

2 Corinthians 5:14-15
One Has Died for All, Therefore...
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Have you ever had an experience that completely changed your world? Sometimes these are known as “game changing” moments, or to use a fancy term, a “paradigm shift.” They can be wonderful and exhilarating; they can also be sad and heart wrenching. Do you know what I mean? Has anyone ever had one of these moments where, in that pivotal moment, you realize that your life has altogether changed?

Maybe it happened when you saw your spouse for the first time. I know for many of you, that—along with children—is the single biggest game-changer. Or perhaps it was when you heard a diagnosis. Funny how two words can utterly transform a life when you hear “it’s cancer.” Or maybe it was the first time you heard a piece of music or read a captivating book. These also can be game changing.

In writing terms, we might call this event the climax. Movies use these moments all the time to begin the road to resolution. Now there is a very obvious game changing moment I noticed in the new Star Wars film, but rather than spoil it for those of you who have not seen it, I went with the next example that came to mind. Does anyone in this room remember the monumental cinematic piece called *The Mighty Ducks*? The Mighty Ducks is a Disney movie from the 90s about a bunch of rag tag inner-city kids who form a junior hockey team. Their coach was ordered to take on this team by the court. And as you would expect, they flounder early on; other teams eat the ducks for lunch. That is until they discover...the flying V. An offensive strategy that resembles the migratory patterns of Canadian Geese. The Flying V was the game changer. In one moment the Ducks are terrible, then with the Flying V in their arsenal they are all of a sudden *literally* unstoppable. (This is my surprised face.)

Game changing or paradigm shifting moments show us that one moment life is one way, and then in the very next it is altogether different forever. Last week, as I narrated for you the story of four lepers in the city of Samaria, I told you about how these four men took a chance in a desperate situation. When the city of Samaria was under siege and all the food and water was gone, these four lepers took a chance and went out to the enemy camps that surrounded the city in hopes of receiving mercy. And as they went, God intervened in a miraculous way. While they walked towards their enemy, God caused the sound of thunderous horse hooves and mighty chariots to be heard in the ears of their captors. In that moment, do you remember what they did? They turned tail and fled for their lives, leaving hundreds and hundreds of tents filled with food and water and clothing, gold and silver, and every good thing these lepers could ever need.

God intervened for these lepers and totally, completely changed their lives in an instant. The enemy that was waiting and lurking was chased off into the night. Do you remember? For these lepers, their situation went from being desperate, hungry, and hopeless, to possessing unimaginably good news—everything they could ever need was literally there for the taking. And it’s all God.

This morning, Charlie read for us from a letter that the Apostle Paul, a man who traveled around the Mediterranean helping to plant and nurture new communities of believers, wrote to the gathered people in Corinth. Like these four lepers, everything has changed for the Corinthians because of what God has done. God, in Jesus Christ, has chased off the enemy into the night, defeating once and for all sin and death on the cross. No longer do we have to live in fear, or shame, or worry, or anger, but are free to trust that God has rescued us with his life and has set us free to love and share and give ourselves for others.

That was the news we heard last week, that's the news that tells us where we are. Today, I want to turn the question and ask, "So where are we going?"

I want us to look more closely at these two verses, some of the richest, most precious gospel verses in all the New Testament. There's a lot to dwell on here, to savor and chew on together—so that's what we're going to do, spend some time with these two verses.

First, again Paul writes, **For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;**

In this verse, God tells us where we are. And in this verse, we hear rich and powerful theological imagery that sounds straight forward at first, but the more time you spend with it, the more it causes us to think. So what I want to do is look at four words in verse 14 briefly that will help us unpack what is being said.

First, *one*. Paul says one has died. This is a reference to Jesus, right? What Paul is saying to his audience is that the message he is bringing is not a worldview, it's not an idea, it's not a philosophical construct, it's a person—his name was Jesus. Paul believed, as the other eyewitnesses did, that this one person's life had broad and wide significance for our life, not just for religious people, but for all people.

The next word I want you to look at is *all*. And the word all in this sense means...all. Now there are those in our culture who want to parse this word and suggest that *all* really refers to a subset of a larger whole—that *all* doesn't really mean ALL. But that all means all of a certain variety. But a commentator by the name of Mark Seifrid puts it this way: In his death, Christ was not merely a representative. In his self-giving death he also incorporated "all," so that all humanity was really present in him. His death was their death (his death was for all.) In this word all you are in that *all*, I am in that *all*, your family and friends and even your enemies, and the enemies of organized religion are also a part of that *all*.

The next word I want to turn our attention to is the word *died*. This man Jesus, one a day in history, literally hung on a cross and died. There were some in the early church who wanted to suggest that Jesus wasn't really fully human, and so he didn't really suffer and die on the cross. This is the early church heresy we call Docetism, that his substance was something other than fully human. This is not what the church teaches; we believe and profess that Jesus literally and physically hung from the cross, suffered bodily, and died.

But then Paul uses this word again. He says later that because Jesus died, therefore all have died. When Jesus died on the cross, something amazing happened in your life, something took place for the world—even those who do not know or understand or accept it.

If you go back to the story of the lepers for a moment, I think it will make sense. When God made that sound of thundering chariots and the enemy fled from the tents, now all of a sudden everything has changed for the people in the city, even though they don't yet know it.

One last word I want to point your attention to is this little word *for*. Now those of you who love English, what part of speech is the word *for*? This word *for* has a lot of meanings.

For – because of – Jesus died because of everyone (1 John 2:2)

For – in place of, or as a substitute for – Jesus died in place of everyone 1 Peter 3:18

For – for the benefit of – Jesus died for the benefit of everyone.

Tom Wright tells this story: a young woman had just won a competition. The first prize was a three-week trip around the world. The chance of a lifetime. And she had given it up in order to stay with a friend as she went into hospital to face a crucial and terrifying operation. A newspaper reporter asked her, “Surely she would have understand what a once and a lifetime opportunity it was.” There must be someone else who could stay with her.

Finally the young woman burst out, fine, you want to know why I'm doing it? You think I'm crazy. But what none of you know—and I wasn't going to tell you—is what she did for me three years ago. I was on drugs and I couldn't stop. It got worse and worse. My family threw me out. She was the only person who looked after me. She sat up with me all night through my withdrawal episodes, she took me to the doctor, she made sure I would make it through. She helped me with my court case. She even helped me get a job. She-she-she loved me!

This woman did all of this for her friend, now her life was changed forever. Because of this gift that was given to her of such amazing love, this woman who was once in bondage, this woman who was once enslaved to all kinds of evils, this woman who was once starving for anything good, is free.

This is the gospel that tells us where we are: one has died for all, therefore all have died. Those who once were held captive behind walls that kept them from having the things they need are now free. And like those lepers who discovered it first, this is what each of you has been given. You have the good news that God has chased the enemy off into the night.

And if we turn once more to 2 Kings, there is one last piece that I'd like to highlight about this passage for us. When the lepers discovered the empty tents, not just a couple, but literally hundreds of tents with everything they could ever need, the first thing they did was begin to hide things away in the bushes: gold and silver and food. But then one of them says something really interesting. This is what verse 9 says:

Then they said to one another, “We are not doing right. This is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s household.”

We are set free and given every good thing in order that we might have the courage and strength to bear witness and share with others the way to safety provision and love of God.

If this is true, then where are we to go? What are we to be about in this world?

Go back to 2 Corinthians 5:

What is it like to live for myself? What is it like for a person when they finally find themselves?

One word: miserable.

Lepers stash food and gold and silver in the bushes—nonsense.

If we in the church are not careful, we will become just like these lepers in the church. One of the reasons why thoughtful, intelligent, well-meaning people reject the church is they often come to a place where people are behaving just like these lepers.

What does this look like?

- We say that Jesus is the king, but in our lives in our decision making, we behave as if we are the king.
- We know that God in Jesus Christ has called us to love one another because he first loved us and gave himself for us on the cross—and still we do unkind things to one another or say unkind words to others.
- We know that we didn’t do anything to earn or deserve his love, but that Jesus gave it to us freely, but sometimes church people pretend like it’s our right and so we exclude others and push people away.

I want to say right now that in 2016, Wabash Presbyterian is going to live for Jesus. And living for Jesus means when tempted to say unkind things, when tempted to push someone away because they look different, when tempted to be haughty or arrogant, that we as Presbyterians have the right worship or the right music, or the right way of doing things, or have the right and deserve what we’ve gotten from God—we will flee from these thoughts, and run to Jesus, the one who loves unconditionally, who serves out of a limitless storehouse of compassion, who welcomes all because he died for all. This is what you can expect for our lives together in 2016.

Because we lepers, you and I, who really are just like these lepers have received such good news, that because of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ, everything is changed.