

Beyond These Walls: It's All About Him X 2 Corinthians 5:14ff.

Broadcast Dates: May 11 & 12, 2020
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Here at the beginning of my 10th *All About Him* message and the completion of my 9th year as Senior Pastor here at Bethel, I want to thank you for your love and support and prayers for these years. This ministry at Bethel has been the greatest undertaking of my life and the most challenging experience I have ever had. At the same time, it has been the greatest nine years of my life and if I could do it all again, I would come to Bethel all over again.

I want to thank the wonderful men and women that I have the immense privilege to work with. There might be as talented and dedicated staffs out there somewhere, but there aren't any *more* talented and dedicated anywhere and I thank you for how often you make me look better than I deserve. I want to thank the elders and deacons for the key role you play in our church. Most of all, I want to thank you the church family. This whole church ministry is dependent on you. Without you and your ministry and support, none of this would be possible. I know I speak for the other leaders when I thank you.

I have made many mistakes and have learned many lessons along the way. However, to look around this morning and to see what God has done and to anticipate a very special time tonight (Lake Michigan Baptisms) is the best 9th anniversary celebration I can imagine. So I just wanted to say thank you and to tell you that I love you.

Each year, this message becomes more of a daunting task as memories of past *All About Him* messages have created an expectation for this message that I can't meet. But God can and maybe He will today. This *All About Him* is different. In the past, these messages have been stand alone messages on the greatness of Christ. Today I am simply trying to lay a foundation stone for the rest of this series, *Beyond these Walls*.

I'd like to give you my assessment of the development of our church over the past nine years. I will paint a picture for you in broad strokes. I would summarize the last nine years as being largely focused internally. We have worked very hard at developing the ministries of our church that fall under categories of discipleship, teaching, fellowship and community. These would include everything from Sunday preaching to our children's ministries to our small groups. Is there room for improvement on that level? Yes. But I would say that inside the walls of this church or rather, inside the realm of our ministry, we do a pretty good job. There's a great spirit here. We've got good unity. It's a pretty great place to do Christianity.

What lies in our future? Is this the sum of what God has called the church to do and be? Is this supposed to be a haven? An oasis? *Let's all have a nice time on our jolly way to heaven while our neighbors die and enter a godless eternity?* This is our challenge and this has always been the challenge for the Church of Jesus Christ. How do we love what we have in the church without disconnecting with the world? It's so easy to do. Churches become ghettos. Clubs. Bubbles. And we so easily become complacent. As long as we're saved and our kids are saved and going to heaven, we're happy. Why should we concern ourselves with our neighbors and their eternal destiny? Over time, churches become so inwardly focused that Christ's Great Commission is like a distant dream. *Go and make disciples.*

Without evangelism, churches become selfish and ingrown. (Harris) And that is our fear. I could take a little poll and ask, *How long has it been since you intentionally shared Christ*

*with someone that you have earned a hearing from by the way you have loved them? Let's do a mental poll. How long? For some, it was this week. Others are having trouble remembering one at all. We might explore some of those reasons, but this is why God has burdened your leaders' hearts to ask, *What we are doing as a church here in northwest Indiana to represent Christ to the community and to earn the right to a hearing by the way we have loved northwest Indiana? Or, as I asked some months ago, If our church was suddenly removed from northwest Indiana, would anybody miss us?**

If you live here, God has called you to love this Jerusalem. He has called you to minister here. To love here. To represent Christ here. To engage this culture with the light of the gospel. Why and how we should do it is the aim of this series of messages. Today I want to impress on our hearts the connection between the greatness of Christ and our motivation to reach beyond these walls. I want to show how *All About Him leads to all about them and avoids being all about us.*

The Apostle Paul's Amazing Passion for People (Romans 9:1-4)

Romans 9 comes on the heels of three tremendous chapters on the nature of the gospel, concluding with the great assurance we have in the love of God for us in Christ Jesus. The Apostle's next words are some of the most remarkable in the Bible, *I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.* (Romans 9:1-4)

Paul was a Jew by blood and a Christian by faith. In these words, we get a glimpse into his heart, his passions. What do we find there? An anguish for his fellow countrymen who had not yet come to faith in Jesus as Messiah. These verses have tears all over them. He says in verse 2, *I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish.* His concern for them was not a passing emotion; it was deep-seeded concern. His concern was so great that he makes a shocking statement in verse 3, *I would wish my own damnation if it would mean the salvation of my people.* There is some hyperbole here because he just got done saying in chapter 8 that nothing could separate him from the love of Christ. He wants to communicate his passion. It communicates, doesn't it? *I'd go to hell for them.* Wow. That represents the ultimate sacrifice, doesn't it? To be cursed for their salvation.

That seems so out there largely because you and I struggle with going across the street much less to hell for someone. I am right there with you. That's why I begin with this. If the Apostle Paul is a model for what mature Christianity looks like, then we've got some growing as a church to do, don't we? It makes you wonder, doesn't it? Where does this passion come from? He was a man like you and me, so where did it come from?

Where a passion for people comes from (2 Corinthians 5:11-21)

*Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. 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, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. **For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.*** (2 Corinthians 5:11-14, emphasis added)

There is a great deal here. The context is that Paul was being accused of self promotion. Here, he's saying, *I am not commending myself, I want you to rejoice with us in what God is doing.* Then we get to verse 14 where Paul makes a key statement about his ministry: *For Christ's love compels us.* Other translations go with *constrains* or *controls*. The word means to compress. It's translated in Luke 8:37, *Grip*. I like that. Christ's love has a grip on me. Christ's love dominates me. However, this still lacks clarity as there are two ways to take this love. Do we take it objectively or subjectively?

Objectively, it would mean Christ's love, as a concept, grips me. Christ's love, as a theological truth, grips me. It seems to me that many people hold onto Christ's love in this way. If we were to take a survey in churches, the vast majority of the lukewarm American churches would affirm as a theological tenet, the love of Christ. They sing songs about the love of Christ. They guard the love of Christ in their theology; the objective Love of Christ.

However, that is not what Paul is saying here. Go to Romans 8 for his discourse on the objective reality of the love of Christ. Here Paul is speaking subjectively. It's not "the love of Christ" conceptually or theologically, but personally. Christ's love for me grips me. He says essentially, *You want to know why I do what I do? The love of Christ has gripped me. The love of Christ for a sinner like me has so enthralled me that I am dominated by its effect.*

Why would Christ's love have this effect? Paul was very conscious of his unworthiness for God's grace. *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.* (1 Timothy 1:15) Paul, come on. You don't really consider yourself that bad, do you? The worst? Not only did he consider himself the worst of all sinners, it's the only explanation for his statement in Romans 9. He saw his sin and his unworthiness of God's grace clearly. From that position, to imagine the second person of the Trinity loving him so perfectly and sacrificially was incomprehensible. He loved me? If there is a foundation for a heart of evangelism, it is this. He...loved...me? The wonder of it! The love of Christ for a sinner like me.

Sinner, today, is there wonder in your heart that God would love you? The vain philosophies of this world that try to prop man up as basically good and worthy of admiration have completely twisted this truth. The gospel is this, "I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." The greater my sin is before me, the greater Christ's love will grip us and compel us and cause us to look with compassion on sinners just like us, who desperately need to know this love. This is active Christology. All Christology is. *Love so amazing, so divine/ Demands my soul, my life, my all.* (The Wonderful Cross, Matt Redman)

This seems to me to be the problem with the inwardly focused church that says, *Us four, no more, shut the door.* Where is the love of Christ that compels us? Have they gotten over it? Or have they forgotten how much they need it? Spiritual amnesia will implode a church. *It's all about us! Our comforts! Our preferences! We don't care who goes to hell as long as we don't.* Does that sound like Christ's love? If that's what Christ's love was like, He would never have come to save us and we'd all be going to hell.

All About Him churches are also all about reaching their Jerusalem. *All About Him* Christians are all about reaching their neighborhoods. You cannot be all about Him without also being all about them. One comes first; the other flows naturally. It's just the two greatest commandments. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.* (Mark 12:30) That's all about Him. *Love your neighbor as yourself.* (Mark 12:31) That's all about them. Being all about Him motivates being all about them and keeps churches from being all about us and Christians from being all about me. More on this later, but first back to 2 Corinthians 5)...

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has 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. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

The very famous verse 17, reminds us that in Christ we are new creations. The old way of life is gone and has been replaced with a new life in Christ. One reason we practice immersion baptism is that it pictures this very truth. The old way of life died in Christ. In Christ we have been raised a new creation. Who can we thank for this? It all comes from God. The word that dominates these verses is "reconciliation." We have a ministry of reconciliation in verse 18. God is *reconciling* Himself to us in verse 18. We have a message of reconciliation in verse 19. What is this reconciliation? It's what Secretary Rice has been doing all week in the Middle East; trying to bring reconciliation. Two warring parties are very unreconciled. They need to be brought together for peace to exist.

Spiritually, mankind is at war with God. God and man need to be brought together for there to be peace. This is what Christ's work on the cross did. It took away the sin offense and made a way for a holy God to be reconciled to unholy sinners like us. The ministry of reconciliation is the Church. The message is the gospel. The means is Christ's love sacrifice on the cross for us.

Then in verse 20, in this reconciling of God and man, what role do we play? We are *God's ambassadors*. What's an ambassador? I remember a few years ago when I was in West Africa. At the hotel, we met a woman who informed us that she was going to a gala at the American Embassy hosted by the American Ambassador. I said, *Really?* Ever hear about a party you're not invited to, but you'd like very much to go to? That's where I was. I like to talk my way into things. We spent a fair amount of time trying to figure out a way to get invited to the party, but it didn't happen.

Ambassadors are people who represent something or someone on behalf of someone important somewhere. They are there to speak on behalf of someone else. Ambassadors represent abroad. They don't represent inwardly, that's Congress. We have ambassadors all over the world. So does God. Guess who they are? Us.

We are God's ambassadors, the verse says, and the message of reconciliation we speak is actually God's Word to people. What an amazing privilege! Can you imagine what a shame it would be for an ambassador to never speak? Imagine you're at the UN when someone asks, *And what does the USA have to say about this issue?* And the American ambassador sits quietly. He's not doing his job. He's not doing what he's there for. Something is desperately wrong. When God's people don't speak for Him to the culture, there has been a disconnection between being all about Him and all about them. What is that connection between the first commandment and the second?

The Connection Between All About Him and All About Them is Joy

Let me explain this with a story. A few weeks ago I wandered into a local department store and was looking at grills. I won't tell you the whole story, but the short of it is that I discovered that they had mispriced one of their expensive stainless steel five burner grills. They had the wrong price tag on it. I informed them of it, then said I would take it. I got a grill I would never buy for half off. Ever stumble onto a deal like that? Guess what I couldn't

wait to do? Tell somebody. I got on the phone and was sharing my joy in my purchase. I have had fun sharing it many times over. I got something really good. I was excited. I had to tell someone.

There are many other examples. It's fun to see new parents come to church and show off their child. They're always beaming; so excited. Newly engaged girls flash jewelry around so all can share in their joy. You know how this goes. What would you think about a girl who got engaged and didn't want to tell anyone? Are you engaged? (Shrug) Or a parent who had a child and didn't want to tell anyone? Congrats on the new kid! (Yeah...) I would think the girl didn't love her man and the parent didn't treasure their child. There is a direct link between joy in the heart and joy from the tongue. Joy here means words of joy. We can't help it. That's how we are designed.

Are you a Christian? (Shrug) That doesn't compute! That doesn't mean that that every day we're skipping down the road singing the Hallelujah Chorus, but the real question is, *Does the love of Christ for a sinner like me have a grip on my heart that compels me to share that joy with others?*

On this *All About Him* Sunday, I am not arguing for the greatness of Christ. I have done that at least nine times before. I am asking if we as a church really believe it. Let's go back to my previous question. How long has it been since you shared your good news with someone? Has there been a disconnect somewhere? Ask yourself why. How's my joy?

That's what this series is going to be about. This is not about a program, although we have many ministry ideas that flow from this. It's not about a guilt trip. If this is a guilt trip, then I have been a hypocrite because I feel very weak on this subject myself. I don't want guilt to get us beyond these walls, I want the love of Christ to grip us and to motivate ministry in our Jerusalem. It's a ministry. A lifestyle. Being all about Him leads to being all about them and destroys being all about me. This is just another way of saying that the love of Christ grips me.

This is the next horizon for our church and it will test the sincerity of what we say we believe. *There is no better test of our spiritual state and condition than our missionary zeal, our concern for lost souls. That is always the thing that divides people who are just theoretical and intellectual Christians from those who have a living and a vital spiritual life.* (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, p. 31.)

We're going to talk a lot about engaging our culture; reaching our Jerusalem and how we should go about doing that. This may sound new, but it's simply...

This is what God's love looks like, sounds like, acts like

Remember Paul's statement, I would go to hell to save them? Is this not God's love? Was He not cursed to save us? The greatest missionary ever is Jesus. He is God's ambassador to us. God could have stayed home and enjoyed His heavenly bliss. But He didn't. He went into the world through Christ and humbled Himself to live among us. Why? For His glory first and foremost, but also because God *wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.* (1 Timothy 2:4) *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

Missions is what God's love looks like on a human level. Godly people love others like God loved us. Christ-like Christians are others oriented as Christ was toward us. This is active Christology. This is what an all about Him Christian looks like: Loving the people around us

who are lost and dying and very soon entering a hopeless eternity. Our greatest privilege is to share with them like a newly engaged girl and the new parents, that though we are great sinners, Christ is a great Savior. That is the joyous truth.

Same Message, New Application

Some of you might be saying, I came to hear the annual rah-rah message on Christ, but you're talking about loving our neighbors? I've done the rah-rah on Christ. I've done them for nine years. For nine years we've been allowing the greatness of Christ to transform us within. What wonderful spiritual fruit has been born through it in these years. It's been my joy as your pastor to be a part of that.

The time has come for us to allow this message to expand our vision beyond these walls to thousands within a few miles of our ministry center who are on the verge of eternity. Let's love them. With God's help, we can do it.

I wonder who might be here next year for *All About Him 11* that's not here this year. Where are they today? What are they doing this morning? How are they dealing with life? Who here, gripped by the love of Christ, with a passion for people, will get out of their comfort zone and earn the right to be heard by loving someone different the way Christ has loved you? It's active Christology. It's all about Him and all about them and not about me.

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