He's going to pray for this church. More than anyone else, I get more e-mails week in and week out from Monty Lawless saying, "Josh Patterson, I'm praying for you and for your family by name this day." It will come at 5:30AM or it will come at 10:30PM. And just this afternoon, Monty met with a group of five other people from this church as he has been given the charge of studying the depths of the substitutionary atonement of Christ and putting it in a curriculum, because he hops on a plane in October and He's going to Sudan. He's going to Sudan because there are pastors there who need to be taught and trained to take the Word and gospel of Christ to the nations, specifically the Sudanese people. So although he is old and getting weak and his medication list is as long as his arm, although it might not be safe for this man to travel, he goes, "What else am I going to do with my life?" You see, reconciled people live reconciled lives. They go to Sudan, they go to China, they go where they go because they understand and regard people no more according to the flesh. But they say, "Because God has placed my sin on Christ and has given to me, an unworthy sinner, the righteousness of Christ, I'm carrying forth with this ministry of reconciliation and I'm going in Christ's name as His ambassador for the glory of God Almighty."

Jason and Tess Clark are in their 30's. They're young, vibrant entrepreneurs. They have decided to waste their lives in Vickery Meadow, which is a refugee camp here in Dallas, an apartment complex that is filled with thousands and thousands of refugees from all over the world. Jason, who is sharp and can do anything he wants, has decided to take all of his talents, all of his time, all of his energy with his bride, move into this place near Walnut Hill and Highway 75 in Dallas, a completely crime-ridden and poverty stricken area and he's there giving his life away to a group of people in the hopes that they might hear and be reconciled to God. So Jason, day in and day out as though God was making His appeal through him, calls to the people of Vickery Meadow, "Be reconciled to God. He has made a way."

Maybe the reason Tom Bailey had such an impact on me and why I'm so grateful that he lived a reconciled life is because when I was 19 and my life was completely distraught, dysfunctional and broken, I stumbled literally into his living room. Because he always left his door open. There was always room at the table. There was always food for the one who wasn't there yet. And when I was 19, that was me. And he said this, "As though God was making His appeal through me, Josh Patterson, be reconciled to God." "What does that mean?" "Well it means that Christ Jesus has taken all of your filth, all of your sin and has borne it. You see, He made Him who knew no sin to be sin, Josh, so that you might become the righteousness of God." I have never been the same. Monty, Mike, Jason, Tess and I could go on and on as I look out here tonight and see your faces. I know your stories, I know what you're doing, I know where you've been. Some of you are leading reconciled lives and some of you are wondering what does it look like. It looks like you thinking about the reality of verse 21, that Christ has borne your sin and has credited to you His righteousness. And it means that you are now given a new task and that's to declare His goodness and His glory and the gospel of His good name that He has made a way for us to be created new, He's made a way for us to be reconciled and restored to the Father. And you go in His name, His power, His authority and His protection and care.

So all the people that I just told you about are not pastors. They're not elite, super operation people. They're not some elite task force of people. They are judges and FedEx drivers and entrepreneurs and carpet builders. They are men and women who have been affected by the gospel of Christ and their life is different. So if you're a soccer mom of four and you drive a minivan, how can your life be used in this good season that you might be an ambassador for His name, that you might carry forth this ministry of reconciliation? So you're a businessman, you're a teacher, you're a doctor. Where can you carry forward the banner of reconciliation? You're a student, you're an athlete. Where can you carry forward the task that God Himself has charged you with if you've been reconciled to Him? And my hope is that I would have the courage to speak, that I would have the courage to proclaim and implore as though God was making His appeal through me to my neighbors, to my friends, to my family "Be reconciled to God." And I am forever grateful for the apostle Paul who made his journeys, I'm forever grateful for the saints who followed him who made their journeys and for the saints who followed them and shared the testimony of Christ, and for the the saints who followed them who shared. Because somebody told somebody who told somebody who told somebody who told Tom Bailey who told me. He had the courage to tell me. It might have been awkward, it might have been weird or uncomfortable, but he shared the gospel with me. Somebody shared it with you. And the only thing that gets a man or a woman moving this way is understanding that Christ loves you. For the love of Christ controls us, because He made Him who knew no sin to be sin that you might become the righteousness of God. So reconciled people, they live reconciled lives.

Let's pray to that end. "Father, I just bless Your name. I thank You, Father, that You've given us the message of reconciliation, that You've given us the ministry of reconciliation. But even before that and backing up, God, praise Your name that You've made a way through Your Son. Praise Your name that all of this is from You, that Jesus Himself has reconciled us to You and that You have given us a new task to take this message forward, a new title calling us the unworthy sinners, 'Ambassadors.' You've credited to our account the righteousness of Your Son when we're unworthy. We're filthy, God. But yet in the same truth, in the same vein, in the same reality, we are coheirs with Your Son, standing before You blameless and spotless because You have deemed us worthy because of Your Son. So this has got to impact us, this has got to move us and this has got to change us. We trust You for it in Christ's glorious and precious name. Amen."