

Started in 1295, the city of Plzeň - Czech Republic provides testimony to a religious presence in former centuries but a personal faith in Christ is rare in this 21st century. The city has about 170,000 people. Only around 1% of the population attends a weekly Christian church experience. So it is possible that 99% are not calling Jesus Lord & Savior.

Plzeň 247 is a year-round citywide movement. It involves a network of Christian believers across many churches within the city and others from around the world who desire to be God's ambassadors to the 99% in Plzeň.

2 Corinthians 5: 18 - 20 is the foundation for this movement because the Biblical words specifically point people to the God given ministry of reconciliation. There are many ways for Christians to have a ministry of reconciliation. Plzeň 247 is specifically focused on reconciliation to the city's 99% through prayer & worship.

What does it mean to have a ministry of reconciliation through prayer for the 99% of Plzeň? How should you think about it? What should you do about it?

This is one part of a four part series on having a ministry of reconciliation through prayer for your city. Three of the speakers are different pastors from the city of Plzeň, Czech Republic. The fourth is a pastor from the West Indies island of Grenada who leads his denomination to pray for the 99% of Plzeň.

Since this actual talk was presented in Czech, this is the written English version followed by reflection questions that are suitable for individual or group study.



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We have spoken about reconciliation today written by the apostle Paul. 2 Corinthians 5:16, *"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. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."*

I've read this whole chapter and there are two things I find that are in contrast. At the very beginning the apostle Paul spoke about death and then later on he spoke about the topic we speak about today. This is the topic that is here for us for this special week of Plzeň 247, but not just for this week but also for your whole life.

The apostle Paul starts to speak about death at the very beginning and when someone speaks about death, about the end of life, we usually think there is something wrong with it.

Because when someone speaks about death, it usually means having nothing to live for, you are missing something, you have some pain or you have something hard in your life.

In the same way the apostle Paul speaks about his desire for death. It seems that he has no other goals. Maybe he just doesn't want to continue, but immediately he turns and speaks about a strategic plan for the church for many-many years.

How is it even possible to combine these two thoughts together? The thoughts of his life together with the thoughts of what he wants to do next. For me it means that he combined the heaven that he is looking forward to with the life that we live here on earth.

There is a Czech phrase “heaven and bagpipes” meaning two things that have come together but individually are also completely different from each other. So life up there and down here in our city of Pilsen is for me something like heaven and bagpipes. It combines together the city on this earth that we are living in with the kingdom here on the earth. I believe that is what Paul would like to invite us into.

Eternal life goes closely with our earthly reality. Paul believed that it's the same world now and later. Where in fact we have the same rules and the same relationships. The highest rule, the highest right, is not that all will die, but that Christ died for all of us.

This is what reconciliation is all about, the very foundation of our lives. In this life we can see our relationships.

In this light we can see our neighbors and in this way we can deal with them. It's not that ridiculous old man that you don't like as Pastor Paul said in his talk, but rather it's the person on which I can look at in faith, to see him as a friend. I can look at him as a person that is going to heaven in the same way that I am, thanks to the same grace of God. He is not that person anymore that hurt me yesterday, but now is a person whose sins were forgiven by God in the same way God forgot my sins.

We can use this sight when we go out into the city, into our families, etc. I can compare it to dealing with a small kid. I can be angry that he or she is dealing as a small kid, to be angry about his questions, his cry. We can beat a kid for every mistake, each thing that we don't like, but we do know that once he will become an adult, that he is going to behave in the same way we behaved to him in his child age. So we can be patient in answering his questions, to punish him with love, and we can already imagine that person to be grown up.

We also don't break the branches on the trees because we can already see the kinds of fruits in the future. This is the reason why we are watering the seeds and plow the ground, to be able to rejoice out of this flowering garden.

In the same way, we can look at other people who are all around us. We can have this kind of grace for them, that we will meet them in the kingdom of God. To see them is not all we should do, that's just step number one.

But we are here for another step, to do something for them, that they may know that they have been forgiven, that someone reconciled them. That's not enough just to forgive someone, but we have to tell them who forgave their sins, to whom we should be thankful for our forgiveness.

It's not all about us forgiving others just so we can be a better person as an ambassador. Rather we want as much as possible for people to be reconciled with Christ.

Reconciliation is as the stone that we throw into the water. Those circles that are on the surface are moving outward which is the purpose of reconciliation. But instead of the stone which has a temporary influence on the surface, reconciliation keeps going on and on. It is multiplying itself. It works not just through Christ, but also through each person who has allowed Christ to reconcile them. So that is how it works through each of us.

In the same way we can also be those ambassadors. We have the calling to offer reconciliation to others. It starts inside of us, someone has to start it. Those are our hands, our tongue, our way of living and our standings, those all are our tools for the reconciliation.

The apostle Paul reminds us that we are messengers of Christ. God speaks into this world through our mouths. *"We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."* This is the reason why the apostle Paul would like to live. Why he would like to live a long life. This is the reason why it is worthy for us to fight, to fight the pressures of life from different hard situations, not to be allowed to be defeated by different failures, so that we are able to share God's peace and reconciliation.

This special week of Plzeň 247 activity and this workshop are tools to remind us about the importance of our ministry. Each prayer is a large encouragement. Every meeting reminds us that it is worthy. Each one can be part of Christ's reconciliation.

Reflection Questions

1. Pastor Filip makes use of the Czech phrase heaven and bagpipes to illustrate how the apostle Paul describes the heaven that he was looking forward to in the future with the life that he lived there on earth. It is a way to describe the tension between the realities of the present with the hopes for the future. What do you think are the different views held on hopes for the future between yourself as a Christian believer and the 99% of Plzeň?

2. The point was made that “the highest rule, the highest right, is not that all will die, but that Christ died for all of us. That is what reconciliation is all about, the very foundation of our lives, that Christ died for us. In this light we can see our neighbors and in this way we can deal with them.” So what do you see differently under the light and how does that change your actions with others?

3. Pastor Filip said that to see them is not all we should do, that’s just step number 1. But we are here for another step, to do something for them, that they may know that they have been forgiven, that someone reconciled them. So for you personally, will you now do something new for others? If so, what will it be that you will personally do for others?

4. It was said that this special week of Plzeň 247 activity and this workshop are tools to remind us about the importance of our ministry. Each prayer is a large encouragement. Every meeting reminds us that prayer is worthy. So pray now for yourself, your family and friends, for the 99%, and more, for all to be reconciled to Christ.