

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Biblical Ministry: For Professionals Only?

The Ministry of Need. Part 1

The Changing Activity of American's

If in the providence of God you did not live in the United States, but rather alone in a wilderness do you know what you would be?

Many of us think of ourselves as a lawyer, school teacher, mechanic, artist, or musician. Yet on the frontier you would be all of these and more! With modern urbanization comes job specialization.

Today, few of us change the oil in our cars. When it comes to anything mechanical, we've been taught to, "Leave it to the experts." If you want a good pizza, you order out. We pay people to mow our lawns; cut our hair; paint our houses; decorate our homes; walk our dogs; play with our kids; and even do our laundry.

Now, when it comes to culture, we might consider this lamentable. However many of us feel inadequate to do what our grandparents considered to be a part of every day living. But when it comes to ministering in the kingdom of God, the concept of "professionalism" is nothing less than a crime!

Professionalism is everywhere we look. If you have a problem, you don't share it with the body; you have to go to "THE Pastor." If you have a theological question, you surely don't want to search the Scriptures to discern truth; you go to the theologian from the university. When it comes to evangelism, discipleship, youth ministry, missions, and outreach all these have become the specialized ministry of the professional.

Now don't get me wrong. The Scriptures have role specification such that it is appropriate to have theologically trained men who ought to be consulted when it comes to matters of truth. The Bible tells us to have men recognized as pastors of the flock, and thus overseers of the souls of people. However we must be concerned when "ministry" in the kingdom of God is relegated to the "professional."

This is why I am so thankful for the passage of Philippians 4:10. As Paul closes this Epistle, he turns his focus to the ministry that the Philippians have had in his life. And it is from this section we learn about, what I have called, *The Ministry of Need*.

Ministry is viewed by many in our day as the prerogative of an elite group of spiritual giants. However I want us to consider the doctrine of ministry as taught in Scripture. This study of Scripture is the key to unlocking the spiritual gems found in the passage before us.

The Nature of Ministry

John 17 is Christ's High Priestly prayer. The Lord's Prayer found in Matthew 6 is actually more accurately called the disciple's prayer. In reality, John 17 is the Lord's Prayer.

Now in this prayer we come to verse 4.

John 17:4, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work¹ which thou gavest me to do."

Let me ask you a very important question. When Christ walked this earth, how did He glorify God?

Many have responded to this by saying that Christ never sinned.² Christ performed miracles.³ Christ healed the sick.⁴ He raised the dead.⁵ Christ taught the masses.⁶ Christ died on the cross in place of us.⁷ And He rose from the dead on the third day.⁸

While all these statements are true, nevertheless that is not what this passage says. According to John 17, when Christ walked this earth, He glorified God by accomplishing the work that God gave Him to do!

This is the key to understanding the nature of Kingdom ministry. It is not necessarily just sharing the gospel. It is not necessarily just preaching the word. It is not necessarily just exercising the gift of helps. It is not just showing compassion to many. Truly it could include all of these; yet it is much, much more.

Kingdom Ministry refers to nothing less than "the work which [God] gives [an individual] to do."

In the New Testament we have primarily two words that are rendered *ministry*. First there is the word used in the context of worship and thus refers to any all religious service or ministry offered to the Lord. In its most essential form it speaks of worship.⁹ The second word used for ministry is a more general term used in reference to any service rendered to God. From this word we get the English term deacon.¹⁰

Now it is important to notice that in both words, the concept of "fulfilling one's obligation/calling to

¹ εργον ergon

² Compare 2 Corinthians 5:21

³ Compare John 2

⁴ Compare Matthew 8 and 9

⁵ Compare John 11

⁶ Compare Matthew 5 to 7

⁷ Compare Isaiah 53:6

⁸ Compare Matthew 28

⁹ Compare Romans 12:1 λατρεία latreia

¹⁰ Compare Romans 16:1 and Matthew 9:35 διακονος diakonos

the Lord” is found. So ministry presupposes a set of orders given to the individual by God. When the person acts upon these orders, he is said to be “ministering to” or “serving the Lord.”

Generally speaking when the early church gathered for worship we read this:

Acts 13:2, “As they ministered¹¹ to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

Worship is a ministry to which all in Christ have been called. Far from the mentality sported by the Church of Rome at the time of the Reformation that the only ministry was that of the priesthood. Scripture teaches that in Christ, ALL ARE PRIESTS- and thus, all are ministers.

1 Peter 2:9, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:”

Truly it was God's intent that each and every one of us understand that we are in the gospel ministry! From the “lowly” trash collector whose life revolves around refuse to the head of a nation each and every child of God has been commissioned by the Lord unto His service!

As Paul ministered to the Ephesians’ elders he was ever mindful of this.

Acts 20:24, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”

Paul lived his life endeavoring to fulfill the charge that God placed upon Him in preaching the gospel. And we must likewise share this burden.

Yet you say, “With what?” Paul's ministry was preaching the gospel. Do I have a ministry?

Indeed! In Ephesians 4:12 we read of the goal of pastoral care is for the “equipping of the saints for the work of service [ministry].” This passage presupposes that upon every Christian rests a charge given to them by God. Thus, ministry is not the prerogative of an elite group of theologians or pastors. Rather, it is the obligation that rests upon each and everyone of us in Christ!

So, if you want to glorify God, John 17:4 says accomplish the work which God has given to you.

Nobility of Ministry

While the whole of 1 Corinthians 12 is addressing the issue of spiritual gifts, nevertheless we are talking about ministry here. By way of preface and introduction Paul wrote this:

1 Corinthians 12:4-5 (NASB), “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.”

! Corinthians 12 ultimately revolves around ministry. It is the spiritual gift that enables us to fulfill our

¹¹ λειτουργεω leitourgeo

call. In light of this, listen to how Paul discusses spiritual gifts and thus the nature of kingdom ministry.

1 Corinthians 12:11 (NASB), “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”

Spiritual gifts are not something that you fabricate. According to His good pleasure, God distributes gifts to enable the child of God to fulfill the call that has been placed on his life.

1 Corinthians 12:18 (NASB), “But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.”

Some are called to be eyes, ears, mouths, and the like in kingdom ministry. Notice that each calling is specifically designed and administered by God! Every ministry given by God is noble! God does not have a second string. There is no such thing as second best when it comes to God's plans. Thus there is no more glorious or important ministry in the kingdom for you than that to which you have been called today!

We need to hear this, because we are so prone to make distinctions. Just as we like the showy gifts, so also we long for the noble, admirable, glorious ministry or calling from the Lord. Thus we daily can be found trampling underfoot a calling that God hand-delivered to us. We say “Boy, I wish I could speak like that!” Or, “I wish I had his talents!” Or, “Why can't I be the leader?” Or, “Why is it that my life seems to be the leftovers?”

Those who say such things reveal a deficit in their understanding of the doctrine of ministry! No matter where you are, what you are doing, or the fanfare that surrounds you, if you are a child of God, then live your life in the presence of God such that your most insignificant activities are a sacrifice of praise to God!

1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

And so you who think that your life in Christ is a dead-end realize that God in His providence has hand-picked you for so mundane, boring, and worthless calling. Even if you think that your life is less than exciting and that your life would be so much better if you could do something different, realize that God is in control. Viewed from this perspective, we see that there is nobility to all that we do in Christ! Martin Luther wrote this:

“Alas! Must I walk the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and soars? And on top of that care for my spouse, provide, labor at my trade, take care of this, and take care of that? Do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? Why should I make such a prisoner of myself?”

“What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit; and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest golden jewels. It says, 'O God! I confess today that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I without any merit have come to this distinction of being certain

that I am serving Thy creature and Thy most precious will. Oh how gladly will I do so though the duty should be even more insignificant and despised. Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labor will distress and dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in Thy sight.”

The key to effective ministry in the kingdom of God is recognizing that who we are, where we fit into the body, and that our life circumstances all comprise God's will and calling for our life — OUR MINISTRY. It is as God intended.

1 Corinthians 12:18, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”

The Goal of Ministry

In Ephesians 4 Paul discusses the gifts that God has given to His church. In verse 7-8, he talks about the gift of Christ. In verses 11-12, he discusses the gift of church leaders. Now in this context, notice what Paul identifies as the end of all ministry in the kingdom.

Ephesians 4:12, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:16, “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Just as we learn from 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 1 Peter 4:10 that the purpose of every spiritual gift is for the building up of the body. So also we discover here — not surprisingly — that the purpose of every calling is that, when fulfilled, the body matures and is built up in love.

This is a very important qualification! There is no such thing as a Christian who has been saved for himself. Christ didn't die on the cross merely to save you from hell. Rather we read that all that Christ did in His first advent¹² and all that He will do when He returns¹³ was/will be on behalf of THE BODY!

Thus today, you must understand that your ministry is connected to a greater and larger purpose. The purpose is to be a blessing. The purpose is to bring Christ to the body. The purpose is to refresh the saints. The purpose is to encourage others in their walk. The purpose is to sacrifice self that others may serve.

We see this in the context of trial.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

¹² Compare also Matthew 1:21; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-30

¹³ Compare Revelation 21:1-8

Trial and difficulty will come our way. But with it will be the comforting presence of our Lord! There is an intended end for the presence of the Lord during trial — and it is not simply your comfort. Ultimately it is the comfort of others when once we have been restored!

In other words it all has purpose. From the most insignificant moments to the profound — ALL PARTICIPATE IN THE UNFOLDING PLAN OF GOD!

Do you understand the end of your ministry?

It is not about doing great things for the Lord. It is not about becoming someone special. Rather, it simply is building up the body of Christ one soul at a time!

Ministry of Suffering

In four separate passages of Scripture we read a list of spiritual gifts and callings that God gives to individuals.¹⁴ If we were to combine the lists we would arrive at eighteen different gifts and/or callings — as has been done in numerous books. However this list of eighteen gifts is not exhaustive. For example in Philippians 1 we read of the ministry of suffering.

Philippians 1:29-30, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

From this passage we conclude that any and all suffering that we undergo is a divine calling. In fact, we do not need much time to think of others in the Bible who received such a ministry. Who could forget?

Job 1:12, “And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.”

Acts 9:16, “For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”

Christ told Peter of this ministry.

John 21:18, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.”

We could go on and on quoting passages which speak of men, women, and children who have been set apart to suffer for the sake of Christ. And thus we recognize that to the one suffering this day under a heavy burden God has set you apart unto a holy end. Consider yourself charged with as noble a calling as Isaiah.

Ministry of Ignominy

And yet there is another ministry often neglected, the ministry of ignominy.

¹⁴ Compare 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter. 4; Romans 12

The ministry of repentance given to John the Baptist occurred after 400 years of silence from God. And yet at this time in redemptive history, a lone voice was raised in the wilderness, and many flocked to hear it. In fact, because there were so many, John gathered around himself disciples to help baptize the countless numbers who responded to God's call.¹⁵

But, then He arrived on the scene — a man by the name of Jesus. And it wasn't long before the multitudes were flocking to Christ — all to the grief of John's disciples. The disciples came to John the Baptist and complained.

John 3:26, “And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.”

Listen to John's reply.

John 3:27, 30, “John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. [Consequently] He must increase, but I must decrease.”

This is the ministry of ignominy- it is the call to be second fiddle. It is the ministry to be overlooked. It is the ministry to be forsaken of man. It is to this ministry that God calls all for the honor of God and the building up of the body.

And honestly speaking, this is the call of probably everyone of us here today. Few, if any of us, will be remembered much beyond the grave. Oh we may long to be world-changers. Yet the reality is, in the words of Solomon, “...this too is vanity!”

How many countless millions have served the Lord on this earth and are remembered? While their life was lived in obscurity, nevertheless we would not be here today had they not been faithful in theirs!

Next time you feel overlooked, taken for granted, neglected, or insignificant consider it a calling from the Lord.

The Ministry of Need

And yet there is one more ministry rarely considered, in fact it is the focus of Philippians 3, the ministry of need.

We catch a glimpse of this ministry in a passage that describes the last judgment. After receiving Christ's commendation, the humbled servants respond in shock.

Matthew 25:37-39, “Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?”

Listen to Christ's response.

Matthew 25:40, “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto

¹⁵ Compare John 3:25

me.”

Behold the ministry of need. God places weak, struggling, poor, or disadvantaged Christians in the body. Christ does this so that the body might respond in love, mercy, compassion, and grace.

You thought that trial, difficulty, want, and need were ordained by God to cultivate Christ likeness in the life of the sufferer. While that may be true, there is much more going on than meets the eye. From Scripture we also conclude that God places hurting people in the body so that we might have the opportunity to bring Christ to them — and so serve Christ!

That is what the ministry of need is all about! Such is the ministry to which Paul and, at times, all of us are called.

And yet you must know that this ministry is fraught with land-mines, on the part of the giver — pride, arrogance, and a sense of self-righteousness. And on the part of the receiver this ministry is fraught with selfishness, self-pity, and the temptation to live with a welfare mentality OR an unwillingness to be helped at all. And on the part of the church we see neglect and indifference.

All of these issues and more will be addressed from Philippians 4 in the weeks that follow as we look at, “The Ministry of Need.”

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 28, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.