

Scriptures: 1 Sam. 17:4-11, 19-23, 32-49; 2 Cor. 6:1-13

Vacation Bible School

This previous week we had eighteen different kids come for VBS. It was a lot of fun! Most of the kids who came – I'd say close to 60% – were kids who don't regularly attend here. The other 40% were our own kids – Alison, Zech, Avian. Of those who weren't from our church family, three of them told me that they had been here last year for VBS. Sometimes we think we aren't making an impact, and then we hear things like that! New Hope, you are making an impact – you are planting seeds, and watering seeds – and I'm proud of you. I'm proud to be your pastor.

This is, in a nutshell, what we're going to focus on today – making an impact. In our first reading this morning, from 1 Samuel, we heard the familiar story of David and Goliath. We don't often think about that story from the angle of making impacts, but impacts were – and are – made when we think about it. For instance, Goliath's size had a negative impact on the Israelite army. They were scared to face Goliath in battle. Instead, we heard how the boy David became a hero to his country, taking on the giant with a slingshot and some stones.

David made an impact on his people, on King Saul, and of course, on Goliath. He killed the giant, after all! David's bravery teaches us a lesson, that when we walk with God and come face-to-face with giants – they may be addictions, bullies, obstacles, you name it – we need not be afraid. As long as we prayerfully do something, we'll make a positive impact. With this in mind, let's turn to our epistolary lesson this morning, found in 2 Corinthians 6:1-13. **Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-13.**

Christ's Ambassadors

Paul the Apostle wrote this second letter to the church at Corinth. Bible scholars think that he wrote the first letter in the spring, and then just before winter came, he wrote this one, sometime around 55 AD. Corinth was that era's "sin city." You know the saying, "What happens in Vegas," well, it was like that in Corinth, too. The church at Corinth had been infiltrated by false teachers who were saying Paul wasn't to be trusted. They even went so far as to accuse Paul of stealing the money that had been collected to send to poverty-stricken followers in Jerusalem.

Our epistolary lesson today is centered in a wider lesson from Paul talking about the work of reconciliation Christ's death on the cross has done for all of us. He even says, "We are Christ's ambassadors," (2 Cor. 5:20), and then elaborates on this topic in the first part of what we're looking at this morning. Paul writes, "as God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain," (2 Cor. 6:1). So, what does that mean? Well, one thing it means is that when we decide to follow Jesus, we just keep

on living life the same old way we used to live. Basically, it boils down to us paying lip service to Jesus, and then doing whatever we feel like doing.

There's a lot of people today running around doing that – even pastors and stuff. It's really sad. In another letter, Paul writes, they “have a form of godliness but deny its power,” (2 Tim. 3:5) – in other words, they put on a good show, but won't let the Holy Spirit change them into the Christ followers He originally designed them to be. The next thing we have in today's lesson is a quote – you see that, if you have your Bible or a Bible app handy. Paul, talking about God, says, “For He says, ‘In the time of My favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation,” (2 Cor. 6:2). The first part of this verse is a quote from the Book of Isaiah, and the second half of the verse is a wakeup call for us.

Salvation is Now

Our culture and society focuses a lot on salvation, being saved, and getting to heaven. Here, Paul seems to suggest that God's pouring out His favor and His salvation in the present time. It's not a “someday, when we all get to heaven” sort of thing – it's a present, current reality. We ought to be living our lives as though we're already in heaven – and work as hard as we may to see that as a reality while we're still here below. If we have this idea that everyone's going to get along and be kind in heaven, shouldn't we be living that out right now? Getting along, and being kind, I mean.

Notice what he says next. “We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited,” (verse 3). See, he's making the point that everything he's done for the church at Corinth has been on the up and up. As followers of Jesus, we also should be doing things, acting with integrity and transparency so people don't trip over our mistakes. When we mess up, it's obvious – nothing's hidden. Paul's telling them that he's been living an exemplary life, because he wants them to follow Jesus, just as he follows Jesus.

Just to be clear, Paul's following of Jesus was no bed of roses. He got into all sorts of trouble for following Him. Ultimately, he ended up on trial before Caesar in Rome, and according to church tradition, he was beheaded by Emperor Nero. Notice what he tells us next. “Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger;” (verses 4-5). He gives a laundry list of all the hard stuff he has gone through already here.

Sorrow and Rejoicing

Paul's telling the church at Corinth – and us today – that he has had to suffer greatly for the Gospel of Christ. Contrast that with the folks who were trying to stir up the local church at Corinth, and what do you suppose they were after? If they are

telling people that Paul's stealing the money, what do you suppose they're after? Money. They want comfortable living. Maybe some prestige or power. Their end goal and Paul's are as different as night and day. Friends, one impact from reading this Scripture on us is this – Paul suffered to follow Jesus, we may have to suffer to follow Him, too.

Paul gave us a laundry list of all the bad things that he endured by following Jesus, and then, part way through, he shifts gears and starts telling some of the good things that he's experienced. "In purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;" (verses 6-7). The Church has a powerful tool – a weapon of righteousness – at its disposal, the Bible. But we have to read it for it to work, friends. If we only hear it or look at it for an hour on Sunday mornings, we are doing ourselves and our families a terrible disservice.

We have to be in it, reading it, praying for God to show us His wisdom through it, on a daily basis. Do you want to have a positive impact on your family? Read the Bible. Talk about what you've read with them. You'll make an impact. Do you want to have an impact on colleagues? Read your Bible. Pray for them. Show them lovingkindness even when they're donkeys – you know what I mean. You'll make an impact.

Must We Suffer?

Christ equips us to make a big impact on people – but we have to be willing instruments in His hands. Paul goes on, "through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything," (verses 8-10). See, Paul's been through it all. Sometimes I hear – and you probably have heard someone say something along these lines, too – that if God loves us, we won't have to suffer. They try to put conditions on God's love. God's love for us is unconditional. He loves us through the good times and the bad.

Look, Jesus is God – and He suffered the most! He went to the cross for our sins. He didn't do anything wrong. He didn't deserve to die. You and I deserve it, because we've sinned. Jesus never did. But He loved us anyways and proved it by going to the cross on our behalf. He washed us clean and proves He is able to do that when He leaves the tomb empty three days later. We can count on Jesus Christ to never fail us or let us down – He takes great care of us!

The story of Jesus Christ – the Gospel – is the greatest news the world has ever heard. He doesn't only save us, but makes us co-heirs with Him, Paul tells us in Romans 8:17. Listen to what Paul says in that particular verse: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ," now watch this, "*if indeed*

we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.” If we are truly following Jesus Christ, we will suffer. We may lose friends, jobs, possessions – but He promises us a life beyond our wildest dreams.

Co-Heirs With Christ

I have always liked history. In September 2022, we watched history unfold on television with the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Shortly after her funeral celebrations wrapped up, the United Kingdom remained in the news because of its system of government. In a monarchy, like the UK and the other Commonwealth realms, when the monarch dies, the heir assumes the throne. Charles, as Prince of Wales, was the queen’s heir, and when she died, he became the new king.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray for God’s “kingdom [to] come.” Jesus, the Son of God, is heir to the throne – He is on the throne right now – and because we have these amazing promises in Scripture, we are joint-heirs with Him. We have full access to every benefit, and privilege that He has, as joint heads of that monarchy. That’s an amazing thing. We’re given full access to the throne room and are privileged to speak directly to God Almighty about even the most miniscule thing that may cross our minds. But sadly, so often we do not live like the princes and princesses of God’s Kingdom which we’re all called to be.

This is nothing new. Paul dealt with this in Corinth. He tells that church, “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange – I speak to you as my children – open wide your hearts also,” (2 Cor. 6:11-13). When we throw our hearts wide open, God uses us to do amazing things – you proved that this past week with VBS – we made impacts with eternal significance on a lot of young lives. So New Hope, keep doing the great things God has called you to do – to make Him known, and to bring hope, grace, and salvation to all God’s people!

Prayer: Your hand is upon Your people, O God, to guide and protect them through the ages. Keep in Your service those You have called and anointed, that the powers of this world may not overwhelm us, but that, secure in Your love, we may carry out Your will in the face of all adversity. Amen.