

BROOMFIELD



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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The Recipient of Need

Biblical Ministry

The Forbidden Sermon

There is a ministry which from the very beginning has accompanied kingdom work and yet few know about it today. I dare say you probably have never heard a sermon on it. You won't find it listed in church bulletins alongside missions, education, or outreach. You'll never see it included in lists of possible vocations for aspiring seminary students. And in fact, many who have been called to this ministry resent it — for it is one of the more difficult callings. And yet, it is as genuine and important a ministry as any in the body of Christ. In fact we read about it in Scripture.

John 9:1-3, “And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

This passage is dealing with a man who was given a malady from birth so that, “the works of God might be displayed in him.”

What an incredible calling! To know want, difficulty, hardship, suffering, So that God might extend display His Kingdom through you.

As children of God, the thought of the Lord using us for His glory is wonderful — provided we are active participants. You know sharing the gospel to the rebel, or preaching Christ to thousands, raising children to love, know, and serve the Lord, leading the Bible study, encouraging someone in their walk, who wouldn't want to be used by God in these ways?

But, make me passive, exalt God through my weakness, give me need, difficulty, or trial as a means to honor Christ and I'll be first in line when it comes to complaining.

A Difficult Calling

Heretofore we have discussed this ministry from the perspective of the one giving. Today we are going to begin discussing it from the perspective of the one called to this ministry and on being on the receiving end of the body's giving.

It is my intent to answer these questions: What is this ministry? What is it that should govern our thinking when called to this ministry? And how does it fit into the Kingdom of God?

As we have walked through this passage we have looked at the Philippians' role in meeting Paul's need. However we are going to look at being the one in need, or Paul's perspective. Let's begin looking first at the joy that must govern anyone charged with need.

Their Joy

Philippians 4:10, “**But I rejoiced¹ in the Lord greatly²**, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.”

This reflects a statement of exaltation on the part of Paul (as we'll see), nevertheless it presupposes that his focus in life was not his welfare, living the good life, or attaining a lifelong dream. His focus was Christ alone.

Paul could have written, “I praise God for you Philippians” if all of this was intended to be was an ascription of praise. Instead, he uses a phrase that we have seen often in this epistle³ a phrase packed with significance as it speaks of one's boast, joy, or exaltation. It is the term *rejoiced*. The word for *rejoiced* comes from the word used throughout Scripture for *joy*. Biblically speaking, joy arises from the compound realization that on account of our sin, we rightly deserve the wrath of God hell and yet on account of God's grace, Christ hung in our place on the cross and suffered for us the wages of our sin and thus in Christ, we stand before God forgiven — white as snow!

Now when we come to the realization that we are forgiven — that we stand before God not guilty of sin — the result is the deep-seated emotion of joy!

What then is rejoicing? Rejoicing simply is joy expressed, and thus speaks of the pervasion of joy into every part of our life. This is a pervasion which overshadows all circumstances, past failures, future plans, and more.

And yet here we read that Paul “rejoice in the Lord.” This is an important qualification. It speaks of the reason why Paul was filled with an overflowing joy. Notice, it wasn't on account of his circumstances, or the Philippians, or the fact that they gave so much in order to help the apostle. Rather Paul's joy was on account of Christ and His work in the lives of the Philippians which prompted them to serve the Lord in such dire circumstances.

Now just as John's greatest joy revolved around Christ's work in people⁴ so also we see the same passion here: “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly.” This term *greatly* is in the emphatic position in this text. This means that rejoicing in Christ was not something he did when things turned out O.K — because at the writing of this epistle, they clearly hadn't. Rather Paul considered the work of God in the Philippians' life such that after ten years they still longed to encourage him in Christ. Paul experienced a depth of rejoicing equaled nowhere else in Scripture⁵

¹ χαίρω chairō

² μεγαλως megalos

³ e.g., Philippians 1:18; 2:17, 18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 6

⁴ Compare 3 John 4

⁵ This is the only time this word is used in the Bible. It speaks of that which is great or profound in its degree.

From this we learn of the joy that must govern all ministers of need is Christ and His kingdom work in the lives of other people.

Paul's Predicament

This is amazing when you consider the situation in which Paul found himself at the writing of this epistle. As you know Paul was not vacationing in Rome. He wasn't staying at the Hilton while attending a conference on church planting. Rather, he was taken to Rome as a prisoner. He was placed under house arrest until his trial.

Now as you know, this was not an easy place to live. Unlike our prison system where the convict sometimes is better off in prison than on the streets, Roman prison meant for many a death sentence. Rome didn't adequately provide for its prisoners. Thus in a Roman prison one did not eat unless someone on the outside fed you. You did not have covering unless someone brought you clothes or a blanket. There was no medical care such that if you were flogged, your wounds went unnoticed unless someone on the outside dressed them.

This was the system in which Paul found himself. It was a system which forced the prisoner to rely upon the help of family or friends if they were to survive. And yet in spite of his situation Paul writes that he "rejoiced in the Lord greatly." We conclude something about Paul's joy — IT WAS CHRIST AND HIS WORK.

Family of God, at this point I am going to introduce a theme that we are going to see over and over again throughout this passage. The joy of Paul — that which compelled him as he found himself in great need — was not that he finally received some recognition for all that he had done, or the money he needed in order to pay for his care, or his knowing that everything was going to turn out O.K.- for it might not.⁶ BUT, the joy of Paul is clearly his love relationship with Christ, and thus Christ's working in this world.

Accordingly, let us sit up and listen — for when the time of need comes in our lives, the temptation will be just the opposite. When we experience the shortfall, trials and difficulties such that we hurt inside with a pain too deep to describe, and neglect the temptation will be to allow our circumstances to rule our lives! It is so easy to speak from want⁷ or ultimately seek the gift. But, brothers and sisters, we must not allow this to happen! As Christ said, "Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?" (Matthew 6:25).

We must see that life is defined by much more than our external, worldly circumstances. Accordingly I ask, is not your life in Christ far more than the fulfillment you have been lusting after for years? Is your life in Christ far more than the stability you are longing for? Security? Outward peace? The approval of man? Your job? A family? Success? Property? Prosperity? Health? Or length of days?

Romans 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

All that is important in this life and the life to come is your right-standing before God — righteousness. It is being reconciled to Him — peace. And it is living out the joy of the Lord in and through all things!

⁶ Compare Philippians 1:20

⁷ Compare Philippians 4:11, and 4:17

Now it is the latter truth that we see embodied in our passage. It must define us as a people — whether we are in plenty or in need!

Need or Christ?

Paul rejoiced because he had Christ. And thus when need arose, his lack did not control him. From this we draw a very harsh conclusion: The message that I am at peace with God, and that God finds me lovely in His sight, and that Christ is my glorious Savior whose plans for me include my welfare⁸ must take precedence in our lives so that it overshadows all our needs. If our needs overshadow Christ this is a good indication that we are worldly! We are working for the food which perishes! My need has overshadowed Christ.

Let us turn from such silly lusts and distractions. Let us renew our faith this day. Let us allow the joy of the Lord to permeate our being- which truly is our strength!

How do I do this? And how do I allow the joy of the Lord to move me in life?

It's rather simple though very difficult. In the words of Christ: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Revelation 2:5).

This ultimately is a call to remember that you are sinner! Consider what you have in Christ. Samuel Rutherford put it this way:

“O thrice fools are we, who, like new-born princes weeping in the cradle, know not that there is a kingdom before them?”⁹

How can we not be filled with joy knowing that the King of kings and Lord of lords has deigned to love us? How can we not have rejoicing knowing that Christ has chosen to save us? How can we not have joy knowing that God has provided us with the deposit of the Spirit¹⁰ and promised to work all things unto His glory and our good?¹¹

Family of God — it is this joy that must guard our hearts and minds as we approach a ministry of need.

The Ministry

And yet, that brings us to the consideration of what actually is The Ministry of Need.

Philippians 4:10, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.”

This verse reflects an understanding on the part of Paul as to how his need related to the kingdom of God. Accordingly, let me ask you a question, when it came to Christ's Kingdom work, what was the cause of his rejoicing?

⁸ Compare Jeremiah 29:11

⁹ Letters of Samuel Rutherford, Letter XX, page 71

¹⁰ Compare Ephesians 1:13-14

¹¹ Compare Romans 8:28

Again, it wasn't the Philippians' gift! Rather, it was when the “concern” of the Philippians matured or came to fruition — notice the text.

Philippians 4:10, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, **that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again**; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.”

The word *flourished* is a botanical metaphor used in reference to the unfolding of a flower or the leafing out of a tree after winter. In essence, Paul here is saying that ON ACCOUNT OF HIS NEED the Philippians had blossomed in their concern for him. Their maturation in Christ had advanced. And it was this that made Paul “rejoice in the Lord greatly!”

The Purpose

From this we see another very important aspect of the ministry of need: It's purpose is to revive the love of the body. As the purpose of every spiritual gift is the edification of the body¹² so also is God's will for the one lacking.

As his needs are made known to the body, the people of God are forced to make a decision: Will they ignore one of their own? Will they share the love of Christ with them?

As the latter is the only option for a genuine body of Christ, we see that “need” in any form in the body is a catalyst unto that body's growth in grace. And this — as we have seen — is such an important tool in the Kingdom of God.

Again, what is pure and undefiled religion? Theologically dotted “I”s and crossed “T”s? A pure profession of Christ? Rich and abiding quiet times?

Indeed! It is when our doctrine is fleshed out and we minister the love of Christ to another.

James 1:27, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Lazarus' Illness

We see something of the will of the Lord with regard to the needy when Lazarus became ill. Upon receiving word from Mary and Martha that their brother was sick, this is what Christ told His disciples — it forever changed the way the church was to view the needy in the body of Christ.

John 11:4, “When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”

You say, “Lazarus was sick that Christ might demonstrate His power!”

This is true! And how brothers and sisters does God demonstrate His power in the body of Christ today?

¹² Compare 1 Corinthians 12:1, and 1 Peter 4:10

Christ displays His power no longer through powerful acts, but through His people's actions.

John 13:34, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”

And so it is in our passage. Paul is filled with rejoicing, exaltation, a great joy not because he got some money or that the Philippians finally consented to be his “sugar daddy.” Paul rejoiced because the gift of the Philippians reflected a growth in grace on their part.¹³ His need resulted in the Philippians' maturation in Christ!

And that is what defines the ministry of need — knowing want, poverty, sickness, or need that the body might be compelled to serve in love!

In Denial

Now it is important that we understand this. For today in the church there are two kinds of needy people: Those in need and denying it and those in need and abusing it.

On account of our American mentality which prizes self-reliance and self-dependence, there are many in the church today who are needy, but would never let any know about it. It is as though need and shame are synonymous. They say, “Me accept help from anyone? You're crazy.” Or “I don't want your money much less your pity.”

And sadly on account of their pride those in this camp are hiding a powerful tool — their need — which God has given to the church to cultivate a loving body.

Abusers

Yet, there are also those at the opposite end of the spectrum. They are in need and abuse it. On account of the American mentality which fosters a welfare ethic by giving money to people who have not worked for it, there are many in the church today who are looking for handouts. Years ago, they began asking for money from well-intentioned churches. And now, their life revolves around living off the gifts provided to them by the church.

Just like addicts they don't care about the body of Christ or the Lord. They are looking for the next “fix” in the form of a handout from the church — and our mindless generosity is partly to blame! George Grant in his book, *Bringing in the Sheaves* wrote this:

“... the 'war on poverty' actually halted in its tracks the ongoing improvement in the lot of America's poor... instead of enabling the infirm and the elderly to lead full and productive lives, and instead of empowering the poor to control their lives and rise from poverty, the social welfare programs rendered them impotent, dependent, and helpless.”¹⁴

Today, these “dependent” believers can be found sucking the life out of their churches.

¹³ Compare Philippians 4:17

¹⁴ George Grant, *Bringing in the Sheaves*, 1988, page 33

Both extremes are wrong. Both extremes have a misplaced joy which rests either in their independence — so they won't ask for help — or crisis — they live from handout to handout convincing themselves that they are victims.

Now, we must understand that “Need” is a consequence of the fall that must be addressed — especially in the body of Christ. Thus if we are in need, we do not want to stay there. God has deigned to use need as a catalyst to prompt a church's growth in grace. If we should be beset with need, we must view it as a ministry granted by God for the body.

Accordingly we must allow our need to be known — ever and always trusting in Christ as our satisfaction, joy, and inheritance. If indeed God has ordained to use my need to prompt the body unto maturity, then by definition, the body is going to fail — that's part of growth as sinners. Accordingly, when the body fails me I must NOT take it personally and thus be disappointed, angry, or frustrated because that would be to place my joy in something other than Christ. RATHER, I must pray for the body's growth, looking to myself lest I too be tempted.¹⁵

In light of this, let us go to the table of the Lord. For herein we recognize that ALL of us are needy! We all lack grace! We are all apt to place our trust and hope in this passing world! So let us go to the table and reaffirm not only our faith in Christ, but also our love for Christ who died for sinners such as I.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 9, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

¹⁵ Compare Galatians 6:1-2