

Title: What Are You Going to Do With My World?

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Preacher: Eddie Bellis

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We all know how it is on Christmas morning. Wrapping paper everywhere, somebody has already lost the instructions to something, and a child is holding up a gift like he cannot quite believe his luck.

Years ago, a friend of mine named Phil asked for a globe of the Earth. He did not ask for a video game or a bicycle. He wanted a globe.

His parents were delighted. Finally, they found a gift that might last longer than a few months. They bought him a beautiful one, too: a wooden stand, countries in soft greens and yellows, and oceans an impossibly deep blue. Phil placed it beside his bed, and he turned it, partly looking for places we recognized, partly because we loved the movement of it.

A few months later, his parents were sitting at the kitchen table talking about something ordinary. They started discussing where different things came from. His wife mentioned a scarf she owned and said, "That came from Sri Lanka."

Neither one of them could say exactly where Sri Lanka was. So, Phil's father did what any reasonable person would do. He walked down the hall, picked up the globe, and started back toward the kitchen. That's when he heard the voice behind him. Phil said, "Daddy, where are you going, and what are you going to do with my world?"

Notice what he did not say. He didn't say, "my globe" or "that thing on my table." Phil said, "My world."

Phil's dad gave the usual explanation: "I'm just borrowing it. I'll bring it right back."

But later, alone, the question stayed with him. Because questions like that have a way of growing, and started his child, Phil, asking about a globe. But by midnight, it was no longer about a globe. He really wondered, "What are you going to do with my world?"

I want us to hold that question for a moment because I don't think we can answer it honestly until we listen to someone who spent his whole life answering it.

"Phil thought he owned the world because he held the globe in his hands. We often think the same thing about our lives. But Paul has discovered something astonishing: before he ever gave his life to Christ, Christ had already claimed him, and not only him, but the whole world."

Paul was not asked this question by a curious child. Rather, he asked it of himself, and he writes to a church in Corinth that was struggling with almost everything. Remember, there were divisions, lawsuits, confusion about worship, and people forgetting what it means to belong to Christ. And right in the middle of correcting them, Paul tells them why he lives the way he does:

Paul says, "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). Five times in this passage, Paul uses the language of "winning" or "saving." That repetition reveals something important.

Paul is not simply talking about a method of evangelism. He is describing the deepest conviction of his life. To the Jews, he became like a Jew. To those under the law, like one under the law. To the weak, weak.

Not because Paul lacked convictions. We all know Paul had convictions. But one conviction stood above all the others. Paul was convinced that people need to encounter Jesus Christ.

Paul's flexibility is not a personality trait; rather, it draws deep from the well and is the visible symptom of what he believes the gospel actually is.

The word "saved" has become so familiar in church that sometimes we stop hearing it. We often think of salvation only as rescue. WE ARE being saved from judgment and saved from death. And it certainly is that.

But Scripture also speaks of salvation as being "made whole." Recall in Matthew's gospel when Jesus heals the woman who touches his robe, he says: "Your faith has made you well." The same word translated "well" is the exact word Paul uses for "save."

So, we need to ask two questions: Saved from what? And saved for what? Those two prepositions are important for us to consider.

Notice, the Bible does not minimize what is broken. Sin is not simply a list of mistakes.

Imagine two cups. One is a cheap plastic cup. Drop it, throw it away, replace it. The other cup is a family heirloom passed down for generations. Drop that one, and the room becomes quiet.

Same breaking. Emotionally, the breaking carries a much different weight. The tragedy is not simply that something broke. The tragedy is what was broken.

Friends, we are created in the image of God, and sin is the defacing of that image. But the good news of the gospel is that God does not abandon what has been broken.

Rather than turning away, God comes toward us, and in Christ, God does not simply overlook the cracks. God restores what was broken. Paul says elsewhere, "You were bought with a price." The cross tells us both the seriousness of our brokenness and the depth of God's love.

Yet, here is where we often stop too soon. We think salvation is simply being rescued from danger. Instead, salvation is not only about where we are rescued from. At its source, salvation is about whose we become. (slow down here.)

We need only to look at Paul. He did not find Christ because he was searching. He was on the road to Damascus hunting Christians. Yet, the grace of Christ found him before Paul was looking for grace. The light came first. The transformation came first. Paul's call came after.

That is our pattern of grace. Our repentance does not earn God's love. Our obedience does not purchase God's attention. God acts first, and our lives become the response to what God has already done.

That is why Paul can say, "I have become all things to all people."

His evangelism is not an attempt to prove himself worthy, but it is the overflow of a life already claimed by Christ. There is almost a holy delight in Paul's words. He never writes as though he has been conscripted into a burden he resents. He writes like a man who has discovered the

greatest treasure imaginable and now wonders how anyone could keep it to himself. Grace has made him astonishingly free—free to give up rights, free to cross boundaries, free to spend himself for others because Christ has already spent himself for Paul.

And notice how large Paul's vision is. He does not list only individuals. He names entire communities and worlds: Jews, Gentiles, those under the law, and those outside the law. Paul moves through every place and every people because he believes Christ already reigns there.

As Paul writes in Colossians, "All things have been created through him and for him." Not some things. Paul says, "All things." There is no place where Christ is absent.

No workplace. No family. No neighborhood. No conversation. No corner of creation where Christ does not claim: "Mine.

Evangelism, then, is not convincing Christ to take ownership of the world. It is announcing that Christ already does. To be saved is to have our past, present, and future returned to us under his gracious reign.

- Christ changes our past. The pages we wish we could remove — the moments we replay, the failures we cannot forget — are not ignored. They are redeemed.
- Christ changes our present. The same job. The same struggles. The same ordinary days. But now we see them differently because Christ is present in them.
- Christ changes our future. The resurrection declares that death does not have the final word. Because Christ lives, we will live also.

In 1873, Horatio Spafford sent his wife and four daughters to Europe while he remained behind for business. The ship sank. His wife survived, and his four daughters did not.

Her telegram to him contained two words, "Saved alone."

Upon hearing the tragic news, Spafford traveled across the Atlantic to meet her. As his ship passed near the place where his daughters had died, he wrote: "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll..." He did not write those words because his grief had disappeared. It did not. He wrote them because grief was not the only reality he affirmed.

His loss was real, but he was convinced it was not the last word. That is what Christ does with our future. While the grave is real, it is not final.

So, we return to the hallway where we began. Phil's dad is carrying a globe, and Phil is asking, "Daddy, where are you going with my world?"

And here is the truth, our good news, we have to hear. That world was never really his, and it was never really ours. Every square inch of it belongs to Christ.

Our past. Our present. Our future.

Our relationships. Our work. Our resources. Yes, even our church. All of it belongs to the One who created it, redeemed it, and rose to reclaim it.

The question really is not whether Christ owns the world. He does.

Our deepest understanding comes from the question of whether we will continue carrying it as though it belongs to us. Or whether we will place it back into the hands of the One who already holds it.

And that question is especially before us as a congregation. As First Presbyterian Church continues to listen for God's future, we are not trying to build something that belongs to us. We are not protecting our world. We are not preserving a treasured possession. We are asking how we can faithfully return Christ's world to Christ's purposes.

The people around us are not strangers to God's grace. They are people already loved by the God who made them. The neighborhoods around us are places where Christ is already at work long before we arrive. We are invited to join what he is already doing. They are places where Christ already reigns. The One who says 'Mine' is also the One whose hands still bear the marks of the nails.

So, what will we do with his world? We will carry it. We will love it. We will serve it. And finally, we will return it to him.

Whatever is under your arm right now, carry it down the aisle and out into the world, but carry it to him. And when we place it in his hands, we will discover that we were never carrying the world after all. We were simply being invited to walk with the One who has held it from the beginning.