

Jim & Elisabeth Elliot

Life Verse, Part 7

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Wilmer McLean had retired from the Virginia Militia and had become a successful wholesale grocer living in his home state of Virginia.

He did everything he could to stay out of harm's way as it related to the developing conflict known as the American Civil War.

But harm's way found him. In fact, the first major land battle of the Civil War took place on July 1861 – it was called the First Battle of Bull Run – and it took place on McLean's Plantation in Manassas, Virginia.

Union artillery fired at McLean's house because it was being used by a Confederate General as his headquarters. In fact, a cannonball dropped through the kitchen fireplace.

McLean never really wanted to take sides. And since he was retired from military service himself and wanted nothing to do with this outbreak of war, he sold his plantation after that battle and moved his family 120 miles south to get out of harm's way; he bought another plantation in Appomattox, Virginia.

When General Robert E. Lee knew that he was going to surrender, he sent one of his aides to Appomattox to find a location where the meeting could take place. And that aide knocked on the door of Wilmer McLean's plantation home.

Later, McLean is supposed to have said "The war began in my front yard and ended in my front parlor".

On April 9, 1865, the meeting took place in McLean's parlor. It lasted 2 ½ hours and when it was officially over, soldiers from both sides, officers and citizens wanted mementos of this once in a life time occasion.

When the ceremony was over, members of the Army began taking tables, chairs, and various other furnishings in the house—essentially, anything that wasn't tied down—as souvenirs.

They simply handed McLean money as he stood there in his parlor protesting. One General gave him \$40 for the table General Lee had used to sign the surrender document. General Sheridan paid McLean 20 dollars in gold coins for the writing table General Ulysses S. Grant had used to draft the terms of

surrender – he had his assistant take the writing desk outside and tie it to the saddle of his horse.

Soldiers and citizens alike went through McLean's home like a flea market, taking pictures from the walls, silverware settings, furniture and even the drapes.

When it was over and the people were gone, nearly everything from Wilmer McLean's home was gone as well.

Here was a man who had wanted to steer clear of the conflict . . . but it really had started in his front yard and ended in his front parlor.¹

One of the misconceptions of the Christian life is that we should be able to avoid conflict with the world . . . that we should be surrounded by peaceful conditions – that we can avoid involvement in the conflict that battles around us for the lives and the hearts of the human race.

According to God's design, every Christian has been drafted into service. Frankly, your front yard and your front parlor belong to Him.

In fact, we've all been commissioned to occupy a singular role – there are millions of different applications or assignments to this commission, depending on the will of God for our lives – as we take the gospel to a world at war with God as we give everything to see a peace treaty signed between man and God.

The Apostle Paul informs the Corinthians in his second letter of our special commissioning. Turn to **2 Corinthians 5 and look at verse 18. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.**

Did you catch that? He reconciled us to Himself and then turned around and commissioned us with the ministry of reconciliation.

In other words, our lives are to serve as front parlors where we effectively demonstrate and deliver the gospel of Christ to those engaged in civil war against their Creator.

Paul goes on to reference not only the ministry of reconciliation, but the message of reconciliation – notice **verse 19. Namely, that God was in Christ**

reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word – the logos – the message – of reconciliation.

Mankind is reconciled to God by means of Christ death, burial and resurrection.

The sin – the trespasses that were in the way have been paid for by Christ – they are no longer in the way of potential peace with God.

The gospel is the message of reconciliation – reconciliation involves accepting the terms of surrender offered by God through the peace treaty drafted by Christ on the cross.

We surrender that He alone is God – that Christ alone can save us; that we are sinners and in need of a Savior.

This is our ministry that we engage in and this is the message we deliver.

And in case any of the Corinthians believers get the idea – or any of us – that this ministry and message is for the clergy; Paul emphasizes who we all are.

Notice *verse 20. Therefore, we are ambassadors of Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

We are ambassadors of Christ – begging the world to come to the parlor – so to speak – and sign the peace treaty.

Part of our problem in misunderstanding our commission, is in misunderstanding this idea of being an ambassador.

We think in modern times – we think of ambassadors who spend time attending banquets, wearing out tuxedos or dinner gowns, nodding and smiling at foreign dignitaries who really don't mean what they say, and that's okay because we're going to try and put the best face we can on our unsettled and ever tenuous terms of peace.

You need to understand that when Paul wrote this letter, Roman provinces were divided into two types. Provinces which were peaceful and had no need for stationed troops were called senatorial provinces.

Provinces which were turbulent – typically following their loss in battle to the Roman Empire – they would have troops stationed in them and were called imperial provinces.

Ambassadors assigned to imperial provinces – and there were usually more than one – they were there to effectively deliver to the vanquished people the terms of surrender.

The ambassador would determine the boundaries of the new province; they would draw up a constitution for its new administration; they were literally responsible, one historian called it, for bringing these people into the family of the Roman Empire.ⁱⁱ

How great is that? The ambassador reveals the terms of peace from the conquering king; the ambassador effectively assimilates people who surrender into the family of the victorious empire.

Listen to these additional characteristics of Ambassadors:

- They were to spend their lives among people who often spoke a different language with different traditions and a different way of life.
- Ambassadors were to deliver a definite message, to carry out a definite policy; but were encouraged to be alert for opportunities to place before their hearers in the most attractive form possible [the message of their Emperor].
- Listen to this – one author wrote, it was the great responsibility of the Ambassador to commend his country to the people amongst whom he is placed.ⁱⁱⁱ

Do we not do the same? We have a definite message and we commend on every opportunity to those around us the glory of our King.

An ambassador's goal was not to be assimilated into that country, but to consistently represent his country – to speak highly of the kingdom before whom this vanquished people must surrender.

Here are the terms of surrender.

You can imagine how first century ambassadors wouldn't be appreciated or welcomed or accepted and certainly never viewed as one of the tribe, right?

You can only imagine how, throughout the history of the Roman Empire, ambassadors often lost their lives.

Certainly, throughout the history of the Christian church, those who have gone to provinces far and wide on behalf of the Kingdom of Christ have often lost their lives.

And by the way, martyrs for the gospel are not diminishing, they are being added exponentially. Conservative estimates by missions agencies place the number of Christian martyrs internationally right around 176,000 per year – that's 482 a day . . . that's one every three minutes.

In other words, while I preach this message, at least 10 people somewhere in the world, will have

died for their public testimony as ambassadors for Christ.

Most of them will never make it into the news . . . their deaths will be kept out of the spotlight . . . but make no mistake, they will be received into heaven's glory and to a special crown (Revelation 2:11).

For some reason, the deaths' of five New Tribes missionaries never made it into headlines. They had attempted to reach a savage tribe in Bolivia in 1943 and all 5 missionaries had been killed.

Thirteen years later, five missionary martyrs would indeed send shock waves, not only through the Christian community, but our own culture. In fact, Life Magazine would publish a 10-page article on the lives of these missionaries – and God would choose to use their deaths to literally incentivize the church to send hundreds, if not thousands, of missionaries into service.

Their names were Roger Youderian, Peter Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint and Jim Elliot, the most well-known martyr among them.

Well known, primarily because his story would be retold through his wife, Elisabeth who would write two books and eventually host an international radio program called Gateway to Joy.

Elisabeth, along with the older sister of Nate Saint actually made contact with – and actually went to live among the Auca's – this vicious tribe who had cut their beloved family down by spearing them on a sandy river bank, deep in the jungles of Ecuador in 1956.

Let me back up for a few minutes and tell you how Jim and Elisabeth accepted their foreign commission as Ambassadors for Christ.

They met at Wheaton College where they were both majoring in Greek, preparing for some type of linguistic ministry to an unreached people group. Elisabeth would later write, "There was this student on campus whom I had been noticing more and more. My brother Dave had been encouraging me to get acquainted with him. He and Dave were on the wrestling squad, so I went to a match – supposedly to watch my brother wrestle. But I found myself laughing along with the other fans at Jim Elliot – nicknamed, the "India-rubber man" because he could be tied in knots but could not be pinned to the mat.

I noticed Jim in the Foreign Missionary Fellowship on campus – earnest, committed to missionary service, outspoken. I noticed him in dining hall lines with little white cards in his hand, memorizing Greek verbs or scripture verses.

Finally, my brother Dave invited Jim to come to our home for Christmas break and we ended up having long, long talks after everyone else had gone to bed.

When we returned back to college, I began to hope that he would sit next to me in class once in a while – and he did – often, even when at times he had to trip over other people to get the seat.^{iv}

Eventually, Jim shared his heart's desire to marry her, but first believed God wanted him to settle in Ecuador and learn the language of the people.

Elisabeth also came to Ecuador to serve nearby.

Jim and Elisabeth agreed to put off marriage until they both learned the language so that marriage and homemaking and parenting duties wouldn't interfere with their ability to speak the language – to accomplish their ultimate desire to serve as ambassadors to these people on behalf of Christ.

Finally, 5 years after initially proposing, Jim and Elisabeth were married in Ecuador.

Not long afterward, Jim and his four missionary teammates began to make contact with the Aucas. This was a brutal, primitive tribe that took pride in how many their men had speared to death.

Roger, Ed, Pete, and Nate Saint, their pilot along with Jim Elliot spent months pouring over maps of the Ecuadorian jungle.

They were very aware of that previous attempt to reach a savage tribe in Bolivia 10 years earlier – where all five New Tribes missionaries had been savagely killed.

One author wrote they knew what they were risking – their dream was not pursued on a whim; they would risk their lives because they firmly believed this was their calling – they were to be ambassadors for Christ – even if it meant losing their lives.

They began flying over the village, dropping gifts for the natives. They rigged a loud speaker to the plane and as they flew over they would shout out, "We are your friends . . . we are your friends."

The team found a sandbar along the river nearby where they landed their plane . . . eventually contact was made with some of the women in the tribe . . . everything was progressing wonderfully and the missionary team was excited.

Then, on January 8th, 1956, they flew back to that same location after spotting nearly a dozen warriors on the trail leading to their river landing.

Within minutes of making contact, the killing would begin –savagely, unexpectedly.

Even though all the missionaries were armed, they had decided not to fire on any of the warriors, even if they were being attacked.

Nate Saint had told his wife and son of their decision, “We have decided we can’t kill *them* – they are not ready for heaven . . . we are.”

Steve Saint, years later, would be seated at a campfire with several of these warriors – now believers and committed disciples of Christ – and for the first time ever, there at that campfire, they recounted to Steve the events of that afternoon. They remembered being mystified as to why the missionaries didn’t fire their weapons at them – but only into the air instead; why one of the missionaries would simply wait for one of the warriors to wade out in the river to spear him.

Why another missionary would beg the warriors in their language, “We are not going to hurt you . . . why are you killing us . . . we are not going to hurt you.”

One native said to Steve, “If he would have run away, he would have lived.”

But they all died that afternoon.

Months later, Elisabeth Elliot, her young daughter and Rachel Saint, Steve’s sister, were able to establish a home among the Auca’s, thanks to a young native girl who had fled, come to faith in Christ and now led them back to that village.

These women would live among them for years, adapting to the hardships of such a primitive life, in order to deliver to them the gospel and translate the scriptures into their language.

Elisabeth would personally lead to Christ two of the warriors who had martyred her husband and the other men with him.

Elisabeth would later remember – and write – “When I stood by my short-wave radio in the jungle of Ecuador and heard the report that my husband was missing, God brought to my mind the words of Isaiah the prophet, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.” Jim’s absence thrust me, forced me, hurried me to God – my hope and my only refuge. I can say that suffering is an irreplaceable medium through which I learned an indispensable truth that He is the Lord.^v

Nine years after the martyrdom of these 5 men, the Gospel of Mark was published in the Auca language. A church had already been established and the pastor of the church was one of the earlier warriors in that killing party. His name was Kimo and he would – if you can believe it – personally baptize Steve Saint – Nate’s son – in that river.

There is no better way to illustrate the ministry of reconciliation than that.

One author wrote, “God had used these martyrs, a wife and sister of the slain missionaries, to reconcile with the Aucas and bring them the ultimate reconciliation of Christ’s salvation.”^{vi}

Steve Saint and his family moved to Ecuador in 1995 to build an airport and a hospital for the tribes of this region, including the Aucas.

Just 15 years ago, or so, Steve published the conversation he had with these warriors there at that campfire.

One of the now aged Auca Warriors who had taken part in the killing of Jim Elliott and Steve’s own father told a story that was confirmed by several other warriors and women who had been there on that sandy river bed that afternoon.

They talked about hearing music – strange music. As the missionaries lay on that river bed dead or dying, these Indians began to hear music and looked above the tree-line to see a multitude of “cowodi” – the same word for foreigner – it’s their word for missionary.

One native described this singing choir as lights, moving around and shining, a sky full of jungle beetles similar to fireflies with a light that was brighter and didn’t blink on and off.

One of the women who were there told Steve Saint that she had hidden in the bush during the attack and after it was over, saw cowodi above the trees, singing.

She said, “We didn’t know what this kind of music was until we later heard recordings played by Rachel Saint – when she came to live with them she brought a record player and she would play us recordings of Christian choirs singing.

That was the music they’d heard.

Steve said, “Apparently all the participants saw this bright multitude in the sky and knew they should be afraid, because they knew it was something supernatural.”^{vii}

Evidently, there at that river bank, an angelic host had arrived to testify of these ambassadors who were heading home – they were being sung along their way, from their assigned post on earth, to their home country of heaven.

God rarely does something like that – perhaps just enough to give tangible evidence that Christ has overcome the world – even when His ambassadors lay dying on a sandy riverbank.

Evidence that we also – His ambassadors – have been given the honor of a lifetime to represent His

everlasting, victorious kingdom; delivering to our world the terms of surrender and peace with God – at the loss of our own comforts, our own agendas, our own desires, and perhaps our own lives.

This is our ministry. This is our message.

We are His messengers – as ambassadors – delivering the message of how to be reconciled to God, through Jesus Christ, our conquering, already victorious King.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/4/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from www.wikipedia.com/wilmer_mclean

ii William Barclay, *Letters to the Corinthians*, (Westminster, 1975), p. 210.

iii Ibid

iv <http://reneeannsmith.com/a/the-most-remarkable-woman-ive-never-met>

v www.reviveourhearts.com

vi www.thetravelingteam.org

vii Adapted from Christianity Today, *Did They Have to Die?* (9/16/1996)