

"Legacy: Everything!"

Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

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"As God's co-workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain." That's an amazing statement, isn't it? Of course it isn't if you just read through it. After all it's the last verse. The last verse of a chapter, and when we listen to Scripture read on a Sunday morning, or read it ourselves on some other morning of the week, we tend to give last sentences little time. We want to get on to something else!

But if you don't do that. If you pause for a while to think about last verses, many times I think you'll see they're the most important verses of all. And in the case of the fifth chapter of 2 Corinthians, I think you'll find that the truth Paul's trying to tell us, the spiritual reality he's trying to reveal, is nothing short of amazing.

So I want to take some time this morning to try and take in what Paul's saying to us this morning. And I want to begin with the first three words of this final sentence. "As God's co-workers, as God's co-workers ..."

Now I know you know what a "co-worker" is. Most of us have them. We see them every day when we go to work, no matter what kind of work we do. They're the people who work beside us, the people who work for us or who we work for. They the people who work with us to accomplish the job we're trying to do and reach the goal we're trying to reach.

And whether that goal is pumping oil, or making a profit at the bank, or promoting public health, it doesn't matter. The point's the same. The reason we have co-workers is because we've got work to do, and the best way to get it done is to divide it up and do it together. And that same idea, that same concept of a co-worker is exactly what Paul wants us to have in mind this morning as we read those first three words in 2 Corinthians 5:17. Only there's a little twist. Actually it's a big twist!

You see, when you wake up tomorrow morning, and head to work; when you walk through the door, and greet your co-workers, I don't know much about them. But I do know one thing. The people you greet, your co-workers; will be human beings, won't they? Yes, they will. And that's where the twist comes in.

Because in 2 Corinthians, Paul takes the concept of a co-worker to a whole new level. He pulls back the curtain that usually keeps the spiritual world hidden from our eyes, and he tells us that every day, every day as we go to work, whatever we do, the reality for Christians is this. We work not only with human co-workers. We work with a divine co-worker too because we are "God's co-workers."

And with those words Paul is trying to tell us, God wants us to work with Him and He wants to work with us. And the job we've got to do is big. In fact, it's huge. It's nothing less than the reconciliation of the world! "As God's co-workers," Paul writes.

And maybe know when we read those words from now on, we'll understand better why they ought to make our jaws drop. Because those are amazing words my friends. They really are. They tell us that the God who made the world and everything in it, everything, wants you and me to become His co-workers, his co-workers in a the work of salvaging a world that isn't the way it's supposed to be.

Four years ago, in 2007, a movie came out. It was a computer-animated movie made by Dreamworks and it was called "Bee Movie." That's "B-e-e" not just the letter "B." The screenplay for the movie was written by Jerry Seinfeld who got the idea from a book called *The Secret Life of Bees*, which was a serious book. But if you know Jerry Seinfeld you know that everything that's serious is only waiting to become funny.

Anyway, *Bee Movie*'s really all about the life and work of a bee named Barry B. Benson. And Barry is a bee with a free spirit who's less than enthusiastic about being tied to what he sees a dead-end job, working in the hive. So one day as he goes out to gather honey, he takes an unauthorized trip and makes a shocking discovery. Humans steal the honey that bees work so hard to produce!

So in the movie, Barry files a lawsuit. He files it in court, on behalf of all the bees. He demands that the judge issue a verdict to prevent humans from eating honey. And, when the case goes to trial, he wins! (I know, I know, but remember, it's a movie!) The court orders honey all across America to be withdrawn from the shelves and returned to the bees. And Barry figures with that verdict, he will never have to work again.

The next scene in the movie however, shows the effect of Barry's action on the hive and beyond. The bees have nothing to do. And the world outside the hive begins to change. A time-lapse view of Central Park shows trees fading, plants

shriveling up and turning brown. A man walks up to a flower shop and sees a clerk putting a sign in the window. "No more flowers for sale."

Then the movie cuts to a conversation. Barry's talking with a human friend of his. Her name's Vanessa. "I don't understand why everyone's not happy," Barry says. "We bees are equal now. I thought life would be better. But it isn't. It's amazing. Apparently, honey really changes people."

"You don't have any idea what's going on, do you?" Vanessa asks.

Barry doesn't answer.

Vanessa opens a door, revealing a rooftop garden populated by wilted flowers.

"Doesn't look very good, does it?" Vanessa asks. "And whose fault do you think it is?"

Barry looks sheepish. "You know," he says, "I'm going to guess bees."

"Bees?" Vanessa asks.

"Specifically me," Barry says. "I guess I didn't think bees not making honey would affect all these other things."

"And it's not just flowers," Vanessa tells him. "Fruits, vegetables—they all need bees."

"Well," Barry says, "that's the whole SAT test right there."

"So..." Vanessa says, "take away produce, and it affects the animals. Take away animals and it affects ..."

"Humans," Barry says, finishing her thought.

Vanessa gives him a look, but Barry just keeps going.

"So," he says, "it could all just go south from here, couldn't it?"

And Barry's right, isn't he? It could. If bees failed to do their work, the world could all go south, couldn't it? But if the story in *Bee Movie*'s right, then the story in Genesis is right too. For Genesis tells us it wasn't the bees, it was the humans. They stopped doing what the world needed them do to. They stopped obeying God. It was the humans who did that; a woman named Eve and a man named Adam. It was us.

Two weeks ago, you and I looked at the story. In Genesis 1 we read the first chapter. We saw that humans were created for a relationship, a relationship with God. We kept reading. We saw in Genesis 2 a second reason why humans were created. We were created for a role. We were created to be God's co-workers, working alongside God, managing and caring for part of creation; the garden of Eden.

But sadly that wasn't the end of the story. We kept reading. And in Genesis 3 we saw how the first humans stopped doing what they were supposed to do.

They disobeyed God's direction for their lives. They ate from the tree whose knowledge God knew would only harm them. And it did. It did. As a result of their action, the humans forfeited not only their relationship with God. They forfeited their role as God's co-workers in the Garden. And that affected everything.

And maybe you'll remember what God said to Adam at the end of Genesis 3. Because if you do you'll understand better the connection between the words of Genesis and the words of Paul that we read this morning. In Genesis 3, God tells Adam, " Cursed is the ground because of you ... through painful toil you'll eat from it ... and it will produce thorns and thistles for you."

You see, just like Barry and the bees in the movie, the failure of the first humans had far-reaching consequences, not only for humanity but for the world. And Paul lays out the consequences in Romans 8. He says, "the creation was subjected to frustration; not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it (and don't miss this next phrase), the one who subjected it," Paul says "in hope ... in hope that it would one day be liberated from its bondage to decay, and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God."

And the hope that Paul writes about in Romans is the same hope that Paul has in mind in 2 Corinthians. The hope of God, Paul says, his hope for creation is now being fulfilled. In and through Christ, a new creation is coming into being. And in that new creation men and women who have believed in Christ (that's you and me) we have been given back not only our relationship with God, but our role working alongside Him. In the new creation, Paul says, we have become "God's co-workers" working to reconcile the whole world to God in Christ.

Last week Dr. Kile helped us understand that the world that needs reconciling includes us, each of us, personally. The world includes you and it includes me. And each of us needs to be reconciled to God through Christ. "For God so loved ..." But if we stop there, at that level, as Paul says in the second half of verse 17, we will have received God's grace in vain. Why? Well think about it.

What Paul's really saying is pretty simple. He's saying that if we only take enough of God's grace into our lives to restore our relationship with Him, then the true purpose of grace won't be realized. For the real reason God sent His grace into the world in Christ was not only to restore our relationship with God but to give us back our role. You see if we hoard God's grace, it will still work in us, but it won't work through us.

And God's grace, my friends, was always meant to work through us. God has always wanted his grace to give us back our role, our job, our work. God sent His grace to us to make it possible for us to join Him again in the work He's doing in the world. It's called the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God. And God wants you and me to be personally involved in it.

God is trying to bring the world back into relationship with Him. And that includes more than just us. It includes everyone. And more than everyone! More than everyone? That's right. For in the same way that the fall of humanity affected everything, the redemption of humanity, Paul says, is meant to affect everything.

And everything means everything. It means that whether we know it or not, as human beings redeemed by Christ and reconciled to God, you and I have the potential through our life to bring God's grace into contact with every person we meet and every part of creation we touch. But it all depends on us. It all depends on our realizing and taking up not only our new relationship with God but our new role in God's mission; what Paul calls "our ministry of reconciliation."

Eight years ago, Yogi Berra was asked to be the commencement speaker at Montclair State University. It's a school in New Jersey with an enrollment of about 15,000 students. And if you know anything about Yogi, you know he's famous for saying things in his own way. So here in Yogi's own words are some pieces of advice about leaving school and starting work in the real world.

First, he said, "never give up, because it ain't over 'til it's over."

Second, "when you come to a fork in the road, take it."

Third, "don't always follow the crowd. Nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded."

Fourth, "stay alert. You can observe a lot just by watching."

And finally, Yogi told the graduates remember, whatever you do in your life, 90 percent of it is always half mental."

And you know what? That last quote really works. It's true. At least when it comes to beings God's co-workers. How? Well half of becoming a co-worker with God in the world is understanding that's what God's calling you to do. But only half, the mental half. The other half of becoming God's co-worker however isn't about understanding. It's about doing.

It's about taking up your role. It's about taking part with God in the reconciliation of the world. It's about getting involved, personally involved in the *Missio Dei*, investing your life in the mission you see God doing in the world and allowing that investment to grow until it affects everything. "And whatever you

do," Paul writes in Colossians, "whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

You know last Sunday we had an art show here at church, and the show was made up of paintings and pictures drawn by many of the children in our church. And it reminded me that when my daughters Hope and Joy were little girls, they would sometimes come home from pre-school with pictures they'd painted or drawings they'd done. And when they came in the house, sometimes they'd find me and give me the picture. And as they gave it to me they'd say, "Here Dad, I did this just for you!"

And someday my friends, when you and I walk out of this world and into our Father's house, I hope we'll be able to do the same. I hope we'll be able to walk into the presence of our Heavenly Father and say, "Here Dad, I did these things just for you." I worked where you called me to work. I involved myself in your mission in my world. I tried through to invest my life in the *Missio Dei*. I did it just for you."

And perhaps when we do that, we'll hear our Father say to us what I used to say to my girls. "It's beautiful. I couldn't have made it any better myself." As God's co-workers in the world, I can't imagine any conversation that could be more fulfilling than that. Let's pray ...