



## Sermon

### ***Whose ambassador are you?***

**Jeremiah 28:5-9; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42**

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We spoke last week about the Gospel of Kingdom. Jesus is the King. He has broken the power of the enemy and he is leading us in taking back the earth from his rule.

Today's reading relate to our being his representatives – ambassadors if you will.

An ambassador is a representative. An ambassador represents a king. The 1815 Congress of Vienna defined Ambassadors as "...diplomats of the highest rank, formally representing the head of state..."<sup>1</sup>

I thought you could do with a bit of humour and you know an answerphone represents the owner. Here are some suggested answerphone messages – these messages tell us something about the owners:

- "I can't come to the phone now because I have amnesia and I feel stupid talking to people I don't remember. I'd appreciate it if you could help me out by leaving my name and telling me something about myself. Thanks."
- "Greetings, you have reached the Sixth Sense Detective Agency. We know who you are and what you want, so at the sound of the tone, please hang up."
- Hello, this is Douglas. I'm not home right now, but I can take a message. Hang on a second while I get a pencil." (background noise -- open a drawer and shuffle stuff around) "Okay, what would you like me to tell me?"

Paul considered himself Christ's ambassador. An ambassador speaks on behalf of his ruler and his whole duty and responsibility is to interpret that ruler's mind faithfully to those to whom he is sent.

Paul used this "ambassador" idea twice<sup>2</sup>. In Ephesians 6 he wrote about being an ambassador in chains declaring the mystery of the gospel boldly. In 2 Corinthians he wrote, "So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us."

The theologian, James Packer, says, "The figure of ambassadorship highlights the authority Paul had, as representing his Lord, as long as he remained faithful to the terms of his commission and said neither less nor more than he had been given to say."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, "Ambassador", referenced 27/6/2014.

<sup>2</sup> Eph 6:18-20; 2 Cor 5:18-10

## The privilege of an ambassador

The gospel reading carries on directly from last week's where Jesus warned of persecution and told us not to be afraid. There were three reasons:

- 1) False accusations will eventually fail because the truth will come out;
- 2) God is the one with real power over body and soul – we should respect most the one who has the power of eternal life or death;
- 3) God knows every detail about each of us – nothing escapes his knowledge and we can trust him.

Jesus continues by talking about our representing him. Remember this section of chapter 10 is clearly addressed beyond the twelve apostles to all disciples being sent out to the world. And we are all sent out with the great commission, "Go, therefore, into all the world and make disciples..." Put simply he said, "Anyone who receives you, receives me; anyone who receives me, receives God the Father."

Do you see the great importance of the messengers here? In as much as you are a messenger of Christ, you are important like that. When you tell someone about him; when you speak a message he gives you for someone you are his representative. If they receive you they receive him. If they receive your words, they receive his words. Not only do they receive Jesus, but also God the Father.

If you bring a prophetic message to someone and they receive it, they receive the words of God into their lives. When you bring a message that he wants to heal or intervene, you represent your King's willingness to act.

It is worth pondering this declaration of Jesus. If you start to believe it, what difference would it make to your view of yourself and your place in God's scheme of life.

However, it is not just important for us, there is blessing for those who welcome Christians. When you are received by someone because you are a Christian, they are receiving Jesus and so the Father. Not only that but there are rewards involved. The one giving hospitality to a messenger of Jesus - even as little as a glass of water - shares in his/her reward!

## The service of an ambassador

We have heard from Jesus of the privilege of representing him and the blessings others receive from assisting his people. Let's turn to another aspect of representing him. In the Epistle, Paul is teaching on the new life we have in Christ. We are, remember, translated from one kingdom to another – from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of light.<sup>4</sup> Here in Romans, he uses the language of sin and righteousness instead.

Perhaps a story will illustrate Paul's argument. There was once a slave with a cruel and oppressive master. The tyrant exploited him and made his life one of unceasing toil and labour. Sometimes he tried to escape but he could never achieve it.

Meanwhile there was a great and good king who lived nearby. He took pity on the slave and arranged an amazing plan to set him free. He arranged for the slave to die and come back to life again. When the tyrant looked for his slave he found that he was dead and so he had no claim over him. However, the kind king took the former slave to his palace. The man was overjoyed to be in a place of such wisdom, grace and power. He loved his rescuer deeply and wanted to be like him and please him.

He was now dead to sin and alive to God. Because we are dead to sin, it has no claim or hold over us. Now we are alive to God, who has the legitimate claim on you.

It is not that there are two masters who both rule us – we are dead to sin. How did it happen? When we come to Christ as saviour, we are united with him and his death is counted as our death, his new life as our life.

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<sup>3</sup> James Packer J., 1986, *Your Father Loves You*, Harold Shaw Publishers

<sup>4</sup> Colossians 1:13

Now the former slave is happily going about his new Lord's business when he encounters his old master. The old master tries to frighten him into obeying his commands as he used to do. What should the slave do?

He needs to remember that the old master has no authority over him anymore – no rights, no power. He has a new master. So to every command of the tyrant he must say, "No, you have no claim over me at all. I will not give in; I refuse!" At the same time, he needs actively to choose to obey the new master – "offer the parts of your body to God as instruments of righteousness."

We need to be careful not to put ourselves into the temptation to sin. Anything which unnecessarily leads me into the influence of the old master is to be avoided. Instead we should yield ourselves to God and ask him to lead us in his ways; ask him for the strength not to fail for temptation. "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."<sup>5</sup>

Now suppose we see a slave and we don't know to whom he or she belongs. Effectively, Paul says, just watch and see whom that person obeys that tells you who is the master. One master is described as sin<sup>6</sup> and uncleanness<sup>7</sup>; the other as righteous<sup>8</sup> and God<sup>9</sup>.

Each master demands a kind of service and gives a reward. Uncleanness demands service in the form of sin, iniquity and shameful things these lead onto escalating wickedness. The reward for this service is a payment of death.

But if your master is God, his service is obedience which leads to righteousness and that leads onto holiness. What payment is offered by God for his service? Well, he doesn't offer payment rather he gives a free gift of eternal life.

As we follow Jesus and find we are his representatives, his ambassadors, we find that our way of life is representing the true loyalty of our hearts. As we represent him in the world, we will find his nature welling up and being displayed in our lives. It is part of the responsibility we have serving our king that we do represent him properly and not the enemy of our souls.

What are you representing to people around you? Whom would they conclude you serve?

We have considered the privilege and the service of an ambassador of Jesus. The Old Testament lesson offers us a glimpse of the responsibility of an ambassador.

## **The responsibility of an ambassador**

God had declared judgement against the kingdom of Judah. They were to be conquered by the Babylonians. Jeremiah had prophesied that they should submit to the Babylonian ruler and then they would escape with their lives. However, Hananiah had resisted this message and proclaimed an alternative message he claimed was from God, saying they should stand firm and in two years all would be well.

Jeremiah acts graciously. He says, "Amen, May the Lord do so!" There does not seem to be any sarcasm in his words. He himself did not desire the judgement to come. He warned Hananiah, though, that the true prophet is seen when the words are fulfilled. Jeremiah knew the message God had given him. He knew the message of the other prophets which had warned of judgement. But he does not have to justify himself – it is up to God to justify his word.

So he gives his warning and leaves. In the following passage, God speaks to him further and gives him a message for Hananiah. Continuing from verse 15, we read,

*"Listen, Hananiah, the Lord did not send you, and you have caused this people to put their trust in falsehood. Therefore, thus says the Lord: Now I am about to drive you off the face of the ground; this*

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<sup>5</sup> Mt 6:13

<sup>6</sup> Vv16-18, 20, 22-23

<sup>7</sup> V19

<sup>8</sup> Vv17-20

<sup>9</sup> Vv22-23

*year you will die, because you have spoken apostasy against the Lord.”  
So Hananiah the prophet died that year, in the seventh month.*

Hananiah wanted his words to be true. Perhaps he saw Jeremiah’s words as defeatism or treachery. But while he, and maybe we, would call it wishful thinking or unorthodox teaching, God is blunt to call it “falsehood” and “apostasy.” Why did God send prophets (like Jeremiah) to warn of judgement? It was in the hope of their repentance. It was to be just – so they were warned and had a chance to change. Hananiah’s fault was to lead the people to believe a lie.

God gave warnings to Ezekiel (a contemporary of Jeremiah) for Israel. In Ezekiel chapter 3 and again in chapter 33, he was told that if he passed on a warning and the people did not heed him, he would be innocent of the any blame. But if he didn’t pass on the warning, then he would be held guilty of their deaths when judgement came upon them.

Paul refers to that same principle when he farewelled the Ephesian elders and said, “ I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”<sup>10</sup>

That is one of many concerns I have about moves by some in the church to declare actions described in Scripture as immoral now to be moral. We then become false prophets and not only lead people into judgement with a false confidence but we also become liable for their blood before God.

Jesus’ words about those who cause little ones to sin come to mind – he said it would be better for them to be cast into the sea with a millstone tied around their necks!<sup>11</sup>

We have seen that we have the great privilege of representing Jesus but that carries the great responsibility of representing him accurately and being responsible for the message we pass onto those who hear and see us.

What then do our lives tell people about Jesus? What do our words convey? Are they accurately representing his heart, his mercy, his grace, his truth and at times his opposition, rebuke or warning?

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 20:26-27

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 18:6