

Dynamite And A Peat Fire

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[0 : 0 0] Well, for a short while I would like us to turn back together to the passage that you all read and we're going to be looking at the very end of 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21. Our title tonight is Dynamite and a Pete Fire. Now that probably sounds very random.

I hope that in about three minutes time it will make perfect sense. We are looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and that's a very, very rich chapter. One of the things that it speaks about so powerfully is that as a church we have to share the gospel. And so Paul speaks about how we are persuaders. We're seeking to present a robust persuasive case for the claims of the gospel and the reason we want to do that is because the gospel is persuasive. Verse 20, Paul speaks about how we are ambassadors for Christ. We've been sent on God's behalf. We are representing him. We're communicating his message. And not only that, verse 20 also says that we are imploders. We are bringing a message that is so, so important. That's the most important message that the world has ever heard that affects every single human that every single person must respond to. And so we implore, we urge, we beg people to hear this message, to come to Jesus and to be reconciled to God. And the reason we are all of those things, persuaders, ambassadors, imploders is because we have a message. At the heart of Christianity is a message that God is communicating, a message that the church has got to share, a message that everybody must respond to. It's all about a message. And at the heart of that message lies an utterly astonishing reality that is captured in one of the most astounding sentences ever written. It's the last sentence that they all read. It's verse 21. For our sake, he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. That sentence is theological dynamite. Because the more we understand it, the more it will blow our minds in terms of how much

God has done for us. But it's also a spiritual pit fire because it will warm us. It will warm our hearts and it will make us feel safe and secure like nothing else. Verse 21 is mind blowing and heartwarming. It's dynamite and a pit fire. See, it makes perfect sense now. Okay, we're going to look at it together and we're just going to break it down into its separate parts. So we're going to look at little bits in each part of this verse one by one. I'm going to start with these words here. He made. The he there is referring to God, God the Father in particular. And the key point is that it's speaking about God's action. So whatever this verse is describing, which hopefully we'll see in a few minutes, it starts from the fact that God is doing something. This message therefore is referring to God's action, God's plan, God's doing. And Paul's actually already spoken about this about bringing up a few previous verses, verses 18 down to verse 21. Paul's already emphasized that this whole message, all of it is from God. So in other words, everything that that Christianity about is about rests on what God is doing. So that's speaking to us about divine desire. In other words, speaking about what God wants, because it's coming from him. It speaks about divine initiative, the fact that God is the one who takes the first step, he takes action in order to accomplish something. And it also speaks of divine implementation. So not only is it something that God wants, something that God initiates, it's something that God then accomplishes, he implements his plan. And these things are actually incredibly important to remember divine desire, divine initiative, divine implementation, they're incredibly important to remember why. Because we frequently doubt all of them. We think that God doesn't want us. So easy to think like that.

That you can look at 100 other people and see why God would want them. You look in the mirror and think he would not want me. We can doubt divine initiative, because we think the initiative has to come from us, that God is not even remotely interested in us. If he even remembers us at all. And if he's going to notice us, we need to take the first step. And usually that involves some kind of self renovation where we make ourselves better and stop doing the things that we shouldn't do and start conforming to this kind of better person set of expectations that we've created in our own minds.

And we think if we do that, and if we become a better person, then God might notice me. We think the initiative lies with us. And we also doubt divine implementation, because we think that we can stuff it up. So you think about salvation, you think about following Jesus, you think about, you know, living a life as a Christian, whether that's starting out in terms of the first steps as a Christian, telling other people that you're a Christian, becoming a member of the church, becoming more involved in the church. You think, I can't do that because I'll stuff it up. Or even further on in our lives as disciples, we still think to ourselves, I am probably going to stuff things up. And we think that, you know, I'm just a few mistakes away of God saying, look, that's enough. And so we doubt divine desire, we think that God doesn't want us. We doubt divine initiative, we think that we have to take the first steps. We doubt divine implementation because we think that we can stuff it up. And none of them are true. And you only need two words to know that. He made, He did it. He initiated it. He wants it. He accomplishes it. At the heart of this verse, at the heart of Christianity is the he of God that makes it all happen, the God who is not going to sit back and lose you. So that's the first thing we see. Then we see, we start to see what the he made involves. And it says, he made him who knew no sin. So I'm kind of splitting that phrase just now to focus on the fact that made him who knew no sin. Okay, so now we're talking about somebody else. That he is referring to God the Father, but the him is referring to Jesus. And Paul here, Paul who wrote this letter is making one of the most important statements that you find in the whole Bible about Jesus. It's telling us that Jesus knew no sin. Now, what does that mean? And why is it so important? Well, first of all, we have to recognize what it doesn't mean. Now, what it doesn't mean is any idea that Jesus was kind of ignorant and clueless when it comes to sin. So Jesus kind of walked through the world like this kind of weird, ignorant, clueless character, blissfully unaware of the reality of sin around him.

[8 : 30] That is absolutely untrue. One of the key aspects of Jesus coming into the world of what we call the incarnation where Jesus became human. One of the key aspects of that, key implement, implement implications of that is that Jesus, God the Son came face to face with the brutal reality of sin. And you see that when you read through the Gospels, Jesus was exposed to the brutal reality of a sinful world. So even as a baby, he was a victim of attempted murder as Herod tried to exterminate him and all the other infants in Bethlehem.

As an adult, he was constantly mocked, ridiculed, opposed. And in the run up to his death on the cross, he was betrayed, he was beaten, he was rejected, he was condemned. Jesus saw all the reality of sin right in front of him. And it wasn't just two in terms of what he experienced himself, it was two in what he saw in the lives of others. He witnessed the pain and the sorrow and suffering of scourge of people around him. But not only that, he was also subjected to all the temptations of a sinful world. So Satan, just as he tried and succeeded in tempting Adam back in Genesis 3, he tries to do the same thing with Jesus, confronting Jesus, presenting temptations in the most plausible, appealing way possible in order to get Jesus to sin. Jesus saw the brutality of a sinful world. He saw the suffering of a sinful world. He felt the temptations of a sinful world. And yet in all of it, he was without sin. And that's captured so beautifully in Hebrews 4. Jesus is the one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. So what does that mean, that key truth is that he is the one who knew no sin? Well, I want us to unpack that word there, that word new or the concept of knowing. So in biblical language to know is a very, very rich term. And it's even actually quite a rich term in English because initially when we think about like knowing something, you tend to think of knowledge. You know, do you know your tractor brands? I was speaking to a farmer at Dalmore, so all I'm thinking about since then is tractors. Do you know your football score? Do you know this or that? You think about knowledge. Do you know your something? And that's the kind of basic element of knowledge.

But it's more than that. And it's more than that even in our own language because when we talk about someone who's a friend, we'll say, I know them. And when you say I know them, you don't just mean, oh, I have an awareness of their name, where they live and what they do. It's like, no, they're my friend. I know them. The Bible does exactly the same and does even more. That language of knowing is more than just intellectual awareness. And the Bible to know speaks of a relationship. And I think that's a really helpful thing for us to think through because at the heart of the human condition, at the heart of the problems that humanity now faces is the fact that we know sin. And we actually know sin to ever deeper levels. So even at a basic level, we're well acquainted with sin. So what does a lie involve? What does envy feel like? What does juicy gossip taste like? What does bitterness and unforgiveness do in your heart? We all know. We know because we're

acquainted with sin. I know because I've done all those things. And I know it's the same for you. So we're acquainted with sin, but not only are we acquainted with sin all too often. We actually quite like sin. And we don't just know what sin tastes like very often to us, sin tastes good. And we teach sin like a friend. And so frequently, we welcome sin into our hearts. So someone hurts us at work this week or at school or whatever. Someone hurts us. Stayed away, Mr. unforgiveness, Mr. anger, Mr. bitterness, knock on the door of our hearts and we say, come on in. Come on in, make yourself at home, stay the night.

In fact, stay as long as you want. When somebody gets something that we really want and that we really wish we had, Mr. jealousy, Mr. greed and Mr. resentment, they all walk into our hearts and have a feast. When we make a big mistake in our lives, Mr. lies, Mr. cover up, Mr. blame somebody else. They come for a few nights, Airbnb in our hearts. When someone else makes a big mistake in their lives, Mr. mercy less, Mr. gossip, Mr. judgmental, they all walk into the living room of our hearts, put their feet up, put the telly on and make themselves at home. So often sin can find a welcome in our hearts. But I think we can press this language even further because to know in the Bible doesn't just mean acquaintance and it doesn't just mean friendship. To know in the Bible, as I'm sure many of you are aware, can actually refer to the most intimate of relationships. And I think that we can press that imagery into this into this verse because it's pointing us to the fact that frequently we're seduced by sin. Now, when I say that, I don't just mean sexual sin, even though that is an obvious area of sin that many people find very, very tempting.

It applies to all sin. Sin can seduce us. Back in the Old Testament, and there's an amazing story about Joseph, who was sold as a slave, ended up in Egypt, was chief servant in the household of a man called Potiphar, and Potiphar's wife fancied Joseph. And she wanted to sleep with him. And again and again, she was trying to seduce him. And he always resisted until one day, one day, Joseph walked past her, she grabbed his cloak and she says, come to bed with me. Now, Joseph resisted, and in the end, he ended up getting sent to jail as a result. But what Potiphar's wife did to him, sin frequently does to us. So we are successful in life, and the sin of pride grabs us and says, come to bed with me. We fail at something. And the sin of self pity grabs us and says, come to bed with me. We want to escape from the stress and strains and busyness of life. The sin of drunkenness grabs us and says, come to bed with me. We crave intimacy. And the sin of lust grabs us and says, come to bed with me. We feel hurt. The sin of revenge grabs us and says, come to bed with me. And that seductive power of sin is so tempting. But every time we give in, we wake up in the morning thinking, why did I do that? We know sin. We're closely acquainted with it. We're often on friendly terms with it. There's even times when we're seduced by the empty promises of sin. None of that is ever true of Jesus. None of that is ever true of Jesus. He knew no sin. And that is teaching us one of the most important lessons about Jesus is teaching us about his sinless perfection. Everything that we've described about knowing sin, Jesus knows none of it. He has got no acquaintance with sin. Sin is a stranger to him. So that feeling of telling a lie, the empty thrill of revenge, the conflicting pleasure and guilt of gossip, the regret of losing your temper, Jesus knows nothing of that. It's all a stranger to him. Jesus makes no friends with sin. There's no place in his heart for Mr. Judgemental,

[17:50] Mr. Gossip or Mr. Revenge. They're all strangers. In fact, they're enemies to Jesus. They've never, ever, ever got a foot in the door of Jesus's heart. And Jesus has never been seduced by sin. And that was not for a lack of trying on Satan's part. You read about the temptations of Jesus early in his ministry. That is a full scale effort on the path, on the part of the devil to seduce Jesus into sinning. And Jesus always resisted, always refused.

He always said no. When sin tried to seduce Jesus, Jesus responded with the most sanctified get lost that has ever been uttered. Jesus knew no sin. Instead, you have utter sinless perfection in Jesus. Now, you might sort of think to yourself, well, that means that Jesus, you know, he lived in a different experience from us. And he won't know how awful sin is, because it's never been in his heart. Yet, the truth is the other way around. You know, when you think about Jesus knowing how awful sin is, he actually knows better than any of us. Because our acquaintance with sin makes us numb to it. So that's why we're not that bothered when we come across greed, or envy, or gossip, or even questions of sexual purity, which is not that bothered anymore, whether it's about ourselves, or about others, or about our society. Jesus is bothered. Jesus is not knowing sin, the fact that he does not know sin, did not know sin. That doesn't mean that he's clueless about it. It actually means he understands better than any of us how awful sin really is. And it's so important

that we just keep coming back to the fact that our Savior, Jesus, he's the one who knew no sin. That makes Jesus so beautiful. And it makes him so worth thinking about. Just think about Jesus in the week ahead that he just knew no sin. Every time you're weak, every time your day gets ruined this week because of sin, send your mind to Jesus. I think all of that's a stranger to Jesus. He was not like that. Every time you've been hurt in life, every time you've been let down, it's because you're dealing with people who know sin. Jesus doesn't. Jesus is not like that. He is so, so, so not like that. And that's why it's so wonderful to remember that sin is never a friend of Jesus. That means sin is never tagging along when Jesus meets you. When Jesus meets you, when he talks to you, when he promises you something, when he listens to you, sin is never tagging along. Which means he's never lying. He's never double crossing. He's never half hearted. He's never uninterested. He's never manipulative. Sin never tags along when Jesus deals with you because all you have is the sinless perfection of the one who knew no sin. He is the one who's so beautiful and so worthy of our worship. So the verse is telling us about him who knew no sin. Third thing it's telling us is that God made him who knew no sin to be sin. Donald McLeod wrote that that is the boldest statement anywhere to be found in the New Testament.

And he is absolutely right. And part of the reason it's the boldest statement ever to be found in the New Testament is because of who it's talking about. It's talking about the one who knew no sin. And it's only if we grasp the magnitude of how pure and perfect and spotless Jesus is that we realize what an utterly monumental statement Paul is making when he says the one who knew no sin is made to be sin. And so instead of the one who knew no sin being kept as far away from sin as possible, isolated from everything that's wrong and pure and broken, the reality is that in the Gospel the closest connection is made. And there's a deliberate intensity to the language that Paul uses. He's not saying that Jesus is just exposed to sin, not that he's just made a sin offering, but it says that he's actually made to be sin. And that's as shocking as it says it is. Because what Paul is describing here is the impossible being made possible, the unthinkable being made unavoidable, the appalling being made actual. Jesus Christ, the perfect sinless Son of God was made to be sin. What does that mean? And how does that work? Well in order to understand how it works, we have to look back a couple of verses because it helps us to see what Paul is meaning. In verse 18 and 19 Paul talks about the Gospel, the fact that our relationship with God is being restored and the word he uses to describe that is reconciliation.

[23 : 47] And at the heart of that is the fact that in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. Now that's the key phrase that he uses that God is not counting our trespasses against us. And that's describing a key theological term called imputation. That's a word that you'll read in the writings of theologians.

It's an incredibly important word and it's all about counting or accounting or like a ledger. It's the idea of something being held against somebody. In other words, you could paraphrase the fact that God's not counting their trespasses against them is that God is not holding our sins against us. And so even though we are guilty of sin, even though we know sin, even though my sin and your sin is real, God does not count that against us.

And again, there's a brilliant quote from Donald MacLeod. He says this, it is not that God has nothing against us, but that he holds nothing against us. Not that he has nothing against us, we are guilty, but he holds nothing against us. And that's the amazing reality of God's mercy. He does not treat us according to what our sins deserve. But as Phil explained this morning to the kids, and as we've said again and again, that is not to say that the implication of our sin disappears. It's not that God sees all the sin in my heart and your heart and just sort of says, it's gone. That's not how it works. That's impossible. That's to make sin seem like just a phantom, an illusion that's not that important. The death that we owe does not vanish. Our guilt does not evaporate. In the gospel, it's moved. It's moved because it's not counted to us.

Instead, it's counted to someone else. It's transferred from sinners to someone else. It's all placed on Jesus, the one who knew no sin, but who's willing to take our place.

And Jesus does that even though he is completely sinless. And this is where we have to recognize that Jesus is actually totally passive in this verse. You look in this verse, Jesus doesn't do anything in that verse. He just gets stuff done to him. He has made sin. And that's exactly how the gospel works. That Jesus died in the cross and on the cross, all of our sin is counted to him.

[26 : 54] Isaiah captures it perfectly. All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was

afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that said to the slaughter and a sheep before its shearers is silent. So he opened not his mouth. He didn't do anything. It was all done to him.

Our corporate guilt is placed entirely on him. Now, it's important that we recognize there's a tiny phrase there to be sinned three tinsy little words, but there's so much to unpack behind these words. And what I want us to see is that that little phrase there, it speaks of total liability. And there's a magnificent vagueness about that word. You look at that word sin, and it's just in just a broad general sense that it's being used. It's as big and as broad as it appears. And that's so incredibly important for us to remember because it tells us two crucial things. It tells us that sin, the sin that Jesus was made is both broad and narrow. It's broad in that it's wide enough for every single sinner who comes to Jesus. And it's narrow and focused enough to reach every single sin that you and I have ever committed. And that's what brings what we could maybe call like a double totality to what Jesus is doing. Because if I look at my sin in my life, I look at my life, I look at every stupid thing I've said and thought and done, everything I've done in my life that I regret, everything I should have done that I've not done, and it all kind of mounts up into this massive swamp of mess. When I look at my sin, that's what

I see, this massive swamp of mess. Jesus takes up every last drop of that swamp, every last drop of the sins that I've committed. Jesus takes it on his shoulders. And so there's that totality of what I've done wrong in the past, in the present, and even what I will do in the future.

And yet the incredible thing is that that totality of my mess is just a drop in the ocean of the full liability that Jesus bears for all of his people.

Because he takes the totality of your mess as well, and the mess of millions and millions and billions of others. He takes it all. It was all thrown onto his shoulders. He was made sin.

[29 : 59] Next key phrase is this. So that all of that is so that something can happen. All the massive theology of this first section is so that there can be a purpose. It's all so that God can accomplish his purpose. And so that's so that is magnificent. It's telling us that this is going to do something. And that this that it's going to do is captured by such an important word, such a magnificent word, that word we. Now that we is sandwiched between two beautiful statements. I want to just look at this bit here so that in him we might become. I want to take that phrase. The we is in the middle. The we is talking about you. So I'm going to you as a

Christian or it's talking about you if you become a Christian. It's talking about you. And either side of that we lie to massive truths that lie at the heart of the gospel. The gospel is placing us in him.

Placing us in Jesus, binding us together with him, uniting us to him, so that the implications of everything that he has done become a reality, not just for him, but for us as well. We are united to him. We're in him. We're not outside of him. And that means that in terms of our guilt and our liability for sin, we are never ever ever exposed or alone again.

We're in him, recovered by Jesus, we're protected by Jesus, we're represented by Jesus, we're defended by Jesus, we're inseparable from Jesus, we are in him and to be in him changes everything. Which is what the second half of that phrase tells you that we might become something. Now it's very important to understand what that might means. It's a word you can easily misunderstand because when you say the word might, you can think of that means like a maybe might.

So a might go shopping tomorrow. A might cut the grass. Don't want to buy might. I might do this.

[32 : 31] I might do that. We can think of might as a maybe. That's not what this means. This is not a might maybe. This kind of might is the might that says the impossible is now possible. What couldn't happen before can happen now. And this is so important to see this. It starts, it lies the heart of the gospel that without Jesus any change, any hope, any reconciliation with God is impossible.

Sin stamps you can't over everything related to us approaching God on our own. But Jesus was made sin so that that you can't is forever changed into a you may. You can.

And that's what makes the gospel so utterly brilliant. Whether we realize it or not, sin has left us imprisoned, condemned, incapable with no ability, no hope, no chance. And the devil will never stop accusing you before God in terms of what you are. So you're a sinner, you're a letdown, you failed, you're a mess, you've done so many stupid things. And so often we are overwhelmed by the fact that we think he's right. I have stuffed up. And my life's not the way I thought it would be. And I feel so ashamed and so guilty about the things that I've done. And that's the tragedy of what sin does. It leaves us in a state where what we are, in prisons us. But the gospel and the gospel of God says, I

don't care what you are. What I care about is what you can become.

And that become right there, that promise of change, that transformation, that release, that opportunity for a fresh start. That's what being in him involves.

And that's why when you put your trust in Jesus, and when the devil comes to try and accuse you before God again, all he finds is an empty prison cell where the door has been smashed down, the chains are broken, and there's a note that's saying, you will never find me here again.

[34 : 52] That's the amazing change that Jesus brings. And so in him, we might become something. What do we become? The righteousness of God. That is more dynamite. That is incredible. That is more theological dynamite right there. In him, in Jesus, you as a Christian, if you are one or if you become one, you become the righteousness of God. Now, there's a clear balance between what was said in the first part of the verse and what was said in the second part of the verse. That the one who knew no sin, that is the model of the righteousness of God. And so when we are made, when we become the righteousness of God, we're just becoming like him. And that's the level of the transformation that the gospel brings. It takes us from being sinners to being righteous. And it works in exactly the same way. It works by imputation. So our sin counted to Jesus. Jesus's righteousness counted to us.

Now, it's so important that we recognize the magnitude of what is being said here, particularly when we think about that word and that phrase, righteousness of God. That word righteousness is talking about a very, very, very specific thing. Right? Righteousness is not like this vague term talking about kind of goodness as opposed to badness, morality as opposed to immorality, godliness as opposed to ungodliness. It's much narrower than that. Righteousness is a very specific term. It's much narrower. And that's because righteousness, the righteousness of God is talking about absolute uncompromising moral perfection. The righteousness of God is nothing less than absolute perfection, perfect goodness, perfect holiness, perfect wisdom, perfect love.

If you were to make it into a percentage, righteousness is 100 always. Never 90, never 95, never 99, never 99.9. God's righteousness is always at that level.

The standard is as high as it gets. It never deviates. And you might be thinking, but I'm not that. I'm not that. And I'm not that. And that's utterly true. That is absolutely true. But that's the amazing thing about the gospel that if you are trusting in Jesus, or if you start trusting in Jesus, then you are in him. And that is where the judgment is made. The righteousness of the one who knew no sin is counted to you because you're in him. If you want to think about how imputation works, which is really what this verse is all about, I want you to imagine two things. I want you to imagine, first of all, that you have to line up before God with a list of every single way that you've stuffed up. In other words, with a list of all your sins. And you've got to come before God, and you've got this list of sins, things that you've done wrong, all the mistakes you've made in your life, and you hand it to God. And he takes it and he picks it up like this, and you reach through it, and he goes through all of them, every single one of them, all the sins.

And when he puts it down, you are no longer standing in front of him. It's Jesus who's standing there. Because he has made sin. All of our sins placed on him.

[38 : 58] He's come, while that list of sins is being read, he's come and he said, out of the way, I'll take your place. So that when judgment comes, the judgment falls all on Jesus. Our sin placed on him. But now you also have to imagine Jesus coming with his sheet of paper. Jesus isn't coming to God with a list of sins. He knew no sin. Jesus is coming with a list of perfections. A list of what makes Jesus so beautiful. What makes him so lovely, so wonderful, so adored by his Father. And Jesus comes to his Father and he gives the list and the Father picks up the list and he reads through the beauty, the purity, the holiness of Jesus. And he reads through it all. And then when he takes the list down, he sees you standing there. Because all the righteousness of the one who knew no sin has been placed on you. That's what it means to be united to Jesus. That's what the gospel is offering us. At the heart of the gospel lies this astonishing reality.

That he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. There's one last stick of dynamite in this verse. And it's the bit that we missed at the very start. All of it is for our sake. All of it is for you. It's for you. It's because of you.

It's so that everything can be fixed for you. And that mind blowing stick of dynamite leaves a crater in our minds that says, why, why, why would God do that for me? Why is the one who knew no sin made sin? Why is the cost of that might become worth it in God's eyes? Why would God do this?

And the answer is because of how much he loves you. Those three words for our sake introduce the boldest statement anywhere to be found in the New Testament. And it's all because of how much God loves you. And that is the spiritual pit fire that you can curl up beside.

Safe, warm, secure, happy forever. That is the reality of the gospel. That is where Jesus wants to take you. And if you are not yet a Christian, there is a seat at that pit fire for you. And I'm here tonight. I hope I've persuaded you.

[42 : 43] I'm here as an ambassador to call you. And I'm here as an implorer to beg you. To come and sit at that fire. And find the peace and the healing and the forgiveness that Jesus can bring. I don't need to tell you how flipping awesome a pit fire is.

Well, that's the tiniest glimpse of how incredible it is to know Jesus Christ. Amen.