

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Good News in Strange Places*, No. 1

Suffering

October 3, 2021

2 Corinthians 5:16 – 6:2 [NIV]

*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*<sup>6:1</sup> As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. <sup>2</sup> 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.*

---

We are in 2 Corinthians 5 today, if you'd like to find that place again in your Bible. The Apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church – Chapter 5.

"I've been serving God for years, but then my child got really sick. That doesn't seem right. Why didn't God prevent that?"

"I started going back to church, but then none of my friends wanted to hang out with me anymore. What happened?"

"It seems like right after I did what I really thought God was asking me to do, my life started falling apart."

"You know, right after I told God, "OK, I'll serve you in this way," I lost my job. I thought life was supposed to get easier, not harder, when you're obedient to God."

Questions like these arise, to some degree and at some time, in the heart of every follower of God sooner or later.

"Why do really hard things happen to really faithful people?"

And they do. It's a fact of life, and it has been from the very beginning, which is precisely what Paul is talking about here.

Just like every New Testament church, the Corinthian Christians were experiencing difficulty. We're not absolutely sure of what theirs was, though Paul gives us hints about it all through chapters 4 and 5: rejection, persecution, and physical difficulties all come up.

And Paul mentions them with empathy, because he himself experienced those things too. He goes into detail about all his own suffering later in chapter 6.

But he writes here because these hardships were tempting at least some of the Corinthian believers to back away from Jesus. Maybe not to renounce Him completely, but at least to distance themselves from unreserved obedience to Him.

So, to address this issue, this crisis, Paul uses the image of an ambassador.

Does anyone know who Daniel Foote is?

You wouldn't have known anything about him before two weeks ago, when he appeared in the news.

Mr. Foote was *not* the *chief ambassador*, but he was *an ambassador* – a Special Envoy, actually – from the United States to Haiti, until he resigned a couple weeks ago, because he did not agree with our government's decision to fly some of those Haitians on our southern border back to Haiti.

Now, I'm not here to comment on that policy. I'm just telling you, whether or not you agree with it, Mr. Foote did the right thing in resigning his ambassadorship, because of the very definition of ambassador.

An ambassador, you see, is a citizen of one nation who is commissioned by his leader – his King, if you will – to live in another nation in order to represent and speak for his home nation in that foreign place.

So, an ambassador's job is to communicate and live out the values and wishes of his homeland in a foreign land to a foreign people and a foreign king. You are the face of your home nation – you speak for your home nation in a foreign place.

That's a huge responsibility, and Daniel Foote realized he could no longer do it with integrity, since he personally did not support the U.S. position on deportation.

That's why I say, there was nothing else he could do, and still maintain his own personal integrity.

The Apostle Paul sees followers of Christ, Christians, as ambassadors.

We are citizens of God's Kingdom who have been commissioned and sent by Jesus, our King, to this world – we are sent to this nation and people – in order to represent Him and His interests here.

That means we should not be surprised to find that, from time to time, we will hold different values than this nation to which we are sent and in which we live. The truth and magnitude of that, unfortunately, is getting more evident by the day.

As citizens of God's Kingdom, we speak something of a different language. We have a different culture.

We have traditions – priorities, ways of life – that will, in some way, sooner or later, clash and put us at odds with our host nation, whatever it is, and we should not be surprised by that.

That's just the way it goes for ambassadors, you see.

Ambassadors fully expect certain differences to exist.

And those differences can be hard, and can bring hard times to our lives.

To live like heaven in a nation that more and more frequently chooses to live like hell is not easy.

But that is just the way of nations. It is sad and unfortunate, but those are just understood differences.

As an ambassador, it does little good to rage against them or complain about them.

Now, of course we speak and we work for what is perennially right and good.

And the fact is, part of our commission is to invite as many people into citizenship in God's Kingdom as possible.

But there is a limit to what ambassadors can do in a nation that is not their own.

And, an ambassador certainly cannot somehow synthesize or combine the very different values of nations.

Neither can an ambassador, on her own accord, rewrite national mores – either those of her own nation or of her host nation.

That's beyond an ambassador's authority.

There are limits to what an ambassador can do.

***But above all else, ambassadors don't give up on their own nation – their own kingdom.***

Because that's their home. That's who they are. That's where they ultimately belong, and that's where they'll ultimately return, especially if their kingdom is God's Kingdom – if theirs is the perfect and right and good Kingdom.

If you're a citizen of the Kingdom of God, well, you surely don't want to renounce your citizenship of that Kingdom for the sake of some lesser Kingdom.

If Jesus is the King of your nation, and if your King has done for you all that Jesus has done for His people (all that Paul talks about there in verses 17 and on):

*If your King paid the cost to redeem you – to return you to Himself,*

*If your King has forgiven your poor behavior – your rebellion against Him,*

*If your King has made you nothing less than a new person, If your King has given you a high calling and purpose and office,*

*If your King has, in fact, made you His ambassador – entrusting you with the great honor of representing Him to others and introducing others to Him, and even inviting them to become citizens of your nation – His kingdom...*

Well then, that's a King – that's a kingdom – you'd be a fool to walk away from just because the ambassador job might get hard from time to time, or because things don't always go the way you think they should.

If your King is as good and wise and just and loving as all that, then as His ambassador – as His representative, the smartest thing you can do is to trust your King and His leadership, even when you don't understand why things happen the way they might.

You just don't give up that sort of privilege and honor and blessing – you don't give up that sort of citizenship – just because of a little difficulty.

This is Paul's argument to those Corinthian believers who were considering walking away from their citizenship in Heaven – walking away from their ambassadorship – because life was getting hard for them.

They were thinking it simpler to just give in.

"But, my," Paul says, "look at all you'd lose if you did! You don't want to do that. You *don't* want to do that."

***We don't want to do that!***

We can't let life's hardships – life's disappointments, the opposition and difficulties that come with following Jesus – get us down or back us away from Him and His Kingdom.

*Those people who disappoint you,  
those things that happen that you don't understand,  
those value differences between us and the world around us:*

they're just part of what it means to be an ambassador of the most magnificent King and of the greatest Kingdom that ever existed, and of the only Kingdom that will exist forever.

The fact is, so many of those difficulties and hardships and conflicts we face are actually *good* news, because when they appear in a Christian's life, that's very often an indication that we're staying faithful to our heavenly citizenship. We're resisting the temptation to compromise our values and our commitment to our King.

Very often, the conflict we experience is because the rulers of the kingdoms of the world and the Ruler of the Kingdom of Heaven don't get along. They disagree deeply about what's right and what's wrong, and we're caught in the middle of that great, supernatural struggle.

We're caught up in a great conflict between kingdoms.

And where ambassadors are concerned – when the citizen of one kingdom is living in another – there are some things, some of those conflicts, that just can't be helped.

Now, ambassadors don't go out just looking for trouble. That's self-serving and wrong-headed. We represent the Prince of Peace, after all, so we're called to do all we can to live in peace.

But when differences and difficulties find us, that only proves that we're doing our job: we're fulfilling our commission of representing Christ's Kingdom in an earthly kingdom that is often hostile to our King.

And that's good news, even though it's found in the strange place of suffering and hardship.

So please, don't even consider stepping back from Jesus because you're suffering a bit – or even a lot.

Paul says there in verse 1, "***Don't receive God's grace in vain.***" This is all part of your ambassadorship; part of what it means to be *in*, but not *of*, this world; part of what it means that no servant is ever above their master.

It's all part of following King Jesus while living in a nation that follows a different king.

Every morning, the ambassador of the United States to every nation where we have an embassy, from Albania to Zimbabwe, goes out into the embassy courtyard and raises an American flag – often right in the middle of the capital of whatever nation they're in.

That flag flying there is a sign that this little piece of land belongs to the United States, and here within these walls, all that is done is done according to the way of America.

The flag reminds us that there's a little piece of America in that foreign land.

The same is true of what we do here today.

In our gathering together, and especially here at the Lord's Supper, we recognize and celebrate Jesus and His kingship over us.

In all we do here today, and especially at this table, we raise a flag declaring that this little piece of land belongs to the Kingdom of God, and all that's done here honors Him.

We do this together, as His ambassadors, whether we are filled with happiness today or suffering under some burden.

And we do this in just the way Jesus told us to – remembering Him as the King who Himself suffered and died for His people.

## Service of Holy Communion

Closing Song: *Rejoice the Lord is King*

Benediction:

It's been said that the honor of a nation rests in the ambassador's hands.

May we be the ambassadors Christ has commissioned us to be, so that in both times of ease and times of suffering, we represent our King and Kingdom faithfully and joyfully – knowing that ours is the King above all Kings, and His the only everlasting Kingdom.