

Paul's View of the Ministry, Part 1: Serving and Teaching

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I've entitled this particular of ... chapter, Paul Looks at His Ministry. And in it we have Paul's perspective on his own ministry.

Many great men never finish what they begin. There are unfinished sculptures, unfinished paintings, unfinished books, unfinished symphonies, many unfinished things. And, in some cases, maybe the greatest dream of a man's life, he died seeing only halfway done.

But life is like that. Life is cruel in that sense. For the ungodly, for the unfaithful, there is no guarantee that they will ever see the completion of what they dream to do, no guarantee at all. But whatever that thing is that they pursue that may give meaning to life, there is no promise that they'll ever accomplish it.

But you know I don't think that's true for the Christian. I believe in my heart, as much a belief in my heart as it is a confident trust in scripture, but I believe in my heart that God gives to the Christian the time he needs to finish the ministry God gives him. I believe that.

I believe that for the Christian there is the promise that, when God calls you, He will not only give you the spiritual gifts, He will not only open the doors, He will not only make the ministry a possibility, but He will give you the time to finish it. And I think that's born out here in the testimony of the Apostle Paul.

In chapter 20, notice verse 24, "He had been warned not to go back to Jerusalem, and they warned him in these terms," verse 23, "The spiritual witnesses in every city, and, of course, it was through a human agency, saying that bonds and afflictions await me, but none of these things move me. Neither can't I my life here unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry."

Paul knew that he had a certain amount of time, and that in that time he would finish his ministry. He had that confidence, because he pursued it and he believed that God would allow him to accomplish it.

I believe that God prescribes the bounds of every man's life sovereignly. And if God calls you to a ministry, within that sovereign frame there is the possibility of accomplishment, I have to believe that,

for God would never call you to a ministry that was impossible to finish. And I even believe that if, that he did this much time. I think probably this much of it is grace time for the goof offs in this part.

I mean I have to believe that God anticipates certain periods of defection. Don't you? I mean I hope so. [Laughter]

But God has prescribed for a man who is a Christian a time in which to accomplish a ministry if he puts out a maximum effort.

I believe some Christians die without finishing their work, because they started it too late, or because they never got to it. And do you know something, I believe that God may just take Christians home before they even get going. If I read 1 Corinthians 11, "Some who continue to be carnal express that carnality at the Lord's table were killed by the Lord." Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead on the spot. 1 John 5, The sin of the death, it may be that if a Christian fails in it continuously, the Lord just removes him 'cause he's more trouble than he's worth, at least in terms of a testimony on the world.

Now if a Christian does not accomplish his ministry, it's not a question of a shortage of time, it's a question of failure on his part to make the use of time. For example, Paul says twice, "Redeeming the time." Not redeeming time, redeeming the time, definite time, a definite article, a prescribed time. Buy it up, redeem means buy up time, and that's what Paul was doing, he wanted to maximize every moment. He didn't waste time.

I don't believe God would call us into a ministry and not give us the time to accomplish it. Paul says, "But you have to buy it up." And Paul then lived his life buying up every moment to the end that he would finish his ministry, and when he would finish it, then he would leave.

Now the Lord has given us all of the ingredients. You know, if you read 1 Corinthians 12, you find out He's gifted us all, right? Granted to us the Spirit. There are many diversities of gifts, and operations, and administrations, and ministries, and He's put all those things together, and I have to believe that He's given us the gifts and the ministries, according to Romans 12:3, He's also given us the faith to operate those gifts. Wouldn't do any good to have a certain faith and not have the faith to operate it, or to have a lesser gift, in a sense, and have more faith than you needed and just be frustrated all the time.

So there's an equal measure of faith for the type of gift that you have. And with all of that care, surely God has given us the time in which to accomplish it, if we maximize it. And I suppose the people who are going to hear, "Well done good and faithful servant," are the ones who maximized it.

In Ecclesiastes, just to call your attention to some thoughts about time, they come from a human brain, Ecclesiastes being the wisdom of man. But the wisdom of man intersects with the wisdom of

God periodically in Ecclesiastes. And I call your attention to Ecclesiastes 3:1, "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven."

Just as much as God guides all the other factors of existence, He guides time: A time to be born and a time to die. And I believe the bounds of a man's life are sovereignly designed by God.

In verse 17, "I said in mine heart, God shall judge righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." God grants a time for every work to be accomplished.

In 1 Peter 1:17, most interesting statement, says this, "And if you call on the Father who, without respect of persons, judges according to every man's work," listen, "Past the time of your sojourning here in fear." Peter is saying you have a certain time, live it in the fear of God, that's what he's saying. Pass the time of your sojourning, a very personal designation of time, the time given particularly to you.

In 1 Peter 4:2, he says that, "He no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lust of men, but to the will of God." Now the idea here is that God has prescribed time to be maximized for His own will.

In Acts 17:26, Paul was preaching on Mars Hill in Athens, he said, "God has made of one blood, all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation." God determines the time.

Job knew this. And you remember, probably the first part of Job 14:14, but I wonder if you know the last part. The first part says, "If a man die," what? "Shall he live again." The second part says, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait 'til my change come." Job says, I know I'm gonna be changed, I know that, you know, and he said elsewhere that the worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. I know I'll be changed, I wait for my appointed time to end. Yes, God has bounded the life of a man sovereignly in terms of time.

And there is enough time for you to finish the work that God gives you. And I think that's so important. That gives me such a tremendous sense of direction in my life. To know that if I maximize, that I can finish the work, then I don't worry about dying, see, I don't have to worry about death. If I worry about just finishing the work and I don't mean worry in the sense of a negative, but worry in the sense of anticipation, if I think through the fact that if I maximize time, I'm gonna finish the work and then go to be with the Lord in a sense of fulfillment.

You know, we're gonna go to Israel pretty soon, and there's a lot of shooting going on over there. And I heard some lady who said that she was gonna stand in front of me because she didn't think my time was up because my work that isn't the finished. [Laughter]

So I said, that's fine, lady, but I don't know whether your time's up, so I'm not gonna get near you.

You know. I'm not willing to risk that either. But you know it's a fantastic thing to be able to look at your life in terms of that. If I maximize my life and finish the work, then I'm gonna go, and that's glorious.

You know, the Apostle Paul was a man who believed in making use of time, and he didn't believe it only for himself, but he propagated it to others. He wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5, and he said this, he said, "Discharge your ministry to the full." In other words, he said, Timothy, accomplish it, do it, finish it. And to one, a particular individual who may well have been the son of Philemon in Colossians 4:17, he said to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which thou has received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it." See, he says to this young minister, fulfill the time. Notice he said that twice, once to a young Timothy, once to a young Archippus. That's the time when you need to begin to maximize your ministry, to make the most of time, to redeem time.

Now this brings us, then, into the 20th chapter of Acts, and we catch the Apostle Paul as a man who is running against the clock in the sense that he realizes that, as he finishes his ministry, he'll go to be with the Lord, and he knows in his own heart that that's what he wants, that's the supreme thing. Remember he said to the Philippians, you're nice, I'd like to spend time with you, far better to be with Jesus.

So that was the goal of his life. All he lived for was to finish. Verse 24, he says, I don't care what's promised about bonds, I don't care who says they're gonna kill me, that doesn't bother me one bit. Why? Because I am gonna finish my cause with joy, I'm not gonna go along, well I'm gonna get it one of these days, and I'm gonna keep ministering, even though I'm gonna get it, I'm-- No. I'm just gonna plow through this deal with joy, I'm gonna finish the ministry, and what happens happens, and all it's gonna do is release me out of this world to be with Jesus anyway.

He lived for one thing; he lived to finish the work the Lord gave him to do. That's right. I'll tell you, people, that's about it, isn't it, that's about the summation of life. I hope that's what you live for, I hope you live to finish the work He gave you to do.

People often say to me, Johnny, you can't keep going here and speaking, you gotta rest, you gotta take it easy, exercise and have a little time off. And, you know, but that's all right, take care of your body and you exercise a little bit, and you eat properly within the bounds of sanity of course. But, let's face it, you just keep doing what you do, you maximize every opportunity, when you're done you leave. That's life. And that's the only way to live it, and I'm not gonna let worrying about dying steal the joy outta living. I just wanna finish the work.

You say, well it's nice to have that desire, John, but you'll never be able to finish the work. Why? It's a vast work. Well I know it's a vast work and I, God didn't ask me to win everybody in the world. And I know I'm not gonna finish the whole thing, but I know God put a little place here and said, MacArthur, this is your area, cover it. And that's all I need to do.

You know the Apostle Paul came to the end of his life, in 2 Timothy 4, and he said what I'd like to be able to say but never probably will be able to say, but, anyway, he said it. Verse 6 of 2 Timothy 4, he said, "I am now ready to be offered." I love that. That is to me an, he just said, Lord, I can die now. What do you mean, Paul, don't you know that there's a whole world to be won? No, I'm ready to be offered. The time of my departure is at hand.

You say, how does he know that, how did he know that he was gonna die. Verse 7, "I fought a good fight, I have finished my course." Isn't that tremendous. He had a little grace time left at the end.

Imagine. He finished the course. God help us to see our life in terms of the bounds of time which God has prescribed us. You say, well I'm not in the ministry. Oh, yes you are if you're a Christian, aren't you? We're all ministers of Christ, all of us. And whatever spiritual gifts and whatever ministry God has called you to is to be maximized within the frames of the time God has given you. And when you've accomplished that thing in the frame of that time, the joy and the glory of going to be with Him is reward.

Well let's look at verse 17, and let's pick up the narrative, and then we'll give you an outline down around verse 19. Verse 17 says, "And from Miletus," and, of course, this was not the coast of Asia Minor where the ship had stopped, Paul, on this third missionary journey is saying farewell to his beloved in the eastern Mediterranean area. He has a sense in his heart that he'll never be back, because he knows the persecution of the Jews, he knows what he's been through, the, it's very difficult for him, and he feels this is the last time. Plus, he's on his way to Jerusalem and then to Rome and then to Spain, so he doesn't see in his own mind coming to this area again, and so it's a farewell time.

And he come by the ship heading for Jerusalem, because he wants to get here by the feast of Pentecost, verse 16 says. And so he stops at Miletus, the ship stopping there, for several days, and he has a chance to send over to Ephesus, which is about 30 miles away. And so he sends for the elders of the church, because he just wants one more chance to share with these men that he loves. These were his own disciples, he came to Ephesus, no, but no Christians there, he just came in, well maybe a smattering of those who may have been exposed to the Gospel, but nothing like a church, nothing established, nothing solid going. And he came there and he won people to Christ and he founded that church, and he exploded from there, and got involved in all of the churches in Asia Minor, the ones mentioned in Revelation, and probably was responsible for the starting of all of those

as well.

But anyway, he came to Ephesus and there he won these people to Christ. And for three years he nurtured them, and taught them, and they grew, and they grew until he had a whole little flock of mature Christians. And out of that flock rose those men who were called of God to lead, capable, mature, elders or pastors, same idea exactly, same responsibilities, same ministry, elders are pastors.

And so here are these men, were his own disciples, his own children in the faith, now grown up to be at least spiritual young men or spiritual fathers perhaps in the terminology of John. And so he calls to them to meet with him. And I think, as we've seen so many times, here is really the Biblical pattern for the church, you grow your own leadership. And Paul had done it there, and now he had turned the church over to them to nurture it, to carry it on, and he has one last time to spend with them.

Just a footnote, look at the word elders. For the sake of definition, the word elders is presbytery, from which we get presbyter, from which you get Presbyterian. It simply refers to a mature man. These were people who were mature, not just mature, they weren't just old men, you know, like the Old Testament, the hoary heads, the gray hairs, the white hairs, they weren't just that, but they were mature spiritually. And sometimes old age doesn't necessarily go along with spiritual maturity. And sometimes there are younger men who have depth of spiritual maturity, such as Timothy, who certainly would have to be considered as one who would rank as an elder.

And so it is not so much just the idea that these are old men who are given the rule, but the idea of spiritual maturity. So the term elder in verse 17 has to do with the man himself.

Now notice Verse 28, it says, "Take ye, therefore to yourselves, to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." Now there's another definition. The man is titled, in verse 17, his duty is described in Verse 28 as an overseer. That's the word Episcopos from which you get Episcopal. And this is his job. An elder is a mature man, and he rules the flock, he rules the congregation. He has the oversight, he rules not by a big stick, but he rules according to Peter's word by example, by example.

All right, so Paul then talks to these leaders. Now his speech, which begins in verse 18 is very important and I'll tell you why, it is the only speech in all the book of Acts that Paul made to Christians, the only one. All the rest of his messages are to unbelievers. This is the only speech he made to Christians. Now believe me, he made a lot of 'em, but it's the only one Luke recorded. And it, it's really interesting. We're not gonna do this particularly study, but if you want an in depth study sometime, just take this whole thing from verse 18 down through verse 27, you can even go on through the end of the chapter, and pick out every phrase there that you find in the other epistles. This whole little passage here is like a sampler of Paul.

All of the little Pauline phrases all pop up in this passage. It's as if he just pulled together everything that he'd been writing all over everywhere and just threw it all together in this little sampler. So it's important, from just the standpoint of studying the Apostle Paul in terms of his communication to believers.

Notice Verse 18, let's pick up with his speech. And, incidentally, I add that this is probably an abbreviated form of what he said. "And when they were come to him," that is the elders arriving from Ephesus, "He said to them, ye know from the first day that I came into Asia after what manner I have been with you at all seasons."

Now he says that, from the first time that I came, you know how my ministry operated. And you say, well why does he start out like that? Well it may be an apologetic speech. In other words, by that I mean he may be defending himself. Somebody, in the year that he's been gone, may have come in and started undermining him. They did that, didn't they.

And so maybe what he's saying is, look, how could you guys began to distrust me, you know, from the first day that I arrived, the style and the pattern of my ministry, you know what my ministry was. So there may be an apologetic here, he may be defending himself against some people who've tried to undermine him.

And, of course, you know, if you look at verse 29 to 31, it may add a little more weight to the idea of an apologetic, because he says, I know that after my departing, grievous wolves are going to enter in among you, not sparing the flock and, of your own selves, men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them and so forth.

So he may be saying, look, you need to expect this. On the other hand, it's, it may not be that he is talking apologetically, it may be that he is simply expressing in his own simple way a pattern for the ministry. He may be saying, look men, now I'm leaving and this thing is yours. Now you know how my ministry operated from when I first arrived here's how. And what he's saying, in effect is, here's how I want you to do it. So it may be apologetic, it may be just instructional.

Let's look then, beginning at Verse 19, at Paul's view of his ministry. He is about to express to him the pattern of the ministry. Now I hasten to add this very simply, this passage is not difficult to understand. It's very simple, the concepts are simple, it's ground floor. And, at the same time that I say that, I would instruct you to listen carefully, because, as it is basic, it can really be formative in your own ministry.

Now Paul gives four views. The ministry only goes four ways, watch. Our ministry has a perspective toward God, right; our ministry has a perspective toward the church, save people; toward the lost; and

toward ourselves. Those are the four dimensions of the ministry. My ministry will be effective in terms of how I relate to God, to the church, to the lost and to myself. That's all. But that's the embodiment of everything. And so I say, it's a simple thing, but in its simplicity, it is very basic to any ministry.

Paul says then, in effect, here are the four ways I view my ministry, for God I see it as service to Christ; for the church I see it as teaching; for the lost, I see it as evangelism; toward myself, I see it as sacrifice. And that's his perspective on the ministry.

Now let's look at the first one: For God, Paul saw his ministry as service to Christ. And I think we have to see ours the same. Verse 19, first three words, "Serving the Lord." He says, you know how I came to you, you know, from the first day, the style of my ministry was serving the Lord.

In chapter 27 of Acts in verse 23, Paul says, "There stood by me this night an angel of God who's I am and whom I serve." Paul always viewed his ministry, primarily, as service to Christ and to God. Now this is important. You say, well that's obvious John, that's very simple, it is, but it's important. Because it lays some basic thoughts that we need to look at. First of all, Galatians 1:10, Paul really comes down with a very definitive comparison here, this is what he says, "Do I now seek the favor of men or of God? Do I seek to please men? For if I yet please men I should not be the servant of Christ." That's a pretty powerful statement, isn't it?

If your ministry is to be popular with people, you've blown it already, right? You remember the context of this in Galatians 1, he had just started his letter to the Galatians on churches, and I mean he came down heavy. He says, of course what, let me give you a background first, the Judiazers had come in and they had just told the Christians there in Galatia, look, the only reason Paul didn't impose the law on you, the only reason Paul didn't impose circumcision on you was, he wanted to be popular. He just wanted to win your fancy.

He, they, see, they came in and said, you gotta be circumcised, you gotta keep the law, that's how you get saved. He said, Paul comes along and he's just nice and says grace, and just to be popular, he just wants to be popular, that's all. And so Paul answers that criticism in verse 8. He says, "Though we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be anathema. And as we said before, so say I again, if any man preach not any other gospel unto you than that which you have received, let him be anathema." Now, do I sound like I wanna please men? Take that. Do I sound like a men pleaser when I say, curses on those people.

No, he's no man pleaser. You have to choose in your ministry, sooner or later, whether you're gonna serve God or people. That's right, and every one of us does that. That doesn't mean you stomp all over people, but it does mean that your priority is toward God and that you do not necessarily consider the reaction of people if the demand of God is clear. You do what's right and let God take care of the consequences.

Now this boils down, people, to the very simplest thing, it's not only a contrast, service to the Lord is not only a contract from service to men, and I think we need to think of that, because so many times even you who probably teach a Sunday School class, you very often think of that Sunday School class as an obligation to the system. Well I've got to teach because it's, you know, 8:30 and those kids are there, so I'm going in. You know.

Or, well the superintendent's a nice guy, or is a nice, there's a nice lady superintendent there and she would be disappointed, and there's little, you know, there's that kid in there that always gives me trouble and he needs to learn and so on, and the church, and there's John and the elders, I better do this. You have completely the wrong perspective. When you go in and talk to those six little wiggly things.

Whatever it is, that is rendered onto Jesus Christ, and you should consider that obligation as if Christ was standing in the room. For, believe me, He is. And as if Jesus Christ Himself were the superintendent, and he, he and the apostles were the elders of this church, because we represent Him. Your service isn't to me, don't you ever serve me. Don't you ever say, well, I don't think it's the right thing to do, but John thinks we ought to do it. Don't you ever do that.

You serve the Lord Jesus Christ, you respond to the leadership of the church as they serve Christ, and give you direction from Him, but you are serving Christ. Keep that in perspective, whatever you do.

But let me take it a dimension further, it's not only just in what you do in the church and what you do in terms of your active ministry, but look at Ephesians 6, this is a most interesting one. Ephesians 6:5, it says, "Employees," it says servants, but it means employees, "Be obedient to them that are your employers. Obey your boss with fear and trembling." You say, that I do.

Good, well you got one thing out of the way. "In singleness of your heart," in other words with a single purpose to direct yourself to the accomplishment of that which he gives you, what? "As unto Christ." Why does it have to say that? You mean that I am to obey my boss as if he were Jesus Christ? You don't know my boss.

No connection. You should work at your job as if you were working for Jesus Christ Himself. Can you image if Jesus Christ came in to wherever you are one day and said, look, I'd like you all to do this for Me. Oh, oh, you, what, you know, we would.

Shhew, you know, we'd fall all over ourselves trying to get it done. But you know it's very important that you function that way, because the Bible says that you ought to serve whoever your master is, even if he's anything from a Christian to an atheist, as if they were Jesus Christ Himself. That's your

obligation as a Christian. Everything you do from the moment you open your eyes in the morning 'til you close 'em at night and go to sleep is service to Jesus Christ. There is no secular and sacred division. The secular belongs to the unsaved and the carnal. Everything is service to Christ, everything is rendered to Him.

Whether it's the operation of your spiritual gifts or whether it's punching the clock at your job, it's all the same. And the things that you do in this life are rendered under Christ. Remember in Matthew chapter 25, where, in Versus 34 to 40, Jesus is talking about the judgment of the nation's that's coming at the second coming. And He says to them, to the sheep on His right hand he says, "Enter into the Kingdom, and He says here's the reason, when I was thirsty you gave Me a drink, when I was hungry you fed Me, when I was naked you clothed Me," etcetera, etcetera. And they said, when did we do this? And Jesus said, "As you did it onto the, one of the least of these My brethren," what? "You did it unto Me."

Whatever you're doing, remember, it is marked down in God's mind as service rendered toward Christ. What kind of service are you rendering Him? You say, well I serve Him when I come to church. Well that's nice. That's one hour out of the week. What are you doing the rest of the time? It's all service to Him, all of it.

You say, but I'm not in the ministry, I just, I'm a mechanic. That's service to Christ. Our service is no less personal than if Jesus Himself were our employer, and the dichotomy must be remembered, I serve Him, I do not serve men.

I am not pleasing men, I'm not making the effort, in my ministry, to please men, to say what everybody wants to hear. And you know you have so much of this, it's just amazing how many things are avoided because people don't want to offend the guy who gives the most money.

Now notice the word here that is the word service in verse 19, serving, it's slavery, literally in the Greek, bond service. Paul uses it 17 times in his Epistle, and he talks a lot about slavery. It was a high calling to be a slave of Jesus Christ, believe me. To be a servant of the King of kings and Lord of lords, fantastic. Whatever you do is to Him.

I know that, in the ministry, you have very sobering attitudes, because you think of yourself in terms of a servant of Jesus Christ and then from then it's a matter of responsibility. But, of all of the sobering responsibilities that I have, the one that presses me the most is the responsibility of teaching. And the verse that haunts my mind repeatedly is the verse that's in 2 Timothy 2:15, it says this, "Study to show yourself approved unto God."

Boy that is really a strong statement. You know, when I prepare a sermon, my thought isn't well, will these people like this sermon, my thought is, will God be pleased. And that makes a whole different

thing out of it, district it. Because, what I'm doing here, right now as I speak, I don't want to do as, to please you, although I want you to learn it, and I want you to grow, and I want you to sense there's love, I wanna do this so you're taught, you're instructed, you're in priest, and God is served. And I don't wanna do anything that would detract from Him no matter how it affected you. Service to Christ.

Now such service to Christ is rendered with two things, verse 19, "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind." Not some humility but all of it. You know it's one thing to be a servant, it's something else to have the spirit of a servant. You guys that have employees, have you ever had a cantankerous, rebellious employee? You always have one. You just keep firing him and getting another one. At some point or other, if you have a large enough entourage of people, you always get somebody who chafes. But serving the Lord is to be done with all lowliness with a total sense that you're a servant and this is a high calling, and this is something you enjoy doing, the spirit of a servant. Not just service, but the spirit of service. Humility.

And Paul had this. As capable as he was, as astute as he was, as much of a man of knowledge, he was humble. Verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 15 expresses it, "For I am the least of the apostles, that I'm not fit to be called an apostle, because I have persecuted the church of God. But," he said, I like that, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace, which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me." He says I'm nothing, I don't deserve anything, but I am what I am by the grace of God. And as long as he had that attitude, people, he served the Lord with humility.

He said, I don't mind suffering, I don't even mind the thorn in the flesh, I don't mind persecution, I don't mind affliction, I don't mind any of that, because when I'm weak, then I'm strong. He said, I just can't believe God'd even be gracious enough to let me be a slave.

In 2 Corinthians 3:5, listen to these words, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." We have no right to think anything of ourselves, our sufficiency is of God, listen, "Who also hath made us able ministers." The only reason we have any capacity to do anything is because of Him.

Lowliness of mind. The word lowliness means devoted submission. Humility of mind means contented obedience. Ambrose was one of the great figures in the early church; he was a great scholar, churchman, governor of several Roman provinces. And he had ruled so capably as a governor and with such spiritual insight, that when the Bishop of the region died, they wanted to make him the Bishop and switch him from politics to theology. He was a Christian, history tells us. He was called out to be the successor of the dead Bishop. And the historians tell us that to him it was so unthinkable that he turned and ran out of the building, fleeing into the night, rather than face the responsibility. Right or wrong, they chased him down and convinced him that God had appointed him to the task.

There needs to be, I think, in the sense of our service to Jesus Christ, a constant sense of inadequacy. Not, we are inadequate in His power, but that we are inadequate in ourselves and must totally rest in His power.

John Knox, great preacher in Scotland, was called to preach. And his biographer says this, "He burst forth in most abundant cheers and withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behavior from that day until the day that he was compelled to present himself in the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart." He was torn and driven to tears by the fearful responsibility of being called to preach.

Humility is basic to the service of the King, if it's to be effective. But there's a second thing, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and, of course, we've talked so much about how you define humility, humility is knowing Jesus Christ so well you see yourself in perspective. But also with many tears and trials which befell me by the plotting of the Jews. Serving the Lord involved humility and suffering, second point, suffering. That's the lot of the servant, you know. Jesus became a servant and suffered. The suffering servant of Isaiah 53, the perfect example, and Peter says, "As He was a suffering servant, so we're to follow in His footsteps."

Now this is just part of it, you know, all that will live godly in this present age are gonna suffer persecution. If you really are a humble servant of the Lord and you really serve Him, you're gonna get some things, it's gonna come. But there are two areas that the suffering comes from. Notice verse 19, "With many tears," that's inside suffering, "And trials," that's outside, The servant of God who serves with a full heart in all humility is gonna find suffering is gonna come, and first of all, it's gonna be inside suffering tears.

I don't believe you can really serve the Lord with a passion, and I'm convicted somewhat at this point myself, I don't believe you can really serve the Lord inside with a passion unless you really feel some inside suffering. And I don't mean it's conjured up, I don't mean it's manufactured, I mean it's just real. Paul shed tears, he said with many tears. His service to the Lord was a service involving tears. Why? Because he pained when God was dishonored. And he grieved when he saw certain things in the world.

Three things grieved him. I looked through the New Testament trying to find some things, and I found three things that made Paul cry: One, he cried because people were lost. Romans 9:2 and 3, in that passage where he unbears his heart, he says, "That I have great heaviness, continual sorrow in my heart, and I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsman, according to the flesh." He says, I cry all the time, and I could almost wish to be cursed myself if Israel could get saved. You say, oh, Paul, that's emotional. And he says in verse 1, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not. My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit. I'm telling the truth, I hurt for the lost."

Many tears. He cried over the loss.

Secondly, he cried over carnal Christians. You know that he wrote 1 Corinthians to the biggest batch of carnal Christians around, and the whole time he wrote the letter he cried. That's concern people, that's real concern. Are you really that concerned about the body, are you that concerned, am I that concerned about a carnal Christian?

Listen to 2 Corinthians 2:4, he writes his second letter to them and describes his feelings when he wrote the first one, he says this, "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote unto you with many tears." I wrote the first letter crying through the whole thing because of your carnality and your inconsistencies. He cared.

There was a third thing that made him cry, he cried about false teachers, because they undermine God's work. Acts 20:31 he says, "Remember, for three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears." And he just told them he had been speaking about false teachers. He warned them about false teachers crying. That grieved him. Philippians 3:18, "Many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." He's talking of false teachers again. He cried over the lost, he cried over carnal Christians, and he wept because God's glory was being undermined by false teaching. Many tears.

Service to Jesus Christ, I think, has to involve some of that inside suffering, because we can serve Him with a full heart, and we serve Him passionately. And yet, at the same time, that there's all the joy and service, there's that knowledge that there's fruitlessness. We're gonna see tonight in Galatians where Paul must have done some weeping, because after all this passage that he writes in Galatians, he closes by saying, "I don't know what to do with you." I have gone to the end of my rope.

But you know something, I really believe that when there is that kind of ministry there's gonna be fruit. I believe that when a person is that passionate, that they shed tears over those kind of things, God is really gonna reap a harvest.

I remember reading about Robert Murray McCheyne who died and his church was visited by a young pastor who was taken around by the custodian to see the church where McCheyne had preached. And they took him into a little room and there was a little stool and the old custodian said, 'Sir, you see that stool.' And he thought, well it's strange to show me a stool. He said, 'That's the stool where Pastor McCheyne would kneel and weep before he'd ever preach.'

And then he took him into the pulpit and he saw this great Bible on the pulpit and he saw that it was all watered and stained and he said, 'Well what is all this on the Bible?' And he said, 'Well that's the tears that Brother McCheyne would shed while he preached. And he is dead but he's still moving lives.' He had an impact. And I'm not advocating a stupid emotionalism, I'm talking about an honest

compassion.

But listen to Psalm 126:6, a beautiful promise, "He that goeth forth, even weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." If we can make a spiritual point out of that, and I think that's what it's there for, the person who goes forth carrying the Word of God, bearing the precious seed and has a compassionate, caring heart has the promise that God is gonna send him back with his sheaves. Gonna be a harvest.

Serving the Lord, then involves humility and suffering, and the first kind of suffering comes from the inside. When you really see your life as service to Jesus Christ, you see it in the right perspective and you know that it has to include some tears.

Second thing, there is suffering from the outside in Acts 20, he says trials of the Jews, they plotted against him, he says, you know, it's, it's just a question of persecution, that's what he's talking about, and it was always the Jews, seemingly, that hassled him and plotted against him. In fact, even in chapter 20 verse 3, they had tried to kill him, apparently by pushing him overboard on a ship, and so he never even got on the ship.

It was at this time of his life, incidentally, that he wrote 1 Corinthians. And, in 1 Corinthians 15, I think it's verse 30, he makes the statement in reference to some of the problems. He says, "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour." And then the next Verse, "I die daily." He lived in a constant jeopardy for his life, even at the time in which he was writing that, which is just prior to the time that we find in Acts 20. The Jews had continually plotted against him, they saw him as a heretic, as a threat to their religion, and so forth.

But, you know, as we've seen so many times in the book of Acts, suffering's just a part of living a holy life in an unholy world, isn't it. The system can't tolerate it and they react to it.

I suppose there is a sense in which you could gage your Christian effectiveness by the waves you make. If you don't make any waves, you're not really very affective. There should be some reaction by the system against you. And I don't mean by Christians. If the Christians are reacting against you, you got a problem. But I mean by the ungodly system.

Well that's really a look at a servant of the Lord. You know the world measures a great servant of God if he gets his picture in every Christian magazine, or, you know, if he's on the list of all the dignitaries who are heading up this or that, if he's influential, has a great name, or has a lot of degrees after his name. But you know how the lor-- and some of those men are great servants of God, but, you know, how God measures it? If he has his whole life set in order of the priority of serving Christ and he does it in all humility and a willingness to suffer. And believe me, when it all gets passed out at the great judgment seat of Christ, I think some people are gonna be shocked at who gets it in terms of reward.

Second thing, and we'll just look at this, 'cause it's only a brief point. The second thing that Paul saw in looking at the ministry was the view to the church. He saw his relationship to God in terms of service, but toward the church, point to teaching. His obligation to the church was to teach, verse 20, "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shown you and have taught you publicly and from house to house." His ministry, Godward was seen as service, churchward is teaching. He saw the priority was instruction, that was very clear.

And I like this little thought there, verse 20, "I kept back nothing that was profitable." To keep back, to draw back, to withhold, the same verb used in verse 27, "I have not shunned, or I have not failed, or I have not held back anything that was the council of God." Paul didn't hold back a thing.

You know, that's one of the dangers in the ministry, is you get to thinking about how people are affected by you, and you get to worrying about your popularity, you do that just as much as I do. You know, you say, well, if I say that, Mr. so and so's, I don't know, 'cause he thinks this. And, you know, you, and you just, you're very careless. So you may avoid certain things so you don't offend somebody. Now you should do that, you should be inoffensive if it's a particular opinion. But if it's the Word of God and the truth of God and the question of right or wrong, you just put it out and let everything fly.

You know, I think the great example is Paul when he was in Antioch and Peter was there, and Peter was having a great time, and he was eating heroes and miracles sandwiches, and living it up Gentiles, and he was, and no problems at all, he wasn't hung up on law. All of a sudden a whole bunch of the circumcision party arrived, Peter separated himself from the Gentiles, went over and sat with the Jews, and did the Jewish thing, and Paul was really upset with him.

And in Galatians 2:11, Paul says, "I withstood into the face because he was to be blamed." And in verse 14, 13 or 14, he says to him, "Peter, what are you doing making these people do something that you didn't even do?" And he said, "I said it to him publicly before everybody." Say, well you'll hurt his feelings.

You, I hope so. I hope I do more than that, I hope I ... theology. Paul never held back anything. He was never guilty of shrinking back from the obligation of teaching. He withheld no doctrine, no exhortation, no admonition that was needful. If he knew it was God's truth, and he knew it was needed to be applied, he applied it. And I'll tell you, there are many people who don't do that. Say, well, we don't wanna say anything about that because we've got a couple of men who give a lot of money, and they don't feel that way, so we just avoid that.

What we've got, well I've got these guys on the board and, oh my, if I said that, oh, see. Gosh, you know, that's men pleasing. I had one pastor say to me, well, we don't preach on the second coming,

I'm not sure what I believe and there's a variation of things, so we just don't talk about it. That's a sin. How could you teach the Bible and not talk about the second coming? That's what we're all waiting for.

Say, one fellow said to me, well, we just avoid doctrinal issues.

You know, that's real good. Ah huh. One fellow asked me, he said, you and your church believe in church discipline, where if there's a sinning member that you know about and so forth, that you would go to him as elders and discipline him. I said, oh, absolutely. You do? Oh, why, I haven't heard of that, and that hasn't been done in years. I said, well we do it. I said, and you ought to do it, it's right, it's in the Bible. He said, well we couldn't, he said, in the first place, where would we start. [Laughter]

You know. You know, the question of applying right principles, whatever the consequences is a question easily answered by scripture, you just do it. By this I don't mean you're unloving, I just mean you do what's right. You can't hold back anything profitable, you can't, and fulfill your ministry, can you? No. You say, well who says what's profitable. Well you got me there. He says, "I held back nothing profitable." You say, well what's profitable? I mean can't every man decide that. Maybe it isn't possible to discipline this person, put him out of the church, maybe it'll harm him, so it isn't profitable, or maybe such and such a doctrine isn't profitable, so how do you know what's profitable. Very easily.

You ready for this? All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. You didn't know that was in there, did ya?

Right. The whole council. Verse 27, "I haven't held back anything, I've given you the whole council of God." You think God gave us unprofitable truth? All things here are for our edification. Yes, it's all profitable. Now, some of it's profitable for doctrine, that is to teach principles; some for reproof, and that word I translated five times rebuke, and once it's translated in, I think it's Matthew 18, to tell a person his faults. Yes, the Bible is profitable also to say, look, my dear brother, this says you're doing things that displease God, reproof, and we have that obligation; it's also profitable for correction once you've rebuked, then it gives you the tools by which to correct the behavior; and finally it's profitable for instruction in righteousness.

So it's, once you've reproved, set the man on the right path, then you continue to teach him in a righteous life. It's profitable. That's not just a New Testament concept, listen to this, David said it in Psalm 49 and 10, and I think, just to give you the idea of the consistency of God in the Old Testament, listen, David, "I delight to do Thy will, oh my God, yea thank You law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation. Lo, I have not restrained my lips, oh Lord, and you know it." Listen to this, "I have not hidden Thy righteousness within my heart, I have declared Thy faithfulness in Thy salvation, I have not concealed Thy loving kindness and Thy truth from the great congregation." Isn't that good. I didn't keep anything back, I told 'em everything.

You know, Ezekiel was given a very, very unique commission, and I think it's a commission that belongs to every Christian, and it's in 33 of Ezekiel, and I'll read you three verses and make a quick application. Listen, God says to Ezekiel, He calls him son of man, "Son of man, I have set the a watchman under the House of Israel, you're My man in Israel. Therefore, thou shalt hear the word at My mouth and warn them from Me." In other words, whatever I tell you, you tell them. Implied is, they won't like it, they won't like all the rebukes. "When I say unto the wicked, oh, wicked man, thou shalt surely die," can you imagine having the commission of the Lord to go up to somebody and say that? "Listen, you wicked man, you're gonna die." So the Lord anticipated that Ezekiel may a little, get a little queasy at that point, so He says, "If I say that, if you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die is in iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." In other words, you'll get punished for not communicating My If, on the other hand, you do that, there's no punishment.

Now that's not saying that you're gonna get sent to hell for somebody else dying without Christ, what it's saying is this, and I believe this, the implication there is that the Christian minister is responsible to communicate the truth of God or stand in the place of chastisement for not doing it. So when somebody says to me, well I just don't talk about that. Then my statement to them is, you ought to read Ezekiel 33, because if you don't talk about that, you may be withholding that which God designs to be spoken. And if that individual dies in his sins, then it may be that you shall suffer some chastisement for a failure to communicate.

It's not the question of whether the man's gonna be saved or lost on the basis of what you say or don't say, that's on God's sovereignty side, because the man dies in his sins in both cases, it's just a question of whether you are gonna be punished or not punished for a failure to exercise your ministry.

Now if you're going to really warn people about the things of God, and if you're gonna declare the whole council of God, and if you're going to give everything that is profitable, then your ministry is gonna be involved doing this, right, teaching this Book. That's why I'm so committed to the fact that you must teach expositionally through the Bible, through the Bible, because if you do that, then you're gonna hit the council of God solidly.

Okay. So he taught them, now notice two ways he taught: Publicly, and from house to house. He taught in public and he taught in homes. Now, the idea of teaching publicly is very simple, when he was ... he taught, first of all, in the synagogue for a couple of months, three months I think, and then for two years in the house of Tyrannus. They had public meetings and people came and learned. And that's great and that's why we do this, because we are called on to teach publicly.

But he also did it from house to house. You know I have learned, and I wish I had the opportunity, and I'm certainly available to any of you any time to come to homes and teach the Word of God. You

know why, because there you can reinforce and apply the truth which you teach here. Paul knew that one, it was one thing to teach it, but it was another thing to meet somebody somewhere and meet their special need and help them make an application.

You know, Paul did some house to house, I've seen people try to defend home to home visitation programs on the basis of this verse. That isn't what it's talking about, it's talking about teaching. And, you know, visitation where you go and drink coffee and talk, that's nice, and you should do that, it's a nice thing to do. But don't confuse that with Acts 20:20, that isn't what it's talking about. What it's talking about here is going there to teach the Word of God in a home Bible study or to a family, to be available to instruct or to apply spiritual truth.

And you know, I know Paul did that every home he went into, because what's the first thing you do if Paul arrived at your place? Paul, could you please explain to me this verse. Sure, you'd ask him. That's what happens to me everywhere I go. Or, you know, I'm so glad to see you, John, could you please explain to me what this verse [Laughter]

That happens everywhere. You know, I mean I was in the market and a lady comes up and says, oh, John, I'm so glad to see you, so nice to meet you here. Could you please explain to me such and such a verse. I said, well wait 'til I put my bananas down, I'll be happy, you know.

And that's fine, I mean, you know, I'm happy to do that, if I know the answer.

Of course there are times when I claim that great verse, which has become my life verse, Deuteronomy 29:29, the secret things belong to the Lord. [Laughter]

But there is not only the idea that the Christian ministry is a public thing, but that you ought to be able to bring that message, if you propagate from a pulpit, down to somebody's house and somebody's life, and make it work. And I like the fact that Paul went from house to house because that says to me he was a real person, and he cared, and he was involved, and his ministry was something that you could test, and you could bounce your life off of his truths, and it would work and it would stand.

Listen, my obligation toward God is to serve Him, that's how I view my ministry. My obligation toward the church is to teach the church, whether it's publicly or privately, to reinforce that teaching and to make it livable, that's the priority Godward and churchward.

Come back next week and we'll see the other two, let's pray.

Father, we thank You for tremendous insights into the ministry that we gained from the life of this dear man. We are thrilled when we see the dimension and the depth of his ministry. And even more thrilled to know that we have the same Holy Spirit dwelling in us that was in him, enabling us to do, in power

and in measure, those things which were done through Him. Father, we pray, too, that we might view the ministry of Christ committed to us wherever we are as service to Jesus Christ in everything. And that we might not be men pleasers but God pleasers. And that toward the church, Father, we may see the ministry viewed as teaching and instruction. And even though many here, Father, most in this place, are not preachers, and they're not perhaps gifted with the gift of teaching, yet to be responsible, to communicate whatever gift they have, and to instruct one another in the truth is certainly all of our responsibility. And so, Father, may the ministry be in our lives what it was designed to be in heaven, that God may be glorified and people one to Christ and saints built up in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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