



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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### Treasure in the Kingdom of God, Part 4

It probably goes without saying, but did you know that ministry in the Kingdom of God is the calling and therefore responsibility of every one in Christ?

1 Corinthians 12:7, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."- this means that when God saved you, He gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit (and His enabling) for the purpose of ministry- "...for the common good."

In fact, you couldn't get any clearer than the words of 1 Peter.

1 Peter 4:10, "As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Paul wrote:

Ephesians 4:11-12, "And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers [the following is NOT a list, BUT linear; God gave 'pastor/teachers'...], for the equipping of the saints [that they might do] the work of [ministry], to the building up of the body of Christ."

There is no question that service in God's Kingdom is NOT an option for us. THE reason God ordained the pastoral office is for the training up of everyone in the body for ministry!

What this means is that when it comes to the welfare of God's people, everyone needs to be concerned! I love the words of the Apostle John:

2 John 1, "The elder to the chosen lady and her children [this most likely is code-language for a church and its members. This epistle was written at a time of persecution, and so John doesn't indicate he is writing to a church here, lest this letter be found and the church be destroyed], whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth."

Did you get that? According to this passage, a mark of a believer is that they love God's people! Remember the words of Christ:

John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Accordingly when we read of the value statement Paul made here, that one of his greatest treasures is the body of Christ standing with him in glory (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20), we are reading about that which ought to be is everyone's treasure... glory... reward!

Now because this is true, it will have a radical impact on our own lives! In the words of Christ, "...where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). There is NO chapter division in the original; accordingly out text reads thus:

1 Thessalonians 2:19-3:1a, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy. Therefore..."

From this we see that when God's people are your treasure there will be predictable and necessary implications that arise in our lives. Previously we have noticed that when God's

people are your treasure, that for which we sacrifice most often in life will be people-related. The world will sacrifice for money, pleasures, positions, and power. In contrast, the mature Christian will sacrifice for God's people!

When God's people are your focus and so your ministry, like Timothy you will endeavor to

- Rely exclusively on the gospel.
- Co-labor with God in His Kingdom purpose.
- Labor to hasten the coming of Christ's Kingdom in our lives and in the lives of those around us!

Truly, "it won't be by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6) that we carry out Kingdom ministry.

Now get this, we don't endeavor to attain this list because it will make us better ministers. Rather, as we take seriously our calling as ministers (which primarily involves God's people), this list will be the natural result! With this, notice a third consequence of making God's people our treasure is that it will impact our ministry:

1 Thessalonians 3:2b, "And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith."

This is a key statement; for it tells us what ministry in God's kingdom is all about! Now to understand this, it is important that we keep in mind the occasion for Paul's words. Recall that prior to Paul's coming to Thessalonica, the believers there were enslaved to various and sundry false-gods (Thessalonica was the idol-capital of the ancient world). Yet upon Paul's arrival and the preaching of Christ, the Thessalonians turned from the vanity of their false gods to the one and only true God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:9)! This upset many in Thessalonica, including (1) the Jews, (2) the state (recall Thessalonica's primary deity as a free city of Rome was Caesar; to reject Caesar was to make yourself an enemy of the state), and (3) many Gentile idolaters. The result was severe persecution (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:4)!

Now what makes this doubly brutal is that Paul's ministry amongst the Thessalonians at best spanned six weeks! This young church sat under discipleship, training, and teaching for no more than six weeks! After which time Paul, Timothy, and Silas were chased out of the city and doggedly pursued for fifty miles by the Jewish leadership of Thessalonica! And yet, the moment Paul was chased out of the city, he began working to go back and finish what he began, yet "Satan thwarted him" at every turn (1 Thessalonians 2:18)! Accordingly, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to minister to the brethren on his behalf (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2a). With this, what was the charge Paul gave him? It was for Timothy to labor at "strengthening and encouraging" the believers there when it came to "their faith." Let's talk about this twofold

calling.

1. Strengthen: the word behind “strengthen” is στηρίζω (*stērizō*) which carries the idea of putting in a buttress or a support, and so means to strengthen and/or build someone up. For example, it is used in Luke 22:32 where Christ said to Peter, “...and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”- accordingly, Peter’s entire ministry could be summarized in one phrase: “*The strengthening of the brethren!*” Not surprisingly therefore, Peter gave this assurance for trials in 1 Peter 5:10, “...the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”- truly, God’s will for us in the midst of trial is NOT to remove us from the pain/difficulty, BUT to strengthen/establish us such that would endure!

That is the idea behind this word. Being “established” speaks of being built up such that we are able to stand in the midst of severe difficulty; it speaks of being strengthened such that we do not shrink back in our faith, but rather serve the Lord boldly in and through all things. That the Thessalonians needed this is evident from the number of times Paul references this word in his epistles to the Thessalonians- four times!<sup>1</sup>

2. Encourage: the word for “encourage” is παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*) from which we get the word “Paraclete”- which is used of the Spirit of God and His ministry in the lives of God’s children. Having just shared of the plan of God which included His death, Christ comforted the disciples with these words in John 14:16-18, “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper [παρακλητος- lit. one who comes alongside], that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” From this text we learn that the primary avenue when it comes to the ministry of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer is a drawing near to us and so walking along with us- which is the idea behind παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*), a calling/encouraging on the side of someone.

That is the second charge Paul gave Timothy. He commissioned Timothy NOT only to re-enforce the Thessalonian’s faith, BUT to come alongside them and whisper words of encouragement to them:

- “Yes you are tired, but play the man!”
- “Don’t listen to their threats; continue to stand in the right!”
- “Don’t fear what man can do; boldly do that to which Christ Himself has called you!”

What in this context was Timothy’s ultimate objective? According to the text, it was the Thessalonians’ “faith”! I want you to note that this is a huge issue in the Kingdom of God, which

no doubt is why Paul referenced it no less than five times in this chapter alone!<sup>2</sup> Why did the Apostle John write the Gospel of John?

John 20:30-31, “Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Everything written in John was given to not to make us moral, secure a specific lifestyle, or to get us to do certain things. Rather, everything written in this letter is there either to engender or strengthen faith! S. G. de Graaf gave this instruction to Sunday school teachers:

“Our aim in telling Bible history ought to be the same as God’s purpose in recording it for us in His Word. God had the stories recorded ‘in order that we might believe.’ Accordingly, even in grade school, this aim must be kept in mind when we are imparting knowledge. It makes no difference at all that the children in your classroom already believe. In their case, too, the story is told to evoke faith, to deepen and broaden it.” (DeGraaf, 1979, p. 18)

Accordingly, Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica for that very purpose. In fact, lest he or the Thessalonians missed it, Paul stated and restated his purpose four times:

1 Thessalonians 3:2b, “And we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith.”

1 Thessalonians 3:5b, “For this reason, when I could endure *it* no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain.”

1 Thessalonians 3:8b, “For now we *really* live, if you stand firm in the Lord.”

1 Thessalonians 3:10b, “As we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith.”

Why is this such a big issue? And is there no place at all for instruction on how a Christian ought to live when it comes to Christ’s Kingdom? Let’s take the latter question first; is there a place for instruction on how a Christian ought to live when it comes to the Kingdom of God? By all means:

2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable [for what is it given?] for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness [this is all about behavior and so moral living]; that the man of God may be adequate [mature], equipped for every

good work.”

So indeed there is a place for instruction on how a Christian ought to live. However, that instruction must be given in the context of grace.

1 Timothy 1:5, “But the goal [the telos] of our instruction is love [which means the goal does have an ethical/moral element to it] from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”- any kind of instruction outside of or divorced from reliance upon Christ is bad teaching. But when it is given in the context of grace, it is right on!

2 Corinthians 7:1, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved [What “promises”? The promise of sonship!], let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

So there is no problem with instruction on how a Christian ought to live. In fact, it is necessary! However, it must spring out of the soil of the saving grace of Christ! With this, why is a believer’s “faith” such a big issue in Scripture? Why was Timothy charged with this ultimate objective when it came to the Thessalonians?

It all goes back to the beginning! When God created the world and placed man as ambassadors in His Kingdom, God’s word was that by which Adam and Eve were to live.

Genesis 2:16-17: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying...”

From the beginning of creation, God framed His relationship with man with His word! From this point on, man was to live “by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4)! In fact, it was when Satan got the woman to remove herself from being bound by God’s word to being a judge over it that all the problems began.

Genesis 3:1, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said...?’”

Robert Reymond put it this way:

What precisely occurred in Genesis 3? In answer, our first parents permitted the serpent, through their embarrassment with God’s authority over them, to challenge God’s Word with an alternative interpretation of the tree. When the pair demonstrated their unwillingness to believe God on the basis of His bare claim of authority over them by remaining silent in the face of the serpent’s lie, they, by that silence, permitted Satan to *reduce* the Word of God to a mere *hypothesis*... This means, however, in a universe created by God that the center of authority, for man, shifted from another to himself. Man

demanded that he become his own authority, that he determine for himself what is true and what is false. (Reymond, 1984, p. 19)

Accordingly, in Scripture the only way a man can know truth/live in reality is if they first believe/trust God; if they live, think, and reason according to the word of God!

Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

The word “fool” in the wisdom books is a reference to the non-Christian (as opposed to the immature Christian who is referenced by the name, “simpleton”). An universal characteristic of all non-Christians is that they do not reason in light of the truth. The word of God at best is a hypothesis! In contrast, for a Christian to know anything they must first believe/trust/“fear the Lord.”

Psalms 36:9: “For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light we see light.”

Do you understand? Faith/reliance upon God’s word is the only path to knowledge! Kevin Swanson describes it this way:

Almost a hundred years after Martin Luther attached his ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church, Rene Descartes spent an entire winter developing the first proposition for his system of thought: *cogito, ergo sum* (‘I think, therefore I am’). The fundamental problem with this theory of knowledge was that rationalist man had made himself the first defining point in his thinking. This was a departure from a Christian view of knowledge summed up by Augustine in the words, ‘I believe in order to understand.’ (Swanson, 2015, p. 13)

Nota bene, Descartes said, “I understand, therefore I believe!” The word of God teaches, “We believe in order to understand!” It is very clear in Scripture that for man to think accurately, he must presuppose the validity of God’s word and its claim of authority over man! To start anywhere but unconditional trust in and reliance upon God and His word is to begin in atheism.

In fact, we can take this a bit further. Prior to the fall it is clear that man’s faith revolved around the veracity of God’s word (which is why Satan attacked Adam and Eve the way he did). However, subsequent to the fall, in addition to God’s word, faith now revolves around the goodness of God. That’s the progression we see in Genesis. The first attack on Adam and Eve was on the veracity of God’s word (Genesis 3:1). With the word of God now as a hypothesis, Satan then threw the next punch which was leveled at the goodness of God.

Genesis 3:4-6, “And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely shall not die! [Satan’s first

objective was met: at this point Adam and Eve failed to trust God's word. Now came the second blow...] For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' [In other words, God is holding back good from you! He doesn't have your best interest in mind!]

"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food [she used to think God was good, but now no longer; good lies out there!], and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."

So this is why Timothy's ultimate objective in the Thessalonian church was to strengthen, reinforce, and encourage the Thessalonian's faith. And this same call is given to you and I as members of Christ's church.

1 Thessalonians 3:2b, "And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith."

As we've seen, Paul left the Thessalonian believers in a crucible. Paul knew that there would be immense pressure upon that young church to question God, reject Christ, and ultimately return to their former way of living! Accordingly, with Satan stoking the flames of affliction to a high degree, the Thessalonians were at grave risk; specifically as it pertained to their trust and reliance upon Christ!

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4, "And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we *kept* telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know."

Truly, it would have been so easy for the Thessalonians to pack up their faith, abandoned God, and so return to their former way of living! This was a very real threat (it always is in trial)! So Timothy's call was to come alongside them and (1) buttress their faith and (2) whisper in their ears to stand fast in Christ! God had destined the Thessalonians for this. In fact, listen to Paul's further exhortation:

2 Thessalonians 1:3-5, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged [Timothy's ministry bore fruit], and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever* greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure [notice how closely Paul links "faith" and "persecution" Again faith is always up for grabs when suffering sets in! Accordingly,



Paul once again address the wherefore behind suffering toward the end of establishing further the Thessalonians in their faith...] 5 *This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.*"

In fact, this was THE ministry to which Paul devoted himself on every missionary endeavor. For example, on Paul's first missionary journey we read this:

Acts 14:21-22, "...after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'" (cf. also Acts 15:32, 41; 18:23; Rom. 1:11).

In fact, this is where the church gets its philosophy of ministry. For example in our bulletin we state this as the purpose of our church:

Bethel Presbyterian Church exists to most properly and most honorably worship God, resulting in Biblical Fellowship and the Equipping of the Saints, thereby reflecting the face and affections of Christ to a lost and dying world.

Truly, in affliction when our faith is tested and our love for the Lord is tried, the question is always outstanding: Will the child of God continue to trust/love the Lord? Or will he take matters into his hands and go it alone? Recall Satan's challenge to God:

Job 1:11, "But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face!"

And so herein we see the ministry to which Timothy was called- and the ministry to which we all have been called when it comes to each other. First and foremost it was to reinforce the faith of the Thessalonians- "to strengthen their faith." Your belief is NOT in vain! Your greatest treasure on this side of the grave is NOT eating, your health, or the well-wishes of family and friends. Your greatest treasure is a God who loves you! Life is NOT about what you get, have, possess, or experience. RATHER, it is about serving and so giving!

Secondly and just as important, the call of ministry was to come alongside the Thessalonians in their pain, misery, doubts, and whisper words of encouragement- "to encourage their faith." Trial and difficulty is NOT an indicator that you are doing things wrong. No! God hasn't turned His back on you. The Lord is ever and always good! And so while we may NOT ultimately understand, God is worthy of your devotion and trust!

Christian! Do you think you can encourage one another toward that end? Can you place your focus on the faith of another and endeavor to bolster it and encourage it? Our call therefore is NOT to...

- Answer every theological question another might have.
- Engage in philosophical discussions touching on the mysteries of life.
- Be know-it-alls who have an answer for everything.

RATHER, our call is to encourage and strengthen each other when it comes to God, His goodness, and His purpose and plan! Our call is to come alongside a brother and sister knowing if there is a struggle in the life of another believer, it will always involve their faith, “Will you trust a good God to bear you through? Or will you go it alone?”

When God’s people are your treasure, this becomes the focus of ministry!

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### End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; 3:3.

<sup>2</sup> vv. 2, 5, 6, 7, 10.