

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Nature of Kingdom Work

### An Answer to Prayer

You may find this rather amazing, but did you know that your presence in the kingdom of God is an answer to a prayer that the disciples were exhorted to offer?

Toward the end of A.D. 28, large multitudes looking to be healed and cared for attached themselves to Christ who was ministering in Galilee. Accordingly, our Lord went about “teaching in their synagogues” and “healing every kind of sickness.”<sup>1</sup> And then He exhorted His disciples that “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38).

Though it has been almost 2000 years since Christ uttered these words, nevertheless we are an answer to this prayer. We are the workers that God has sent into His harvest.

What that means is that we have been saved to serve in the kingdom of God — which may sound rather shocking. In other words, we weren't redeemed simply to be delivered from hell, know peace and joy all our days and just live happily-ever-after. Rather God saved us with the intention of using us for His Kingdom work!

That is why Paul's favorite self-designated title was, “bond slave” which speaks of being a servant in the Kingdom of God. And yet it just wasn't Paul's title. In Romans 6:16 we learn that everyone in Christ has been made a slave! And that is why before Christ ascended into heaven, He charged us as a church with the calling to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

Thus Paul exhorted us as a nation of priests who have been called to serve in God's kingdom this way:

Romans 12:1-2, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service<sup>2</sup> [worship]. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Matthew 9:35

<sup>2</sup> λατρεία latreia the service and worship of God according to the requirements of the Levitical law

Truly, if you didn't know before you came here today, you know it now: God has saved you to work in His kingdom!

## Kingdom Service

And yet what is this work? How is our service in Christ to be fulfilled? What is the Nature of Kingdom Service?

Our text answers these questions. Hannah and Elkanah have finished worshipping in Shiloh. And our text is the epilogue in which we get a snapshot of one family's service. From this text we learn four things about the nature of kingdom work.

## Not Double-Minded

1 Samuel 2:11, “**And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house.** And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest.”

The author of the books of Samuel was a master “digresser.” You will discover as we work our way through Samuel that this book is like a mountain landscape. There are the peaks. These carry the main story. And there are the valleys. These address specific issues not necessarily related to the larger story but are essential to it.

For example, let me show you two peaks. In 1 Samuel 8 the people ask for a king. This is definitely a peak in the unfolding story of God's Kingdom. In 1 Samuel 10:17, Samuel calls the people together to anoint a king — clearly the next peak. And yet in between these two peaks we read of accounts which the people would not have been privy to but are essential for us — the reader — if we are going to understand what God is doing and why.

This morning our passage is a “Peak” in the ongoing story of Hannah and the unfolding of the revelation about God's Kingdom. In 1 Samuel 1:24-28 we read of Elkanah and Hannah bringing their three to four year old son to the temple in Shiloh. Then in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 we have a digression where we learn of Hannah's thoughts and motives — words that help us interpret all that Hannah did. Our passage picks up where 1:28 left off. So let us view this scene.

Hannah and Elkanah have brought their son to the temple with the plan of leaving him there.<sup>3</sup> After presenting their offering<sup>4</sup> they brought Samuel to Eli.<sup>5</sup> Then after a few words of dedication<sup>6</sup> our text reads “then Elkanah [and obviously his family] went to his home at Ramah.”

Do you see the point?

This is the shocking finality to it all. There apparently was no looking back. There was no prying of fingers from the child's hand, no extended “good-byes,” no regrets, would haves, or should haves. Elkanah and Hannah set about to do the work of the kingdom, and they didn't look back!

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<sup>3</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 1:22-23

<sup>4</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 1:24

<sup>5</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 1:25

<sup>6</sup> Our prayer of confession this week was longer than Hannah's psalm.

From this we derive a very important characteristic of kingdom work. Kingdom work must not be double-minded! Christ taught us this in Luke 9.

Luke 9:51, “And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

This was a turning point in Christ's ministry. Up till now, Christ spent the majority of His ministry in Galilee. And yet from this Christ was determine to complete His mission of going to the cross. (Luke points this out more than any of the other gospels from Luke 9 to Luke 19:27.)

This is why He came. And it was this that would consume Him in His final year of ministry. In fact, in Luke 12 we read these words of Christ speaking of the crucifixion: “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50 NASB).

The last year of Christ's life illustrates a principle by which Christ lived His entire life. His life was a whole-hearted, life-absorbing, and unwavering commitment to the ministry of God's Kingdom. Christ Himself said that “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

## **The Typical Approach to Ministry**

This is such a contrast to how we typically approach ministry. We want to see God's name exalted, the kingdom of God to advance, and Christ to be glorified BUT we also want in all our labor to make sure that in the end it will be fine and well for us! Right?

Matthew 19:27, “Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”

You say, “That's Peter! He was always putting his foot in his mouth.” And yet it went beyond Peter to include even John. In the midst of Christ's “setting His face toward Jerusalem” and the cross, James and John made sure to ask “grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory” (Mark 10:37).

The fact that James and John fell prey to looking out for themselves is a good indication that this mindset will be quite easy to fall into! In fact, it couldn't be more obvious then after Christ gave a call for those in His presence to follow Him. We read of a mindset of so many today.

Matthew 8:21, “And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father [a colloquialism for ‘setting ones house in order’].”

Truly the perspective with which most approach ministry is the longing for and the establishing of a safety-net which will catch us if we fall or, to be more honest, when God fails us. We have one hand on the plow and with our heads we are looking back with longing at what we have given up in order to follow Christ.<sup>7</sup> Many of us are just like Lot's wife, we want one more look.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Compare Luke 9:62

<sup>8</sup> Compare Genesis 19:26 and Luke 17:32-37

Brothers and sisters, it ought not to be this way!

The paradigm that we must have for ministry is as Hannah's and Elkanah's here. It must be whole hearted. It must be resolute. It must be passionate for the Lord. This is what we must aim for in our lives!

And yet would you notice that this sort of devotion, love, and praise does not occur in a vacuum. In fact, clearly one of the reasons 1 Samuel 2:1-10 was included in Samuel was to show the basis upon which such devotion arose.

And what is that basis?

As we saw, an understanding of who God is — His sovereignty, greatness, holiness, love for His own, and compassion and tender care— indeed, let us know God as He really is, and our lives will be changed!

How do we cultivate such a view?

It begins with honesty. And thus the recognition that in our heart of hearts we really don't want to know God in this way. We would rather have the god of our imagination.

It progresses as we confess our duplicitous heart to God whereby we want Him and our passions as well. And it culminates as we get into the word<sup>9</sup> and allow it to transform our minds.<sup>10</sup> Then we learn what trust and devotion to God is because we take God's promises and live in light of them.

However, all of this is review. Let us recognize that an element of kingdom work is that it must not be double-minded!

## Not Limited by Age

1 Samuel 2:11, “And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. **And the child did minister<sup>11</sup> unto the LORD before Eli the priest.**”

What a fantastic statement! Would you notice what we are talking about here? We are not talking about an eleven or twelve year-old soon-to-be-man — which in our culture would be a 20 to 25 year old — RATHER we are talking about a three to four year-old boy — which in any culture is young.

And yet amazingly, we read here that, “...the boy ministered to the Lord.” This is quite incredible.

The word rendered here *minister* is the Hebrew word שָׂרַת *sharath*. It is a special word in Scripture. There are primarily two words in the Hebrew used for serve: שָׂרַת *sharath* and עָבַד *'abad*.<sup>12</sup> *'Abad* references the menial service of a slave. However it is not limited to the work of a slave, it generally references that which is low or indistinguishable. *Sharath* references a higher category of service and is used of the personal service rendered to an important personage, usually a ruler — as in Joseph in

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<sup>9</sup> Compare Psalm 86:11-12

<sup>10</sup> Compare Romans 12:1-2

<sup>11</sup> שָׂרַת *sharath*

<sup>12</sup> עָבַד *'abad* is found in Genesis 15:14.

Potiphar's house.<sup>13</sup> It also references the ministry of worship on the part of those who stand in a special relationship to God — such as a priest.<sup>14</sup>

The verb designates either a high rank on the part of the servant or a special relationship in which the servant stands in respect to the master.

Now amazingly of the two words, it is *sharath* that is used of this three to four year old boy. In other words Samuel was NOT relegated to menial labor on account of his age or thought of as being too young to serve Christ RATHER, he is charged with some of the more serious activities as a servant of God.

And on account of the service of this three year-old God's kingdom would never be the same! This three year-old boy would make an impact NOT because of his age, parentage, upbringing, or schooling BUT because — as we'll see in the coming months — Samuel was available, he listened to the Lord, and responded appropriately to what he heard. And all of this began when Samuel was but a youth.<sup>15</sup>

From this we see that kingdom work is not limited by age.

## **A Church Crisis**

And yet here is where the crisis really exists today. Did you know that in many churches this morning, Samuel is not listening to the Lord?

Why?

Because, he can't. At some point in the service, the announcement is made for all children twelve and under to attend children's church. So, rather than allowing their child to serve the Lord, in the name of God, parents by the droves have excluded their three year-olds from His worship!

## **Need for Training**

You know in the years I've been in the ministry I've watched murders, adulterers, pedophiles, thieves, the ignorant, intelligent, rich, poor, charismatic, and those in a cult all unite themselves to the ministry of which I was privileged to be apart. Now this isn't to say that it hasn't taken education, training, and in some cases conversion. But listen, as our bulletin says (and Scripture) "whosoever will" may come — this church opens wide her doors and offers welcome in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Accordingly let me ask you these questions: What do you do with someone who has never been in a church and doesn't understand a thing? What do you do with a former witch who used to worship the goddess of the earth and now attends regularly? What do you do with an African who doesn't know how to sit in an American, sedated, church?

You disciple them! Right?

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<sup>13</sup> Compare Genesis 39:4, 2 Chronicles 22:8; Esther 2:2; 2Kings 4:43; 6:15; 1 Kings 19:21; Exodus 24:13; 33:11; and Joshua 1:1

<sup>14</sup> Compare Psalm 103:21; Exodus 28:35, 43; and 1Chronicles 6:17; 16:4, 37

<sup>15</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 2:18-21

One must prepare them for what they are about to participate in. You invite them to sit with your family. You answer their questions. You help them worship. And the church does this except when they are our children.

With our children we post announcements in our bulletins which read like this one:

“To value a distraction free environment for adults to enjoy our service, we strongly encourage use of our children's ministry and ask that any disruptive child be taken from the service in a timely fashion.”<sup>16</sup>

And thus excuse them when they are Samuel's age, hoping that they'll want to return when they reach adulthood. So, “good-bye.”

Jesus grew up worshipping in a synagogue. John the Baptist leapt for joy over Christ in his mother's womb.<sup>17</sup> Children worshipped at Ephesus.<sup>18</sup> Children were whom Jesus blessed.<sup>19</sup> Josiah, the boy king, was used by God to spark revival in his Kingdom. And Samuel ministered to the Lord at the age of three!

However the modern church tells children that they are not welcome! After all, God forbid, you may cause an adult to be distracted! We say, come back when you're not a bother!

Listen, it doesn't have to be this way.

The approach that generally has been taken when it comes to the youth in our churches for the past 50 years has been a dismal failure. What we've found is that when you run a child off at age 3 he doesn't return when he is in his teens.

Indeed! If you want your child to serve the Lord don't excuse them from kingdom service. Rather with every other disciple, from the earliest of age place upon them the same priority for ministry as any other member of the body of Christ. Train them to participate in the ministry. Teach them early how to worship God — not just on Sunday, but Monday through Saturday as well! Let them know that they are expected to be profitable servants.

Spiritual Giants are not raised on children's church. They aren't reared using dumbed-down Bibles. They aren't found in separate but equal services, activities, and events. Rather, as Samuel, they are raised in the trenches of Kingdom Service!

Truly Kingdom Work is not limited by age!

And yet, let's back up one step from this passage for the purpose of a broader application.

What do we conclude from a text like this?

By virtue of a three year-old serving in God's Kingdom, we conclude that **THERE IS NO ONE IN THE KINGDOM EXEMPT FROM KINGDOM WORK!** If a three year old is expected to serve God then what excuse could we possibly offer for not serving?

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<sup>16</sup> Taken from Fountain Creek Church bulletin, January 4, 2004, Pueblo, CO

<sup>17</sup> Compare Luke 1:44

<sup>18</sup> Compare Ephesians 6:1

<sup>19</sup> Compare Matthew 19:14

## Gadarene Demoniac

When Christ came to the country of the Gadarenes he met two demoniacs that were indwelt by a host of demons. Christ sent the host of demons that indwelt these men into the herd of pigs, and to the amazement of his townsfolk, a former demoniac sat there calm and clothed.<sup>20</sup> When Christ was about to leave we read this:

Mark 5:18-19, “And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.”

Ministry occurs where you are planted. You don't pack your bags and move across the world to serve Christ; you serve Him where you live. God's plan for the disciples was that they first preach the gospel in Jerusalem — where they lived.<sup>21</sup> The Great Commission in which we are to “make disciples of all nations” is to be fulfilled, “...as we go...”<sup>22</sup> And thus the Gadarene demoniac was to minister Christ in his Jerusalem.

### What is Your Jerusalem?

Family of God, what is your Jerusalem?

Realize that “Jerusalem” is not just where you live, it also is that which comprises your life: Your past, personality, talents, victories, failures, trials, difficulties, and current situation. All of this comprises the “Jerusalem” in which you live.

Accordingly heed the exhortation, “You shall be my witnesses... in Jerusalem...”<sup>23</sup>

Let us lay aside every pretense, excuse, limitation. And with our three year-old Samuels let us get busy with the work of the kingdom — “for the workers are indeed few!”

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<sup>20</sup> Compare Matthew 8:28

<sup>21</sup> Compare Acts 1:8

<sup>22</sup> Compare Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>23</sup> Compare Acts 1:8

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 21, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.