

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED     **II Corinthians 5:20—6:2****NOW IS THE TIME !**

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!*

*We, then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you" Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation!*

"Please get going, you have to be at the airport by 8:00! Ok we're here, but please walk faster, boarding starts in 10 minutes. Please *hurry*, the boarding gate closes in 1 more minute!" These are urgent requests, encouragements, "proddings," offered by a concerned mother for her less than excited teenager who needs to make his flight. "Now is the time!"

That's what Paul is saying in our text for today. And that's what the pastor says during Advent!

The congregation at Corinth had been a congregation needing special concern from Paul. There were divisions within the membership. There were those thinking that earthly appeal, power, and wisdom in the message were superior over the message itself. There were those who tolerated gross sin as if it were a matter of being "accepting." There were those who rudely took fellow believers to court to settle worldly matters. There were those who misunderstood the true blessedness of marriage. And those who felt they had a right to do anything, even if it damaged the faith of others, to say nothing of their own. There were those who misused spiritual gifts—such as speaking in tongues, back then. There were those who misconstrued the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and their own future resurrection as well. All are mentioned in I Corinthians.

Here in II Corinthians Paul is defending his apostleship. There were those who labeled him an inferior messenger of God, interested only in self, that his message of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ crucified and risen was really not entirely the whole thing. So Paul expressed his great love, care, and concern for the church at Corinth, urging the believers to cling to Christ—for their own good. He wrote in the verses before our text: *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord! we persuade men. . . . God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them and has committed to us the Word of Reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:10ff. )*

Paul's whole point was their standing, their status, before the Lord at that time and at the end. He knew the terror of the Lord. He knew the dread and panic of being found on the opposite side from God. He had been a persecutor of those who were clinging to the crucified and risen Christ for forgiveness and salvation. He had scoffed at the idea; but by God's intervention, Paul fell humbly before Him.

He says now to his beloved people at Corinth, I am sent out by the Lord Himself, one of his first-place outreachers, one who speaks for Him, His ambassador. God is talking to you through me. Remember the Lord is your best coach ever, your best advisor ever. He calls you aside during practice or the game, and says, "Ok Joey, Ok Susan. This is where you're going wrong. Here's the key to the whole thing." God is yearning to coach and lead you. He's doing it through me. I'm not just a free-spirit with my own ideas, with just another option among many for you. I implore you. I beg you, I plead with you, in Christ's behalf, for your own good. Much like the mother trying to get the teenager onto the plane. Much like the mother in the country song, "*Don't take your guns to town, Bill. Leave your guns at home, son.*" Heartfelt pleading. Paul is concerned about his dear charges. He says, *Be reconciled to God.* You can't face the music on your own. Don't kid yourself, don't fool yourself, don't ignore the facts, don't fall for the lies. God holds you 100% accountable for every minute of every day. Be reconciled, before it's too late.

Paul has the solution for them. *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!* For the guilt and sin and failures that you stand with before God—for them to be

taken off your record, Jesus has stepped in for you. The text isn't saying God made Jesus to sin, or that God forced Him to sin. It's saying, God turned Jesus the spotless Son of God into sin—sin! Yuk!—for us. And then God dealt with Him, our sin, accordingly, at Calvary. Also, Yuk. In Him, we who are Yuk become righteousness itself! Pure and acceptable at every point! All in Jesus. Now is the time! Repent! Cling to Him!

Paul was preparing his people for the return of Christ. He was / is also preparing you for the return of Christ, when you must stand before Him. And right now we can use his same words to prepare for Christmas and the celebration of His first coming to earth.

Will you be prepared for Christmas? And you know I mean on the inside, not material Christmas. Are the following really true, in the spiritual sense?

*I won't be ready for Christmas because I've been sick.*

*I won't be ready for Christmas because we had an emergency in our family.*

No.

Here are other statements for missing out on Christmas, sad indeed:

*I won't be ready for Christmas because I frittered away my time on the X-box, or video games, or whatever the latest device is.*

*I won't be ready for Christmas because I was sure there would be time later, but then . . .*

*I won't be ready for Christmas because it sneaked up on me.*

*I won't be ready for Christmas because I put off buying a gift*

All sad, all regarding outward Christmas.

Yet the following false-confidence is also something to consider: One can be ever so outwardly prepared, but still miss Christmas.

*I'm going to have a really good Christmas this year, because I have everything ready.*

But is it spiritual preparation?? Spiritual preparation is recognizing and holding to what our text says: *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!* Here's the essence of it all--that you, unfit and disqualified by your own doing, are not cast away by God, but are taken into His arms through Jesus. This Advent is a time to bring to life that realization again—a realization that is so quickly lost in the regular hum of life.

*Do not receive the grace of God in vain.* Christmas is about God's grace—His undeserved love and pardon. Just like the sheriff who is gracious to you and crumples up the ticket that he has reason to give—not because it was your first time, but maybe your thirteenth time! Not because otherwise you have been spotless, but maybe have a sheet of priors two pages long. Not because you're his friend, maybe his enemy. Not because he owes you one, maybe you never repaid him for the last one you owe him. But just because it's his gift to you. Well, there's no sheriff or policeman like that, but with God and you that is how it is. Therefore, *do not receive His grace in vain!* Do not treat His grace like the new Christmas shirt that you get and then drop it in the middle of the floor and walk on it. Or do not treat it like the badly needed expensive medicine that was provided for you for free, but you pour it down the drain because you don't like the taste of it, and you'll take your chances that something better will come along.

Paul quotes the Book of Isaiah “*In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you*” (Isaiah 49:8), and then emphatically adds *Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation!* Now is the time to re-direct your hearts and thoughts, even your time and energies, this Christmas to the Savior. This is the time of God's acceptance-in-Jesus. This is your “day” of rescue. Celebrate *Unto to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11)!* And this is likewise the day to be prepared for His second Coming. What if Christmas and Judgment Day are the same day this year?! Will you be prepared?

The following is true: I was really prepared for Christmas, because I was sick this year. I was really prepared for Christmas because we had an emergency this year. Absolutely! To cling to Christ, the God-man, your eternal Redeemer from this sinful life, world, death, and hell, is real preparation for Christmas. **NOW IS THE TIME!**

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach ---