

# BROOMFIELD

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

### MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Passion of Those in Need

### The Waters of Testing

A reading of the history of the people of God after the Exodus is quite sad. Three days following God's miraculous delivery of His people through the Red Sea, Israel began to complain. At first it was because there was no water.<sup>1</sup> So God made a pool of bitter water drinkable. Then there was nothing to eat and so again Israel began grumbling.<sup>2</sup> And God graciously provided heavenly food for His people. Then it wasn't long before they arrived in Rephidim, another place without water.<sup>3</sup> Did the people of God trust the Lord this time? Hardly, they began grumbling and complaining against both Moses and the Lord.<sup>4</sup> And the grumbling history of God's people continued.

And yet don't miss it, according to Psalm 81:7, the lack of water in Rephidim was not an accident on the way to Sinai. Rather, it was a purposeful act on the part of God designed to demonstrate the quality of His people's faith and devotion to Him. In fact, such was the issue with every trial and difficulty during the wilderness wanderings.

Right before God's people entered the promised land under Joshua, Moses said, "And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Amazing!

### Characterized by Joy

God used the difficulties of this life as a means to encourage the growth of His people.

This is the ministry of need, granted by God that His purpose and work will be accomplished on this earth. Need is ordained by God so that we as a body might become that to which we have been called in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Exodus 15:22-27

<sup>2</sup> Compare Exodus 16:1-21

<sup>3</sup> Compare Exodus 17:1-7

<sup>4</sup> Compare Exodus 17:3, 7

Paul recognizes this in our passage. While in prison in Rome, Paul received support from the church in Philippi. This prompted him to respond with this epistle in which he not only encourages the Philippians to love and good deeds but also, in our text, specifically discusses what I have called, “The Ministry of Need.”

In the midst of the pain, sorrow, and the uncertainty that “need” often times brings, Paul's Joy was nothing less than Christ! Paul's disposition was not “if I could get a little more money,” or “if the Lord would give me this” but it was “whether Christ comes in the form of sorrow or joy, so long as He comes, it is well.” That is the joy that must characterize the minister of need!

### **Their Purpose: Maturation**

Secondly, the minister of need has an understanding of what constitutes maturity on the part of the body of Christ. It is not enough that a body says that they love Christ. It is not enough to boldly profess the faith. It is not enough to hold to sound doctrine. Maturation will be seen also in how the body cares for their own.

1 John 3:16-18, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

Accordingly, with the same goal as the preacher, teacher, or Bible study leader, the minister of need understands that his purpose in the body is to stimulate love in action.

This is what this ministry is all about. God has ordained your need that it might serve as a catalyst in maturing the body of Christ. Consequently, the minister of need swallows his pride and allows his weakness to be known. He does this not to get a gift.<sup>5</sup> He does it to stimulate love in the body of Christ.

### **Their Disposition: Contentment**

This naturally follows from the above. Because the one in need has as his greatest joy Christ. He knows that his need is a calling placed upon him by God so that the body of Christ would be encouraged unto growth. And the minister of need is characterized by contentment.

The minister of need knows that this world's wealth is but a vapor.

Proverbs 23:4-5, “Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.”

He also knows that in Christ he has the wealth of eternity.

2 Corinthians 8:9, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Philippians 4:17

In the words of Paul Gerhardt “Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near with his cheer; never will he leave me. Who can rob me of the heaven that God's Son for my own to my faith hath given?”<sup>6</sup>

## Their Passion

Now this brings us to the minister's passion. You can learn a lot from what a person commends. Notice that which struck Paul:

Philippians 4:14, “Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.”

Now ironically, because Paul doesn't thank the Philippians the way many liberals would have expected, Paul has been accused of being a man who lacked gratitude. They say: “Why does Paul wait until the end of this epistle to express gratitude? And then when he actually does get around to thanking them, he really never says the words, “Thank you.”

Listen, in light of what Paul says here, I'd take this expression of thanksgiving over any sappy statement on the part of the liberal. For herein Paul not only commends the Philippians for what they have done, but he encourages them also.

Philippians 4:14, “Notwithstanding **ye have well done**, that ye did communicate with my affliction.”

As we saw in our examination of this passage in Part 1 of this series, the Philippians didn't just write a check, wire some money, or provide for Paul's physical need. Rather they sent one of their very own — Epaphroditus — to minister to Paul himself.<sup>7</sup> And from this we saw the key when it comes to serving one in need it is not enough to meet their physical needs. We must also be committed to ministering to the whole man — and thus to their spiritual needs as well. We must be committed to sharing with them in their affliction.

Now as a recipient of this incredible gift, Paul said, “ye have done well.”

Paul is not simply saying you have done a “good job!” Or, “Hey, I owe you one!” Rather, he is expressing the Divine commentary with regard to ones who live to encourage others in their walks with Christ.

And that Divine commentary is this: Well Done!<sup>8</sup> It is good in and of itself. He is saying this because this is God's appraisal of the Philippians' ministry in Paul's life. Before the time, the Philippians received those glorious words “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

I'll tell you what. I'd take this over an empty “thank you” any day. And yet Paul is not finished. He continues pouring on the praise.

Philippians 4:15-16, “Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I

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<sup>6</sup> Trinity Hymnal #609

<sup>7</sup> Compare Philippians 2:25

<sup>8</sup> Compare Genesis 1:31, tov meod

departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.”

The gift that Paul is talking about always come in the form of a person.<sup>9</sup> In essence Paul says, “Philippians, you are one of a kind!”

## **Bearing One Another’s Burdens**

Borrowing Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 11:29 and yet applying them to the Philippians, we could say that Paul here is saying”Unlike most other churches at the time you have stood by me! You have provided for my needs! When I was weak, you were weak! When I was struggling with questions of doubt, you lifted me up! When I was failing under the weight of ministry, you stooped down and endeavored to lift my load! When few others would dare associate with me for fear of persecution, you boldly stepped forward and bore on your back stripes intended for me!”

That is what stood out to Paul when it came the Philippians ministry in his life — their willingness to assume his burden whether it took the form of a financial, emotional, or spiritual trial.

Galatians 6:2, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

And that is exactly what Paul is commending the Philippians for in verses 14-16. He is saying, “Thank you for bearing my burden!”

From this we begin to catch a glimpse of the minister of need's passion: The Maturation of the Body of Christ. This is what stood out to Paul. Certainly he was thankful for the Philippians' gift. But what caught his eye was their willingness to “share in [his] affliction.”<sup>10</sup>

And yet sadly, what he has said here could be mistaken as an appeal for more money. Accordingly and to clarify that which was his Passion, Paul says writes verse 17.

Philippians 4:17, “Not because I desire a gift<sup>11</sup>: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.”

We already have discussed this verse in reference to the “reward” of those ministering to the needy. Yet from the perspective of the one in need, what does this teach us? First off, recognize that this was a risky statement in Paul's current situation.

In the early days of Paul's ministry, the Philippians frequently sent a gift to support him. Paul said this about the Philippians:

2 Corinthians 11:8, “I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service.”

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<sup>9</sup> Compare 2 Corinthians 11:9

<sup>10</sup> Compare Philippians 4:14

<sup>11</sup> The New American Standard adds the word *itself*. *Itself* while having no corresponding word in the Greek, nevertheless picks up on the strong adversative, *alla*, translated as "...indeed, but..." The clear implication here is that Paul was hoping that the Philippians would send a gift, BUT not for the sake of the gift. Rather it was for the sake of their increase in grace. That's what Paul was after!

Yet Paul's receiving of this gift led to the accusation that Paul was after money.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, during the middle years of his missionary endeavors, Paul discouraged others from supporting him — opting to work with his own hands in making a living.<sup>13 14</sup>

## **Maturation in Christ**

Now fast forward the clock ten years and we find that Paul is in a Roman prison. He is unable to provide for his own needs. He is in a city where the church leaders hate him.<sup>15</sup> Clearly Paul's circumstances were reminiscent of the early days of his ministry when all had abandoned him — except the Philippian brethren. His need was used by God to encourage the Philippians' growth in grace.

Now, whether it was the similarity of his circumstances or something else, we do not know. But this we do know, at some point in his imprisonment Paul remembered the early days of the Philippians. He recalled how they matured in Christ on account of ministering to him. And this brought about a longing for the Philippians — who were struggling with a lack of love for one another<sup>16</sup> — to so engage themselves in ministry that they would respond again in love.

By inference Paul makes the incredibly bold statement that he in fact wanted the Philippians to send a gift [eye-brows raise]. Yet, the reason was so that they would get their eyes off of their petty difference — Euodias and Syntyche — and step out in faith and minister. He did this so they would grow up in Christ!

Through all of this we behold the Passion that must govern the one in need. From that which Paul chose to praise in verse 14-16 to his direct statement in verse 17, we conclude that the individual who has been called to a ministry of need must be controlled by the longing for the body of Christ to mature!

And that is what we must be after when it comes to our brothers and sisters!

Because we understand God's plan for the ministry of need (which is God's plan for every ministry) is the building up of the body of Christ.<sup>17</sup> That which must raise our eye-brows, which must cause us to sit up and take notice, and to which we must commit ourselves is not the gift, but the maturation and commitment reflected in the giving!

And yet as we have said, this is difficult

It is so easy to be self-centered and self-absorbed when you are in need. When the world as you know it has stopped and life understandably consists of getting by “need” can skew the lens through which we view the world. It can lead to people attending church in order to get. It can lead to people judging the faithfulness of a body based on whether their needs are attended to. It can lead to divorcing one from ministry. It can cultivate a heart of ingratitude such that sacrifice on the part of the body is viewed as obligatory.

Accordingly, we must fight against this mentality.

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<sup>12</sup> Compare 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10, 1 Corinthians 9:3-18, and 2 Corinthians 12:13-18

<sup>13</sup> Compare 1 Thessalonians 2:9, and 1 Corinthians 4:12

<sup>14</sup> Compare . F. F. Bruce, NIBC, *Philippians*, page 149.

<sup>15</sup> Compare Philippians 1:15

<sup>16</sup> Compare Philippians 4:2

<sup>17</sup> Compare 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 1 Peter 4:10

Life is much more than eating, drinking, the clothes we wear, the house we live in, our health or our length of days. Rather life is about serving the Lord by serving the saints!

I want you to turn with me to a passage we have considered before Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:34, “For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”

The Roman prison system did not provide adequately for the basic care of its prisoners. Thus, if a Christian was placed in prison on account of his faith, the only way he would survive is if the body of Christ brought him food and covering. However this created a bigger problem. If you provided for a fellow Christian who was in jail on account of his faith and you were not related to the prisoner by blood then the natural conclusion was that you must be sympathetic to his teaching! And soon you found yourself in prison.

Here regardless of the threat the body of Christ endeavored to minister to its own.

Hebrews 10:34, “For ye had compassion of me in my bonds”

Here the fellow believers paid the price as they watched Rome impound their property! Yet what was it that stood out to the Hebrew writer? What made the Hebrew writer sit up and take notice?

It wasn't the money given but the life that was spent for Christ.

Hebrews 10:32-33, “But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.”

Indeed! That which stood out about these early believers was their maturation evidenced by their love in action — that's what was valued.

This is the passion of the minister of need. He lives to see the church of God mature and grow in the faith.

What is your agenda for body of Christ?

Is it that we entrust ourselves wholly unto God? Is it that we grow in our love for the Lord? Is it that we become a people of whom this world is not worthy?

This is such an important question! In the book of Galatians Paul speaking of the false teachers said, “they eagerly seek you, not commendably” (Galatians 4:17 NASB). There are a variety of reasons why people seek a church. Some want a place that will meet their needs. Some want to feel a part of the winning team. Some want a specific message. Others look for a ministry for their child. Many want a forum for their ministry.

Yet the minister of need — and for that matter all true ministers — must have as their goal or agenda the growth of the body of Christ! Accordingly if you go to church to get, you have missed in its entirety what the ministry is about!

## A Meat Market

Ministry in a seminary town is somewhat unique. I attended seminary in St. Louis which sported at least a dozen churches of like faith and practice. What that meant was that when it came time choose a church, the decision was quite difficult. Many seminary students opted for a church where they could be used — which based on our text this morning was not right. In fact, one day I saw the issue in capsule form.

I was talking to a new student whom I had strongly encouraged to attend the church to which Janet and I belonged. We were a couple of months into the semester and I still hadn't seen him on Sunday. So one day at school I asked him about it and he said something like this:

“I hate to share this with you, but your preacher is not very godly. After our first conversation, I called the preacher of your church and queried him about opportunities for service. I asked him how he thought I might fit into the church. And do you know what he did? He said, 'What do you think we are a meat market?' and then hung up the phone!”<sup>18</sup>

Let me tell you something, from the perspective of a pastor I understand my preacher's response. The church is not a playground in which to practice for future ministry. Nor is it a welfare institution to dole out money. Neither is it a political action committee to encourage people to vote. And it shouldn't be a day care to raise its member's children.

The church is more akin to a hospital whose members are not only the patients but the doctors.

What is the passion that must govern each and every one of us? It is the “growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:18). A minister of need is driven not by his needs, wants, desires, or will. Rather, he is driven by the all-consuming passion to see the body of Christ become all that God has intended it to be.

And it is these ministers that the church is in desperate need of! Men and women who(se) only agenda is the building up of the Kingdom of God. Their hearts beat with God. They avail themselves to the Lord to be used by Him with no strings attached.

Can you think of anyone who might meet that qualification? Or to put it another way if God were to issue forth the question “Whom shall I send?” what would be your answer?

Brothers and sisters we need not look around. For God intends to send you!

In light of this, let us go to the table of the Lord- the throne of grace- where we “...may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16)!

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<sup>18</sup> This is a paraphrase

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 23, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.