

## 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let me tell you a story. There's a woman in a 4x4 Chelsea tractor. She is driving home on the M4 when she notices in her rearview mirror a huge lorry that is driving uncomfortably close.

She steps on the accelerator but so does he. She leaves the motorway but so does the truck. She starts to get very anxious. She turns suddenly onto a side street but the lorry mounted the curb and pursued her. She drove faster and faster. The truck driver even went through red lights to pursue her.

Finally she swerves into a petrol station and jumps out of the car to cry for help. But the driver of the lorry ran out of his cab towards her car, opened the back door and yanked out a man with a knife who had been hiding intending to do her harm.

The truck driver had seen him from the greater height behind the front seat and had pursued that car. But that woman didn't realise that and she was running from the wrong man. Running from the wrong man.

And all of us I expect have nightmares about something chasing us. About being pursued. In the passage that I just read, really it is the strangest pursuit story that has ever been told.

[ 1 : 20 ] And it is the story of how you and I are pursued by God. Pursued by God. So four things that I want to look at on that. Number one, the surprising reality of God's pursuit.

The surprising reality of God's pursuit. Look at verse 18. All this is from God. All this, all what? All of salvation. All of the Corinthian salvation.

All of our salvation, if we are a Christian, is from God. Look at verse 15. He died for all. Verse 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

That's our salvation. The Holy Spirit changing our hearts. Verse 19. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. So Paul looked at the entire panorama of salvation.

From the very beginning to the very end. And he said, it is all from God. From first to last, this has been a word of God. Now for some of you that might be surprising.

[ 2 : 29 ] When we became Christians, we tend to think that we found Jesus, don't we? We think that we have discovered Christ. That we pursued him. That we searched for him.

We tend to think that we saw Jesus and we desired him and we sought him. But the Apostle Paul looks at salvation and he did not understand it as man seeking God.

But from first to last, he saw it was God seeking man. And the surprising, unexpected truth is that God has sought us and God has pursued us. There was a convention in London of the world's greatest leaders at the start of the 20th century.

And there were seminar leaders discussing how is Christianity different from all other religions.

What's the one big difference? C.S. Lewis hadn't yet arrived. He was late coming in. He says, what are you discussing? They said, we're trying to find an answer as to how Christianity is different to other religions.

Lewis immediately said, that's easy. Grace. Grace. Grace. Grace is what makes Christianity different from all other religions. In the religions of all the world, it is man seeking after God.

[ 3 : 39 ] But Christianity is all about God seeking man. And Paul understood that. Now I want to say to you, that is the message of the Bible. Let me give you a little whistle-stop tour of the Bible.

So when Adam and Eve fell, they ate the forbidden fruit. And there's a hide and seek game that goes on in Eden. But who is hiding and who is seeking?

Adam and Eve are hiding, aren't they? They hide behind the bushes because they're afraid. But who is the one who comes seeking? It is God who comes and says, where are you?

They turned their back on God. But God wonderfully did not turn his back on them. You look at Genesis chapter 12. The beginning of the history of the people of Israel.

And Abraham is in Ur of the Chaldees. And here comes God. And God invades his life. Abraham is not a kind of religious God-fearer. He is a total pagan.

[ 4 : 37 ] And God comes and chases him down. Abraham, who is he? He is a worshipper of idols. He is an idolater. And God comes and God chases Abraham. And Paul says to Abraham, this is all from God.

And he keeps saying it again and again and again. So when the Lord Jesus comes and says, I am the good shepherd. And the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The good shepherd goes after the sheep. What did Jesus say to James and John? He said, you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.

And so for the rest of the day and the rest of the week, we could go on. And we would see in the Bible a picture of a God who is reaching and wooing and pursuing and drawing and saving. And anywhere in the Bible where you see man or human beings reaching out for God, it is only because God has worked in that man's heart to reach him.

Augustine understood this. He said, I should not have sought you, God, unless you first found me. Louis Pasteur, we know him for his work on viruses, on rabies, bacteria inoculation.

[ 5 : 52 ] And Louis Pasteur's work was interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War, which began in 1870. His only son was in that army. Louis Pasteur had lost three daughters to tragedy before, and now his son was on the front line.

He'd endured for him for weeks. And so Louis Pasteur left the lab and set off. And as he made his way north, the roads were chocked full with defeated soldiers and stragglers.

He finally located his son's regiment. What's happened to Jean-Baptiste? he said. And the news was depressing. Out of 1,200, only 300 were left alive, the officer said.

Pasteur's next move, you can read it, is he went through a nightmare of winding roads, chocked full of dead horses and men suffering from freezing cold and infected wounds.

And finally he recognised a gaunt soldier, weak with hunger. And a father embraced his son. That is the picture of the Gospel.

[ 6 : 59 ] That is how God pursues us. It is all from God. He is the one who pursues. Now let's see, secondly, the appalling target of God's pursuit, verse 19.

That is in Christ, God was reconciling, God was bringing together the world and God to himself. What does reconciliation mean?

We use it politically, don't we? The word reconciliation. You know when there's a quarrel and it needs to be settled. It's to bring those into harmony who weren't in harmony.

And so if you need to be reconciled to someone, that presupposes, doesn't it, they were your enemy. Friends, don't need to be reconciled. And our sin has made us enemies of God.

Now look at verse 19. Not counting their trespass, not counting their rebellion, their sin against them. Now we need to see that God was pursuing us even when we were sinners.

[ 8 : 01 ] Even while we were opposed to him. Even while we were God's enemies. Why do you pursue an enemy?

Why does our country pursue enemies? Why do you pursue an enemy? To kill them. But he was pursuing his enemies.

To save. We call it grace, don't we? Unmerited favor. We don't deserve that. Grace is an undeserved gift. And if you've been to church, you've probably sung about it.

Christians talk about it. But I think we've domesticated it. That God is a gracious God. It's so pretty. But it's not as pretty as you might think. And so if you know the life of Jesus in the Gospels, who did he gather to himself?

Thieves and prostitutes. And pimps and tax collectors. And what did the good church people of the day say? We don't want anything to do with a Messiah.

[ 9 : 02 ] Who saves those kind of people? Why does anyone have interest in scorpions? There are odd people. You go to their house. You go to their house and they've got a snake with a pet or something ridiculous.

Would you like to hold it? Or a scorpion. Why would anyone pursue scorpions? It's kind of a fable. It's sort of a wise old teacher sitting by the edge of a waterfall.

And a scorpion is drifting past him on a piece of driftwood. And if he lets it go, that scorpion with the driftwood will go over the edge of the waterfall. So the wise old teacher reaches out and the scorpion stings him.

And he does it again. And he stings him. The little boy sitting next to him says, why are you doing that? And the wise old man says, it's the scorpion's nature to sting, he replied.

But it's my nature to save. And that is the gospel. Not counting our trespasses against us. Jesus said in Luke 19 verse 7, for the son of man came to save that which was good.

[10:08] No. The son of man came to save that which was flourishing. The son of man came to save that which was moral. No, the son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

I was praying with a friend recently and he prayed for his non-Christian friends. And he said, I pray for them even though they don't want you to save them. And that is the reality.

That is the way you were born. What did Paul say in Romans 8? While we were still enemies. Christ died for us.

We are the appalling target. We don't say it. But we think, well of course God pursued me. We ought to be appalled. That we are the target of God's pursuit.

The appalling target of God's pursuit. Read the book Hosea. It's a famous book. God looks at Israel. And he tells a story. And he says, go get a wife. Where do you get a wife?

[11:07] Go to the brothel and find a prostitute. And marry her. And that's what Hosea did. She didn't seek him. But he sought her. And they started a family together.

But she became bored. And she started to play about. And find pleasure with other men. And she left her children. And she left her home. And her husband. And she became the property of another. And God came to Hosea again. And he says, I want you to go to that adulterous woman. Who's made a fool of you. And I want you to take enough money and buy her back. And so Hosea goes with all the humiliation.

Of chasing after a woman who's humiliated him. Who's been used by the community. And he has to go and get her and bring her home. And what was God saying to Israel through Hosea and Gomer? Well, it's the same thing he's saying to us. You are that woman. But I love you. And if you don't understand that. We are the prostitutes. We are the very unfaithful.

[12:02] Who to this very hour. This very week. We've been unfaithful. And we've committed adultery against our God. Yes, sin is rebellion. Yes, it is. But sin is worse than that.

It is adultery. He doesn't chase you down this lunchtime. Because you're good. Because you're rich. Because you're strong. Because you're beautiful. He chases you.

Because you gossip. And you lie. And you cheat. And you willfully walk away from him. And we deny his sovereignty. Because we think we created ourselves. When we survey everything. That God has given us.

We say, look at what I've done. Look at my life. Look at what I've done. It's mine, mine, mine. And my future. It is mine, mine, mine. He chases us because we're selfish.

And we're dark. And we're futile in our thinking. And a part of us stings his hand when he reaches out to us. And if there's a part of you this lunchtime that says, No, that's not me.

[12:59] Let me say as gently as I can. You're deluded. Because you are standing before a God who gave his own son to people like you. And you're saying, God, I can do it.

I don't need you. So we see the surprising reality of God's pursuit. We see the appalling target of God's pursuit. You see the extreme extent of God's pursuit. Look at verse 19. It says, That is in Christ.

God was reconciling the world to himself. Not counting their trespasses against him. And entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. What is God going to do with your sin? Is God going to say, Okay, I know I'm holy, but I know what you've done.

And I don't care what you did. Somebody has to give an accounting. And that's verse 21, isn't it? For our sake he made him, that's the Lord Jesus, To be sin who knew no sin.

So that in him we might become the righteousness of God. So who was Jesus? He was God's son. God came to his own son. How far would God go? The angels of heaven couldn't believe it.

[14:12] The angels of heaven must wonder, What on earth are you doing to pursue these fallen people? And God says, Even my own son. My son will cry from the garden of Gethsemane, Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.

And the father says back, I cannot let it pass. To what extent will God go in? It's reaching, seeking, wooing, Searching, persuading, and drawing, and saving.

Well, for God so loved, He gave his only son. When I was, I'm growing up in South Wales, About 20 miles from where I live, There was a teenager, he was 16 years old, And he picked up 3,000

pounds Of weight.

3,000 pounds of weight. Why did he do that? It's an astonishing thing. It was in the newspapers, It was on local TV. A teenager, 16 years old, Picking up 3,000 pounds.

Not cash. I mean, I mean, Why did he do it? It was a tractor. He picked up.

[ 15 : 21 ] And why did he do it? Because his best friend, Lloyd, Who was fixing the motor, Was under it. The love that this boy had for his friend, Led him to do the most extraordinary thing.

He picked up a tractor. Now I don't like this illustration, But I'm going to give it to you. There's two people trapped under that tractor.

It's not your friend. It's your son. The other person is a day worker on the farm. And you suspect, in fact, You know that the guy has been stealing from you.

And to get the stranger out, You have to put the weight of the tractor Onto your son. It is a brutal illustration. But that is what the father did. He picked up the weight of our sin, And he put it onto his son.

And you might say that is sensational, That's sentimental. All I'm doing is I'm preaching what Isaiah did. Isaiah said he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

[ 16 : 27 ] How far will God go in this wild chase? He will go as far as to give his own son. And that is the message of Easter, isn't it? The surprising reality of God's pursuit.

The appalling target of God's pursuit. The extreme extent of God's pursuit. And fourthly and lastly, The unlikely participants of God's pursuit.

Look at verse 18. Paul says all this is from God, Who through Christ reconciled us to himself, And gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul speaks of himself, And the band of the apostles. But in another way he speaks to all people, And he says we are to be reconcilers. Not to each other, But with men to God.

In the Hebrew mind, He wants to stress something. When you want to stress something, You repeat it. They didn't have bold font, And they didn't have an underline. They didn't have italics. So look at verses 18 to 19.

[ 17 : 26 ] All this is from God, Who through Christ reconciled us to himself, And gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Verse 19, That is in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, Not counting their trespass against them, And entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation.

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God. Now just notice the stress there. So verse 18, We are given the ministry of reconciliation, Number one.

Verse two, Verse 18 again, Committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. Verse 19, We are Christ's ambassadors. Number four, God is making his appeal through us.

Four times he says it. He says, If you are a Christian, You have been reconciled to God. You have been made a part of God's pursuit.

And we become a part of the hurricane of God's grace. The tidal wave of reaching, And seeking, And persuading, And wooing, And drawing, And saving, And redeeming. We are part of that now.

[ 18 : 36 ] At one time, Do you remember in Jesus' ministry, Peter stood and said, You can't do that. Messiahs don't get crucified. Well, He might as well have been standing in front of a tsunami, Or an avalanche.

He's brushed aside. He joins the pursuit. How would you like to stand before a hurricane, Or a tidal wave? You try and stop it. You're crazy. And that's what it's like, You and I trying to stop the pursuit of God.

Now, of course, In the ultimate sense, God's will is done, And it will not be stopped. But there are churches, That they refuse to join in the pursuit. There are Christians, Who fail to realise, That that is part of our calling, To join this pursuit of God.

And the reaching, And the wooing, But we are the unlikely participants. We are the appalling targets. Jeremiah was fed up, The prophet.

And Jeremiah was given a message, Which you and I wouldn't want to take to people. Of all the people in the Bible, The one preacher I wouldn't like to be is Jeremiah. And he keeps going to people, And he keeps getting rejected.

[ 19 : 51 ] And he goes to the people again, And again, And again. And they keep blaming Jeremiah. They kick his head in. And then it says, He says this, He says, If I say, I will not mention him, Or speak any more in his name, There is in my heart, As it were, A burning fire, Shut in my

bones.

And I am weary with holding it in. And I cannot, I cannot stop God's pursuit. And the world will test us, To see how far we will go, In this reaching, And sending, And seeking, And persuading, And moving, And drawing, And saving, And redeeming.

How far will you go? God says, I went to the extent of giving my son. And we say, Well I haven't got time for this. If we truly understand, That we are the scorpions, The prostitutes, The killers, And that Jesus Christ, Has pursued us, How can we not pursue sinners?

When you are here at this lunchtime, And you know actually, You are not at peace with God. A good way of finding that out, Is to think, If you died this afternoon, How would you feel about meeting him?

Would there be peace between you? 2 Corinthians chapter 5, And verse 10, Which is the verse before this section, Tells us that we will all stand, Before the judgment seat of God.

[ 21 : 19 ] All of us here. Every single one of us. Let me read it to you. For we must all appear, Before the judgment seat of Christ, So that each one may receive, What is due for what he has done in the body, Whether good or evil.

That's every single one of us. That all is all. I'm in that all, You're in that all, We're in that all. But there's a second all, In verse 14.

And it's all those, Who believed on Christ. It's all those, Who are going to be saved, Is all those, Who are to be reconciled. So you are in the first all, But are you in the second all?

And it's my job to tell you, That you can be numbered, In that second all. And the apostles answer, Very simply to you today, Is be reconciled to God. God has reached down from heaven, And maybe he's pursuing you, He's been pursuing you for years, He sent his son to bear your sin, What is stopping you, From being reconciled to God?

Stop living for yourself, Live for Jesus Christ, Who died for you, And do it today. And you say, What's the big hurry? Let me read you from, Chapter 6 in verse 2, It says, In a favourable time, I listened to you, And in a day of salvation, I have helped you.

[ 22 : 52 ] Now, Is the time of God's favour, Now is the day of salvation, I implore you, On Christ's behalf, Be reconciled to God.

Let's pray.