



Message Transcript

Genuine Transformation

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Lord Jesus, we give you all the glory, honor, and praise for who you are. And Lord, I'm asking for your help this morning, that you'd be helpful to me and you'd be helpful to us that we would clearly hear your Word because, Lord, we believe that every time that your Word is accurately and faithfully proclaimed that you speak. And Lord, we are gathered here because this morning we desire to hear you.

And so now if you're here gathered, you desire to hear the Lord speak and that you will believe what he says and will, by faith, put into practice what he shows you this morning, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word amen? Amen.

This morning, I want to talk to you about genuine transformation. The gospel makes clear that when we come to Christ, there's more to the gospel than simply getting saved so that we can go to heaven, that Jesus Christ, through his Holy Spirit, comes to dwell in us. And he desires to conform us to the image of Christ. He wants to transform us into his image.

And we all know of people who once were without Christ who have come to Christ, and now they live different, their attitude's different, they think different, they're growing different. And yet there's others that we see that claim that they've trusted Christ and yet there's really no authentic or genuine transformation that's taking place.

I pastored this church for nearly 12 years, I've been in ministry for over 30. And I've met many Christians who aren't much different now from the time that they first claimed Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and savior. And for many, it's because

they just don't know how to experience the grace of God at a deeper measure than what they received when they were first saved.

And so this morning, what I want to talk to you about is genuine transformation, total transformation. What does it look like for you to really have the Lord as Lord of your life? What does it look like for you if Jesus were really in charge of every aspect of your life and what can you expect from Him? And what can he then in return expect from you?

Last week, we talked about the fact that Jesus wants you, that you're on a mission for Him, and how he wants you to be all-in on that mission for Him. Today, we want to talk about, well, what is that mission? Because the mission is more than just getting people saved. The mission is what it looks like when people who are saved are genuinely transformed and conformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

And if you've ever wanted to know how it is that you can be conformed completely to the image of Christ, I believe that God has a word for you today.

I want to encourage you to open your Bible to the book of 2 Corinthians today. 2 Corinthians Chapter 5. We're going to be going through verses 14-21. And then we're going to highlight four ways that the Lord conforms people, genuinely transforms people into his image.

2 Corinthians Chapter 5. I'll read verses 14-21 and then we'll unpack them today together. Here's what he says, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died. And he died for all so that they who live

might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

"Therefore from now on, we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things passed away. Behold, new things have come."

"Now, all these things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

And there, in these few short verses, what we see is what transformation truly looks like, what it looks like to be genuinely and totally transformed into the image of Christ. And I want to highlight four ways that the scripture talks about how to experience that.

And the first is this; genuine transformation starts with the motivation of love. Genuine transformation starts with the motivation of love.

Notice what he says in verse 14, "For the love of Christ controls us." The love of

Christ compels us. The love of Christ is our motivation for what we do. In other words, if we are going to be true believers in Christ, we are transformed and conformed into his image because of Christ's love. And therefore, when we go out to share the message of the gospel, we should be motivated by the love of Christ.

And [inaudible 00:04:56] church, Pastor Jeff, we get that. Going to point number two, I find that many Christians intellectually know of the love of God, but have yet to experience the depth of the love of God. There's a big difference between knowing about God's love and experiencing God's love.

The Bible says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life." And oftentimes, we think of that as just a bumper sticker like, "Yeah, that's the crux of the gospel. And Jesus died for me, and by believing in Him, I can have life and have life in his name."

It's more than that. It's the fact that God loved you so much that even when you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. He loves you unconditionally. He loves you no matter what you've done. He loves you no matter how high your sin list has been piled. Christ loves you. We can't just give that lip service.

And oh Christians, how quick we are to forget. We think that when we come to Christ, "Yeah, forgave my sins, but now I'm a Christian. I really don't need that kind of help anymore." You still need the love of God. And there's a huge difference between knowing about the love of God and experiencing the love of God.

Some of you have people in your life who love you relatively unconditionally, no matter what you do or no matter what you say. Even if you had a bad day and you said, "Hey, I'm sorry," they'd love you anyway.

But we as human beings have limits to all of our love. There's a certain place where people can't go. And then if they went beyond that place, we'd say, "I don't really love them anymore now." God doesn't have a boundary for his love. God loves unconditionally. He continues to lavish love over and over and over.

Have you ever experienced his love? Have you ever known more about it than just what you heard in church, but you've practically applied it to your life, that you're motivated by his love? Because I'm here to tell you, if you haven't experienced the fact that God is proud of you, that he loves you, that he chose you, that he adopted you, that you're part of his family, that he can't think enough thoughts about you, you're not experiencing the love of God that God would have.

God wants you to experience his love so immeasurably that when you go out to share the gospel, it's motivated by Christ's love for you.

He says that, "For Christ's love controls us. Having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died. And he died for all so that they who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

What has Paul concluded? Christ died. Who did Christ die for? All. What does "all" mean? That means everybody. That means everybody on planet earth, Christ died for. It doesn't mean that everybody's born again. It doesn't mean everybody's a

Christian. It doesn't mean that everybody's come into a relationship with God.

But here's the reality, on judgment day, there will be nobody that stands before Jesus and say, "You never did anything for me." Because Christ will say, "I died for you." Christ died for all, therefore all have died. We're all dead in our transgressions and sins, every single one of us.

God is not telling you today, you're a bad person. God is telling you, you were born dead. You were spiritually stillborn. And there's nothing but nothing that you can do about it. That's the gospel. There's a big difference between knowing God's love and experiencing God's love. Have you experienced God's love? Are you motivated by God's love?

I don't care whether you're called to be a preacher, a businessman, a small group leader, help with kids. If you're not motivated by the love of Christ, you won't have the impact that Christ wants you to have. You say, "Well, how do I know about the love of Christ?" You realize all that he's forgiven.

Do you know the Bible says he who has been forgiven much, loves much? I misunderstood that scripture when I was a young Christian. I thought that meant I needed to go sin more so that God would love me more. What it means is if you truly reflect on who you are, you'll realize how much you've been forgiven.

Church people, we forget how much we've been forgiven. We think, "Yeah, those other people out there, they really needed a lot of God's grace. I needed some, but now I'm okay." You miss the love of God. The love of God is great for each and every

one of us. And he died. Why? So that those who live might do what? No longer live for themselves.

Christ didn't die for you so you could live for yourself. Christ died for you so that you could live for who? For Him. He wanted you to live for Him and for each other.

The gospel is summed up in the verses in Matthew Chapter 22, that we're to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love our neighbors as ourselves. Who are we not to focus on? Us. We're to live for God and we're to live for each other.

And since I already read John 3:16, let me read to you 1 John 3:16. "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

See, Christ's desire in your life, if you truly understand how much he's done for you, he would say, "Well, then you go do the same for everybody else that you meet. You go live likewise. You go show my love to every single person, but especially to those in the household of God, especially to those brothers and sisters in Christ." That's our responsibility. And we're called to be motivated by love.

You say, "Well, what's God ever done for me?" God loved you so much that he sent his Son to be the savior of the world. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4 he says, "For I delivered to you as of first importance, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures."

What's primary? Primary is this, God loved you so much, he generously gave the greatest gift he could ever give individually to you. And that wasn't just his Son coming and showing you the way to the Father. It was his Son coming and taking all your sin and placing it all on Him, and then being punished by the wrath of his Father in your place so that you never have to experience it.

And then when he rose from the grave, what did he want to do? "I want to be in relationship with you. I paid for all your sin. I love you unconditionally. Will you please come into relationship with me?" And if you truly understand that about who our God is, that will change you. It will change you radically.

See, most of us grow up believing that we're okay or that we're pretty good. I went to a Lutheran grade school. I started religion classes at the age of five. I went to church relatively every single Sunday. And my school on Monday morning, we used to have to report what we did. You had to say, "Church," "Sunday school," "Both," or "Neither." I know I lied some of the time.

Because I thought the more you attended and the more gold stars you got and the more you did this, then God would be pleased with you a little bit more. I'm here to tell you, on the authority of God's Word, there is nothing you can do to make God love you any more.

Certain people here believe, "Well, I came to church today because if I go to church, I know that God's going to be more pleased with me than if I didn't go to church today. And if I try to be good this week, then God's going to love me more than

if I didn't try to be good this week."

Friends, he already loves you so much. No matter what you do, he can't love you more than he already does. And I'm here to tell you something else; there's nothing you can do that can make God love you any less.

Even on your worst day where you live through a bunch of it woulda, coulda, shouldas. And, "How come I did? And I shouldn't have said that. I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have thought that." God's love for you hasn't shifted one centimeter.

He loves you. Have you welcomed that love into your life? Do you truly own the fact that he loves you like that as his own son or as his own daughter?

See, if you truly understand that, then you'll no longer be living for yourself, but you'll be living for Christ because you'll recognize, what could I possibly ever do to repay my Lord who gave everything for me? Answer: nothing. Nothing. I'm just motivated by his great love for me and I want other people to experience that love too.

You want to see genuine transformation? You want to see total transformation in your life and in the lives of others? Let them and let you be motivated by the love of Christ, which is how much he loves you.

I've ended every service since we started our church by saying three words; you are loved. It's not just a pastoral thing to say. It's not just a cute slogan. It is so that you recognize, even if you haven't trusted Christ, he died for you. He loves you.

And if you have trusted Him, I'm here to tell you, this love is so extravagant and lavish, you can't outrun it. He loves you. You are loved. So if you want to see genuine

transformation, it always starts with the motivation of love.

Second is this; genuine transformation or total transformation grows from the recognition of identity, grows from the recognition of identity. [inaudible 00:14:12] says in verse 16, "Therefore from now on, we recognize no one according to the flesh, even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer." We recognize no one according to the flesh."

Christians, listen up. It means if I'm truly born again, I don't look at people based upon what their skin color is, what their political persuasion is, what their socioeconomic status is, what their gender is. I judge no one according to the flesh.

Now, prior to becoming a Christian, that's impossible to do. We group everybody. We group every single... "Oh, I know what kind of church that is. They're one of those kind of churches." "I know what kind of person believes those things politically, they're in that camp." "I know what that color of skin person believes, they're in..." Not anymore. Not anymore. We judge no one from an earthly point of view.

Paul says we used to judge Christ in this way according to the flesh. What does that mean? It means people have heard about Jesus. "Yeah. I think he lived in Israel. I think he was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, was the son of a carpenter. Claimed he was a Messiah. Died on a cross. Yeah, that's good for some people. Some people claim he's God, some people don't."

That's what some people think according to the flesh. But that's not how we look at Christ any longer. Jesus Christ is God in flesh. He is the glory of the Father. He is

the one and only way to eternal life. And he is worthy of all of our glory, honor, and praise. Amen? And if we truly love Him, then we truly love everybody else we come into contact with.

Christians, listen to me. BRAVE Church is to be known by our love. You can go to certain coffee shops and you would say, "Man, they're known for this kind of coffee." You can go to certain restaurants and say, "They're known for this kind of food." You can go to certain kind of shopping malls and say, "They're known for this kind of service."

But when you come to church, here's how people should know our church; by our love, by our love. And that's rooted in who we are in Christ. That's rooted in our identity.

Jesus said in John 13:34 and 35, "A new commandment I give you that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

So there's anything among Christians that needs to be taking place that people see in the world, here's what they would say about Christians, "That group of people, I can't understand them. They have all different socioeconomic backgrounds, all different colors of skin, different genders, different political persuasions. But when they get together, they genuinely love one another."

That can only be said about the church, and it must be said about the church. It must be said about the church. Why? Because of our identity in Christ. It's who we are.

We don't judge people according to the flesh.

You say, "Well, Pastor Jeff, I hear things in my ear all the time." When I meet people, I'm like, "Oh, you're like that" or, "Oh, you're like this." Where do you think that statement comes from? It comes from the father of lies from the pit of hell.

Do you know how Paul viewed people? Paul viewed people in one of two ways, either (a) they're born again and in Christ or (2) they are lost and they need Christ. And that's the only way we ever look at people if you're a Christian. That's it. Do you understand what I'm saying?

It means no matter whom you're talking to, they either know Christ and need to grow in Christ or they're lost without Christ and need to hear about Christ. That's it. That's why the church exists. That's why we exist for Christ.

It's a recognition of our identity. That's why it says in verse 17, "Therefore, listen, if anyone is in Christ," means he's born again, "He is a new creature. The old things passed away. Behold, new things have come."

When you come to Christ, you are fundamentally altered at the moment that you trust Jesus. God doesn't change your physical appearance. He doesn't change your socioeconomic background. He doesn't change your skin color. He doesn't change your gender. He created you just the way you are. But what goes on from the inside out is God has recreated you in a way to love Him and love others in a way that was impossible for you to do before.

He gives you a completely new world view where you will have love for people

you would've never had love for people before, that you want to be around people that you would've never wanted to be around before. Why? Because you represent the king who died for all. You're a new creation. You're different.

The analogy that's often used is a caterpillar that turns into a butterfly. A caterpillar that's crawling down around on the ground, it gets into a chrysalis, it comes out, turns into a butterfly. We give that creature an entirely new name.

We don't call them a fuzzy, floating thing. We don't call them a confused caterpillar. We don't call them a worm with wings. We call them a butterfly. Why? Because if that butterfly tried to go back and live like it once was as a caterpillar, that butterfly would be utterly miserable. Because it wasn't designed to crawl around on the ground. It was designed to soar.

In the same way, when you come to Christ, you are fundamentally different. You are not the same identity you used to be. You say, "Well, yeah. Before I came to Christ, I was a drunk. I was a drug addict. I'm an athlete. I'm this." No, that was all before.

Now, you're first and foremost a Christian who may happen to engage in certain behaviors, but you're first and foremost a Christian. And why is this so important? Because there are some people who have been born again for a long period of time that would still describe themselves by a term that God would not describe you as.

Like this, "I'm a divorced Christian." "I'm a Christian who had an abortion." "I'm a Christian who is sexually immoral." "I'm a Christian who still struggles with this sin."

Let me just tell you something on the authority of God's Word. If God were to take you to heaven today and walk you around and introduce you, he would not introduce you by your past and what you used to be. He would introduce you by who you are right now.

If he introduced you to people in heaven, he would say of you, "This is my daughter. I love her. I can't stop loving her. If she knew how much I loved her, she would respond to me with incredible grace because no matter what she does, I love her. No matter what, she's incredible."

"And this is my boy. I'm so proud of him. I love him. I created him so unique. He gives me great pleasure just to watch him live his life and who he is. And even when he stumbles, it's never changed my love for him."

See, most of us say, "Well, then why do I have this thing in my head where I always feel like I'm not good enough and I'm not smart enough? I don't have any friends. I just feel like I'm a failure. Why do I feel that way?" Because you have an enemy that lies all the time. It's why you hear that voice all the time. You'll stop hearing that voice when you're dead and in glory.

But I'm here to tell you, on the authority of God's Word, you can't be transformed and conformed into the image of Christ if you adopt names about yourself that just aren't true. God wants you to take on your new identity. You say, "Well, what does that look like?" I'm glad you ask.

There's a lot of verses I could share with you. John 1:12 tells me I'm a child of

God. Now, just think about that for a second. I have three kids. I love them. I mean I love them so much, I would do anything for them. I would give them anything I have. I want them to go further in life than me. I discipline them. I love them. I care for them. I'm there for them. They're incredible. I love them more than any other children in the world because they're my children.

Now, think about this for a minute. God tells me he loves me more than I love my own children. He says, "You who are evil know how to give good gifts to your kids, how much more your heavenly Father who gives you his Holy Spirit?" God loves you.

How about this? "I'm a member of Christ's body." 1 Corinthians 12:17. How about this? Ephesians 1:3-8, "I've been chosen by God and adopted as his child." When was I chosen? Before the foundation of the world. He chose me and him to be holy and blameless.

How about Colossians 2:9 and 10? "I'm complete in Christ." Hebrews 4, "I have direct access to the throne of grace." How about Romans 8:1 and 2? "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." How about Romans 8:31? "If God is for me, who can be against me?" How about Philippians 3:20? "I'm a citizen of heaven."

How about 1 John 5:18? "I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me." How about John 15:16? That I've been chosen and appointed to bear fruit. How about Ephesians 2:10? That I'm God's workmanship. How about Ephesians 3:12. "I can approach the throne of grace with freedom and confidence."

That's just a snippet. That's an appetizer of what the Bible tells me about myself. Now, why is that so important? Because if I walk around knowing there's no condemnation in my life and I'm crowned with glory and honor because I'm in Christ and God sees me, the Father sees me through divine (S-O-N) Son glasses and looks at me and says, "Jeff's righteous and he's holy, and he's good, and he's adopted, and I chose him to be completely transformed in the image of my Son. And no matter what he does, I love him. I love him. I love him." That changes who I am.

And it took me a long time to take ownership of my identity because what I used to do is look in the mirror and I would read the Bible and I'd say, "This is what I'm supposed to be, but this is who I actually am."

"God wants me to be this, but I'm not very good at it. And God's trying to get me to do that, and now I feel even more guilty. And God's putting this burden on me, but I can't do it."

And then one day it dawned on me, what Jesus Christ demands of me, he's the one that provides for me; that everything he said he wanted me to be, he'd already done. And it was no longer about performance for God. It was, "God, you do the performance in and through me."

That's why the Apostle Paul also says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I live in this body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

Christians, God is telling you, "Get off the performance plan. You're not that

good. And it's only going to make you miserable." Get on the identity plan that you already are positionally everything God said. And then you continue to grow and walk in it. Amen.

This is what God has for us. And we miss the mark so often because we start thinking about people wrongly. And one of the reasons we have a hard time living the gospel and sharing the gospel is we group people based upon how we think people must think and who people are.

Here's what they are; they're either in Christ and need to grow in Christ or they're apart from Christ and they need Christ. Can I tell you why that's so important? Because in this church, if you don't know who Jesus Christ is and you've not turned from your sins and trusted Him, when the world ends, be it today or any other day, when this age ends, you will go straight to hell for all eternity.

Family members that you have that have not repented and trusted Christ, they will go to hell for all eternity. Your neighbors that don't know Christ, they will go to hell for all eternity. Your business associates that don't know Christ, they'll go to hell for all eternity.

You say, "Well, then how are we going to reach them?" We're going to be motivated with the love of Christ and our new identity in Christ, and we're going to have great compassion for people that don't love Christ.

And when people are mean to us, what are we going to do? We're going to love our enemies and we're going to pray for those that persecute us. That's what it means

to live for Christ. Why? Because the stakes are so high. A hundred years from now, none of us are going to be here. Maybe that baby crying might be, but nobody else.

We're not going to be here. The most important thing we can do is be aligned with who Jesus is and then go live for Him and let other people know about Him. The greatest return on investment is to share the gospel. Why? Because we don't want to be deceived.

If you were to poll most people and even most Christians in America, they would tell you, majority of people are going to heaven, even though Jesus said the opposite. Jesus said, "Wide is the road to destruction and many are on it." Wide is the gate. People are heading to hell in droves. "But narrow is the road and narrow is the gate that leads to life, and few are on it."

So Pastor Jeff, that's a hard word. It is a hard word. That's why we're called to be ambassadors for Christ.

Paul says this, very sobering words, 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Or do you not know the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God."

Every time I read that scripture, the only thing people hear is homosexual. No, no, no. Fornicators, you're shacking up, practicing your fornication. Why are you deceiving yourself thinking you're a Christian? Repent and trust Christ.

Those of you that put other things ahead of Christ and have idolatry in your life and you love your house and your gifts and your items that you possess more than you love Christ, you're not entering either. Thieves, covetous people, people that are jealous of everybody else, drunkards, revilers.

And notice what he says in verse 11, "Such were some of you." Here's what I would say; we were all that way. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God.

God can take any sinner and completely redeem them. Your past does not determine your future. Your past is what you were. Your present is who you are in Christ now and forevermore. Amen. Live your identity. Live it.

When you look in the mirror some days you may say, "I don't feel like that. I don't feel like I'm a great Christian." Just make declarations over yourself by what the Bible says about you.

Jesus said he loves you, so you're loved. Jesus said he chose you, so you're chosen. Jesus said you're adopted, so you're his child. Jesus said you're forgiven, so you're forgiven. Jesus said there's no condemnation, so he's not condemning you.

And the more you own the truth about who Jesus is, the more you'll love Him, the more you'll want to walk in your identity, and the more you'll want to live for Him. So if it starts with a motivation of love and grows from a recognition of identity, I would say genuine transformation or total transformation is rooted in the reconciliation of relationship. It's rooted in the reconciliation of relationship.

Friends, Christianity is not first and foremost a religion, it's a relationship. I'm talking about how to have a relationship with God, not, "Hey, what doctrines do I have to believe in? What things do I have to do?" That's every cultist religion in the world.

Christianity is about having a relationship with the person of Jesus that not only does he hear your voice, you hear his. You know that you're known by Him.

Notice what the scripture says, verse 18, "Now, all these things are from God." You say, "Well, how do I walk in the motivation of love and how do I walk in my identity? And who did that for me?" All these things are from God.

In salvation, God does all the work. In sanctification, God does the work as he partners with you and you align with Him. It's all from God. He's the one that set all this up. And what does it say? Who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Namely, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Hear the word reconciliation about four times in those two verses? Reconciliation is a step beyond forgiveness. Forgiveness is, "I'm not holding that debt against you. You sinned against me. I forgive you. I'm not bringing it up again. That's fine. But I'm keeping some distance because I don't want you to hurt me again."

Reconciliation is, "Not only do I forgive you, but at the moment you realize what you've done and repent, I'm willing to have a relationship with you again. I want to restore a relationship that was broken. You broke the relationship. I'm willing to go as

far out as I possibly can to restore the relationship."

Christ wants to restore relationship with you. His goal is not to get you saved so that one day you go to heaven. His goal is for you to personally know Him now and to experience Him forevermore. He wants to reconcile with you. He wants to give you his very life. And what does reconciliation look like? Not counting your sins or trespasses or iniquities against you.

Now, nobody clapped. First service, we got a golf clap. Because we forget all that Christ has forgiven for us. Friends, I'm here to tell you, your biggest problem is not your checkbook. Your biggest problem is not what you own. Your biggest problem is not finding a job or finding a spouse, or getting your marriage back on track, or being a better parent. Your biggest problem is that you're a sinner in need of the grace of God.

And the message of the gospel is that Christ paid for them all. He's willing to wipe them all away. Christian, listen to me, even those of you that have been saved for a long time that still have this tape in your head that goes back and back and back and recorded things... They used to be videotaped, they recorded things in the past. Now I know it's different.

But it records things in your head and you go back and you replay the tape all the time of when you were 12, 15, 18, 22, 35, and you can't get over that. Friends, on the authority of God's Word, if you've trusted in Him and are born again, that's gone. It's over.

You're not held accountable for it. And the Bible says when God forgives, he

forgets. It doesn't mean he can't remember. It means, "I ain't never bringing that up again. Why are you? It's done. I put that to bed at the cross. I nailed it to the cross. All your sin is atoned for."

And really what you see in this text is this divine exchange. It's all your sin for all of Christ's righteousness. All your sin for all of Christ's love. All your sin for all of Christ's forgiveness. All your sin for all of God's mercy. All your sin for all of God's grace. He'll take all the bad and he'll replace it with his very life.

Friends, that's the best news on the planet. And who will he do it for? Anybody that wants it. It's a free gift. It's offered to the world so that when you stand before Almighty God, you don't have to come up with all your reasons why you think you're saved or all the good things you thought you did.

You can say, "I don't deserve to be here, but I believe you died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead. And I banked my entire eternity on you being God." Amen.

We have a hard time because we really don't feel like we broke the relationship. Most of us, and growing up, we think we're pretty good people. Even if we're not the best of people, we can always find somebody that's worse than us. So it doesn't really make sense to us that God reconciled to us. Because what did we ever do that was wrong? I really didn't do that. Yeah, I stole, I lied, I cheated. Some of that stuff. But you're talking about a perfect, holy God.

So I want to read you a story today that has a human element to it that when you

hear about this story of reconciliation, it'll maybe give you just a glimpse because this story is a limited teeny bit of microcosm compared to what Christ did for you. And I've shared this story before but I've never read it. I have a hard time reading this story.

I had a hard time getting through it in the first service. I hope I can do it now. It's a story about Corrie Ten Boom. Most of you are familiar with her family. They were arrested by the Nazis. Corrie Ten Boom was along with the rest of her family.

She was eventually imprisoned in Ravensbrück concentration camp with her sister, Betsie, who died days before Corrie Ten Boom's release on December 31st, 1944. She wrote a book called *The Hiding Place*, which was her autobiography. And this is one snippet from that book where she shares a story of God's forgiveness and her desire to see somebody reconciled to Christ.

I'm just going to read it to you. It says *I'm Still Learning to Forgive*. She writes, "It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding, heavyset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives."

"And that's when I saw him. Working his way forward against the others, one moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat and the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with a skull and crossbones."

"It came back with a rush. The huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking

naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment of skin. Betsie, how thin you were."

"Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland. This man had been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent. 'You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk,' he was saying. 'I was a guard there.' No, he did not remember me."

"'But since that time,' he went on, 'I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I'd like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein...' his hand came out, 'Will you forgive me?'"

"And I stood there, I whose sins had every day to be forgiven, and I could not. Betsie had died in that place. Could he erase her slow, terrible death simply for the asking? It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me, it seemed like hours."

"I wrestled with the most difficult thing I ever had to do, for I had to do it, I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition that we forgive those who have injured us. If you do not forgive men their trespasses, Jesus says neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

"And I stood still there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion. I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. 'Jesus, help me.' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.'"

"And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced all the way down my arm, and sprang and joined my hands. And then the healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes."

"I forgive you, brother.' I cried. 'With all my heart.' For a long moment, we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then." Amen.

I'm moved by that story for several reasons. I'm moved for that story because my grandfather was a Jew in Germany and got out before all this stuff happened. I'm moved by that story because of the incredible grace and forgiveness that God can use.

We're not called just to have a heart of love for God. We're called, because of our heart of love for God, to have a heart of love for others, which means nobody is beyond our willingness to have relationship with them. Nobody.

And even as you hear that story, the sin that he sinned against her and several different women and people in that concentration camp is small compared to the sin that you've had against Almighty God. And even though you've sinned like that, Jesus Christ said, "Not only will I come and not only will I declare that I forgive you, I'll come die for you, take the punishment from my Father for all of your sin so that you never ever have to experience."

Friends, there's nothing like the gospel of Jesus Christ. There's no greater message anywhere. It is a message of reconciliation. Our message to the world is no

matter who you are, no matter what you've done, that God the Father wants to have a relationship with you through the person of Jesus Christ. And that because we love God, we love everybody. That's the message. That's the message of reconciliation.

The ministry of reconciliation is that we live the gospel. The message of reconciliation is that we share the gospel. We have to both demonstrate it and declare it. If we just share the gospel but we don't live a heart that's motivated by love for others, we miss the gospel.

If we just live the gospel because we love God but we never share the gospel, we don't have the gospel. The gospel needs to be lived and the gospel needs to be shared, and they're both equally important.

Too often we have people that aren't living the gospel out, sharing it. And too often we have people that are living it that refuse to share it. They both go hand in glove. It's the ministry of reconciliation. It's the word of reconciliation.

People ask all the time in the church, "What's my calling? What am I called to do?" You're called to reconcile people to Christ. That is our number-one mission. And once people are reconciled, we're called to grow people in that reconciled relationship so that they know how much God loves them. Amen. It's a divine exchange.

I don't presume that because you come to BRAVE Church, you've made that divine exchange. You weren't born with it. You weren't born a Christian. There has to be a moment in time in your life where you've come to the conclusion that, "You know what? I have sinned against God and I am unworthy of his love, and yet he still loves

me. And I want to turn from my sin and I want to place all my faith and trust in Jesus Christ."

And when you do, the Bible declares that you are born again. The Bible declares that you are a new creation. The Bible doesn't tell you, "Get religion." The Bible doesn't tell you, "Join a church." The Bible doesn't tell you to get in a small group. The Bible doesn't tell you, "Give all your money." The Bible doesn't tell you that. The Bible tells you, "Get right with God."

And once you're motivated by the love of God, you won't help yourself to be able to do all the other things that the Bible wants you to do. But it's motivated by love, not effort. It's motivated by love, not have-to. It's, "I get to."

When you think about the people that love you the most, the people who have been there for you the most, the people that have been kind to you even when you haven't been good, and there's something inside of you that says, "I don't want to disappoint them. And I want to treat them right, and I want to do what's right. It's not a have-to to love this person. It's not a have-to to show respect to them. I want to, because of the way in which they love me." That's what God wants you to know about his love for you.

So that Christianity is no longer a have-to, it's, "I get to. I'm privileged to." Thank you, Jesus. God was in Christ reconciling the world himself and has committed to us the same message.

We go out and share the gospel. It's not just sharing four different points that,

"God loves you, but you're a sinner. Christ died, you need to trust Him." Those are facts, but when it's motivated by love and a genuine love for the person that you're talking to and a genuine desire to see their soul saved, it will change the way you communicate. And why do you love them? Because Christ loves them. He loves everybody. Amen.

Now, this final point is really important because this tells us who we are. It not only tells us about our identity and that we've been reconciled to Christ. But if you really want to see the gospel grow, if you really want to see transformation happen not only in your life and in the lives of others, I want to tell you that complete transformation and genuine transformation expands through the delegation of authority. It expands through the delegation of authority.

Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth, and he told us to go. Well, what kind of delegated authority did he give us? I'm glad you ask. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says this, "Therefore we," me, you, us, we are Christ's ambassadors, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

How does God want to get this message out? Us. We're his ambassadors. Now, think about that for a moment. When we have an ambassador that goes on foreign soil, they don't just represent the United States of America. They're sent by the president himself.

As an ambassador for Christ, you're not just a representative of the kingdom.

You've been sent directly by the king. That's important.

A number of years ago, I was in New York City with my wife. It was around 2005. And we were getting ready to watch I think the taping of a Good Morning America show or something, and we were waiting in line for it to happen. And all of a sudden, about seven SUVs pulled up flanking each other. Big guys jumped out in suits, started talking into their wrists, formed a perimeter. I've always wanted to say that. I didn't know what a perimeter was, but they formed one.

And they're talking, looking up and down. And all of a sudden, the door opened up and Condoleezza Rice walked right out, walked right in there, who at the time was secretary of state.

And this verse went off in my heart, I'm like, "She is so important to our nation that she has this many Secret Service just taking her to a place in New York City." And God was saying, "Every one of my kids is an ambassador for me, and they're more important to my kingdom than Condoleezza Rice is to the United States of America."

Now you can wake up and say, "Well, I don't really feel like I'm special. I don't really feel..." You're an ambassador for Jesus Christ. You've been sent on foreign soil on a mission to share the love of Christ.

Just out of curiosity, where do ambassadors gather? They gather in an embassy. And when they gather in that embassy, the soil that they're on is American soil. They're American ambassadors. It's American soil where they're on. All the laws of America apply when an American ambassador... It doesn't matter what country they're in, that's

American soil.

You say, "Well, where do ambassadors for Christ gather in the world?" Church. Why? Because this is kingdom soil. And we're here to herald a message about the laws of God and who God is and what God's saying to us. And this embassy, the church, welcomes people from every tribe, tongue, and nation from around the world to repent and believe that Jesus is the Christ and grow into complete transformation with Him. That's why we gather.

And as the church, we gather so that when we leave, we can advance the kingdom through this church with the gospel. That's why we gather. Friends, there's no more important institution on the face of planet earth than the local church, not one, because this is special soil here.

This is soil where the Word of God is being heralded. This is soil where worship is taking place. This is a place where the gospel is being heralded, where people are crying out and praying to the Lord for Him to do what he wants to do in this generation, in our city, in our nation, in our world. And that's why we gather here. And he's given us this delegation of authority. You are his ambassadors.

That's why, for me, when I preach, some people get mad at me sometimes, "Hey, you don't address enough social issues. Why aren't you addressing all the social issues that are out there?" Here's why, because every social issue has a spiritual issue. And if you understand the spiritual root, you can deal with the social issues.

And I believe I've been faithful to teaching that and I believe I'll continue to be

faithful to teaching that. Because when I come into church, when I'm preaching, I'm not preaching left versus right. I'm preaching right versus wrong. And there's a huge difference.

We've talked about Black Lives Matter, we spent a whole day on it. We talked about do black lives matter? Of course, black lives matter. Every life matters. We got in the Book of Genesis and we couldn't get out of Chapter 1 where we believe there was one race and two genders that God created in six days. That's spiritually true. That's why everybody matters.

That's why critical race theory... I don't have to address critical race theory. There's one race, the human race. That's it. The reason people don't get along is not because of the pigmentation of their skin color, it's because of the wickedness of the human heart. That's fact.

We've talked about a lot of things. We've talked about schools, what schools are teaching and what Charles Darwin has done to help the schools. And I've told you as parents, you can send your kids wherever the Lord would have you send your kids to school. But I've also been clear that bad company corrupts good morals. They do.

The reason I don't hang out with a bunch of people that hate their wives is because I don't want to become like them. The reason I don't hang out with people that lie and cheat is because I don't want to become like them.

Parents, I'm just asking you, no matter where you send your kid, if you send them into an environment where eight to 10 hours a day, they're with people that think

differently than how God wants them to think, don't be surprised when they have greater influence on your kid than your kid has on them. But you get to choose. You have freedom to choose.

We've talked about schools. We've talked about vaccines. We've talked about the CDC, which I think stands for Change Decisions Constantly. We've talked about it.

There are people here that are vaccinated. There are people here that are not vaccinated because of strong convictions about what you have. People have told me, "Hey, Pastor Jeff, you're just getting all political now." I'm like, "How can I not be?"

If I tell people you have to wear a mask, I'm political. If I tell people you don't have to wear a mask, I'm political. If I tell people you have a right to choose whatever you want to choose, I'm being political. Friends, God gave us a God-given right through the First Amendment to have freedom of speech and freedom to gather, and nobody can shut that down.

So I believe you have freedom to choose. If you want to wear a mask, wear a mask. And if you don't, don't. And if you want to get vaccinated, get vaccinated. And if you don't, don't.

I have a bigger problem with why I see only a certain stream in the media going one way and anybody that thinks different is wrong. I have a problem with that. How come it is that one unvaccinated player that gets COVID is a month's story, but when whole teams that are vaccinated get COVID, we just move the game by two days and nobody says anything?

I just want to have a conversation about it. Right? Because I find that we're living in an era where everybody wants to give away their rights and their freedoms to see what government tells us we should do. Jesus Christ is the one that has all authority. No government official does.

And by the way, just so you don't write me, I'm not breaking the law by keeping our church open. The First Amendment allows us to gather and share whatever we want to share, and we will continue to do that till Jesus comes back.

The church is geared to say, "Let your kingdom come." And just so you know, I hear this all the time, separation of church and state, separation of church and state. You will not find that in any founding document. You will not find it in the U.S. Constitution or the Declaration of Independence.

You will find it in a letter that was written from Thomas Jefferson to a church, assuring them that the government would never interfere with the church. Separation of church and state is to keep the government out of church, not the church out of government.

So when we talk about these things, they all have a spiritual root. We can sit here and talk about social justice. I don't believe in social justice. Social justice fights for equal outcome for everybody. That's absurd. Biblical justice fights for equal opportunity for everybody, which is true.

Everybody should have the same rights and freedoms and everybody should have the same opportunity, but outcome is not dictated on everybody getting the same

and having a victim mentality and deserving stuff.

And just so you know, I'm proud to be an American. I'm an American. I have dual citizenship. Philippians 3:20 says, "My citizenship is in heaven and I eagerly await a savior." My citizenship to heaven trumps my citizenship to the United States of America. You need to know that. Just so you know my background.

If I go to a football game, I will stand and put my hand over my heart and I will sing the national anthem. I will never kneel. I won't. I will say the Pledge of Allegiance. I love our country, but I love the Kingdom of God more. I love the Kingdom of God more.

Now, listen, the beauty of our country is that we can disagree and we can still love one another. We can still disagree and we still love one another.

You can disagree with our president. God's given us a right to disagree. God's given us a right to talk about that. But here's my problem; there's a lot of people that disagree and then they buy T-shirts and hats that say, "Let's Go Brandon."

And every time I've asked a Christian who owns one of those, "Hey, tell me about the fervency of your prayer for our president to be walking in the fullness of the spirit," they kind of shriek back and realize, "I'm sorry. I probably shouldn't have done that." Why? Because Jesus Christ wants Joe Biden walking in the fullness of the spirit. And Jesus Christ wants all his people walking in the fullness of the spirit.

And if you genuinely love somebody, you don't say pejorative things about them, period. Now, some people don't understand that. "Why don't you have an American flag? Why aren't you waving a flag?" Because our call is for every tribe, tongue, and

nation.

I had a pastor from Uganda here last week. I care more about his soul and what he's doing for his church in Uganda than I do for what happens in America, but I love America and I want us to get involved in America.

I think it's wrong when schools teach sex education to eight-year-olds showing pornographic and homosexual materials. It's wrong. It's also wrong for the church to clap and say, "That's wrong," and do nothing about it. Did you know that?

Because if all we're going to do as a church is sit on the sideline and let life just happen and then complain about other people, we've missed the whole point of the message. The whole point of the message is you can love your country, and you better, and you can love your city, and you better, but you better love Jesus more and you better be praying for the conversion of those that don't love Him.

And what we're speaking about when we talk to school boards and what we're speaking about when we talk to politicians, what we speak about is not left versus right. It's right versus wrong.

When I talk about abortion being wrong, I don't care whether you're Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, it's evil. I don't care what political party you belong to. I will call that out no matter who's president. It's wrong. Racism's wrong. I don't care who the president is.

We're called to love every single person the exact same way, and not judge people by their outward appearance, but to look inside their heart and say, "Do they

need Jesus or do they need to grow in Jesus?" That's it. And that's what the gospel looks like.

So that when we break as a church and people say, "Well, what's BRAVE Church known for?" I don't want to be known as the unmasked church. I don't even want to be known as the church that prays all the time.

Here's what I want to be known for; I want to be known as the church that radically loves people that are unlike us, that radically has a passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ and his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. And I want to be known as the church that's engaged in the world.

You say, "Well, how do I become engaged?" For some of you, the way you're going to get engaged is by praying and praying for God to do things. Great. Others of you say, "I want to get more involved. I want to become an election judge. I want to become a delegate. I want to learn how to be part of a caucus. I want to learn how to do all that."

That's why we're doing a biblical citizenship class. It's neither Democrat or Republican or Libertarians. Just learning about our governmental system. So you can get involved in the way that God wants you to get involved.

We can't stand on the sidelines anymore, friends. We can't. We are ambassadors for Christ, motivated by love and our new identity because we've been reconciled to Him. And therefore, because we are ambassadors for Christ, we are pleading with the world, please be reconciled to Christ.

I am who I am and I do what I do because I'm going to give an account to the Lord Jesus Christ for everything I do and I say. And he cares about his church and he loves his church. And he wants people from all different walks of life, people that are in those walks of life that you say, "I don't want to hang out with people like that." He wants them here and he wants them saved, and he wants you to do it. That's the message of the gospel.

You say, "Well, how do I take ownership of that?" Verse 21 tells us, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." That's what it means. It means that Christ did all the work for us.

Jesus Christ, who had no sin. Jesus Christ, who hadn't experienced any sin. God the Father put all of our sin on Him. And make no mistake about it, when he did, Jesus didn't become a sinner. Jesus just took the punishment for your sin, he took the punishment for my sin, so that you and I, instead of experiencing our sin and all that we know, we can experience the righteousness of Christ.

And that's true for any man, woman, any boy or girl anywhere. And friends, this is so important. This is so important. We want this place to be a place where the Word of God is heralded. Do you know why? Because there's parts of the world right now you can't do it.

There's a pastor in Canada right now in prison for two years because he was audacious enough to teach that marriage is between a man and a woman and

homosexuality sin. You know where he is? He's in jail. Do you think that's coming here?

Yes.

It's coming. You think I'm well aware of that as your pastor? Yes. Do you think I'm going to change the Word of God? No. Never. That's why what I hold in my hand, these elements for communion are so important.

Friends, we can have different political convictions. We can root for different teams. We can send our kids to different kinds of schools. We can have a debate about that all day long. What we're never going to debate is the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's what brings us together. He's what brings everybody together.

As you hold these elements in your hand, I just want you to reflect on all that Christ has done for you. As you hear the words of this song sung over you, these are words from 2 Corinthians 5:21. Chris Tomlin took it, put it into music, just to remember the Messiah that gave his life for you.

I want you to hear the words of these songs. I want to hear them sung over you afterwards. Pastor Justin, who's our campus pastor in Westminster, will come up and we'll take the elements together before we go today. But let me just pray for you.

Lord Jesus, we just thank you for today. Lord, we thank you that we are centered upon the person and work of Jesus. Lord, we gather because of you and no one else. Lord, it's because of you that we have life in your name, not because of anybody else.

And if you're here today and say, "I don't know that I have a relationship with

Christ, I think I'm still separated," if you believe you're a sinner, I got great news for you today.

Say this, "Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner. I know I'm separated from you. But I want to turn from my sin and I want to place all my faith and trust in you. Lord, take all my sin, give me all your righteousness. Come into my life, Lord Jesus."

And Lord, for those of us who have been declared righteous because of your shed blood, Lord, I pray that we would grow in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, we give you glory, we give you honor, we give you praise. We are so thankful for your body and your blood, and we lift you up. The mighty name of Jesus. Amen and amen. Can we give God praise today for his Word?