

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Paul's Philosophy of Ministry

Scripture: Colossians 1:24-29

Code: 80-366

Let's open the Word of God to Colossians chapter 1. We'll take a little break from Mark's gospel which we have been doing for many, many months, many joyful and wonderful months.

I want to bring this Shepherds Conference to a conclusion by looking at a portion of Scripture that is a very important one when it comes to ministry...when it comes to ministry. As I was thinking about what I might do on this particular Lord's Day, I did what I occasionally do, I dug back into a MacArthur Archives, my little study where I do my study has some notebooks all lined up on shelves of things that I've preached in the past, notes that I've made to myself in the past, and I went back into the early years of my ministry. I went back to the foundational years here at Grace Church. I went back an early opportunity I had to do a week of teaching at a very significant seminary in the country, just as soon after I had come to Grace Church, probing around what was there then that shaped my ministry. What was there then...what passage of Scripture, what passages of Scripture help me get a focus on ministry?

And I could always find that by digging up old notes, old notes that I wrote to myself, old notes that I wrote in rough draft form in preparation for preaching somewhere. And whatever I was thinking in those many, many years ago, would inevitably show up when I talked to pastors, or when I talked to pastors in training all those many years ago.

Well I found some old notes that really go back to the seventies, to the 1970's. And when I picked them up and began to wander through these notes, I realized that these notes framed up for me those many, many years ago a kind of composite summary of how I view ministry. And it's not mine, they're not my insights, they come from my hero, the Apostle Paul. If you know anything about me, you know that Paul is my mentor. Paul is my model. Paul is my example. I have him in my mind while I honestly desire to be like Christ. I understand that that is not going to happen in this life, that's going to happen in the life to come. I want to pursue Him as much as I can, but only in the life to come will I be like Him. In the meantime, I need a man with feet of clay to follow. And many, many years ago I read Paul's words to the Corinthians, "Be followers of me as I am of Christ." And I took it upon myself to make Paul my model, Paul my example, Paul my disciple, and Paul my mentor. I have endeavored through the years to exhaust my understanding of Paul in the book of Acts, my understanding of Paul through all of his epistles. And my favorite of all of his letters is 2 Corinthians because that letter digs into the heart of the Apostle Paul like no other. And I'm so glad I didn't try to teach 2 Corinthians early in my ministry, but it came very late in my ministry or I never would have understood the things that

were in his heart because without twenty years of ministry under your belt, you just couldn't possibly grasp the things that he was saying in that epistle.

At this particular point, if I'm ever to pick up a MacArthur commentary which is a rare thing for me to do, but if I ever do pick up one to read for the nourishing of my own soul, it will either be one from the gospel of John, the exalted portrait of Christ, or it will be the commentary on 2 Corinthians where I read again about the heart of Paul. I want to be like Paul, who desired to be like Christ.

And this goes way, way back to many years ago when I saw in Him the model for ministry. He had a perspective on ministry that I think we can sum up by looking at the one passage that you see in the Lord's Day Bulletin, Colossians chapter 1 verses 24 to 29. And it was to this passage that I turned many, many years ago, nearly 40 years ago. And as you know, we're in year 43 of ministry here, so you can see this is in the early years. These are times when I was really putting together the foundations of ministry. This passage captured my heart because it pulls everything together in one place that I felt was necessary for faithful ministry.

Let me read verses 24 to 29, Colossians. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. And in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God, bestowed on me for your benefit so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations but is now been manifested to His saints. To whom God will to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power which mightily works within me."

You will notice there, there are a number of first-person pronouns. I rejoice, I was made a minister, I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word, we—collective first person pronoun—proclaim Him so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose I labor. This is very personal. This is Paul's personal perspective on ministry.

Now, let me begin by backing up to the end of verse 23 where at the very end Paul says, "I was made a minister...I was made a minister." And then he repeats it in verse 25, "I was made a minister." Let me just start there with a definition of what it means to be a minister. The word in the Greek is *diakonos* from which we get essentially the word deacon. It has as its basic meaning a table waiter. Or, if you will, less than that, a busboy, not even the waiter, the guy who picks up the dirty dishes, the guy who serves the waiter. The waiter takes the order, the assistant waiter brings the food and takes away the dishes. I was made a waiter, he says. I was made a busboy. I was made a server. This is a word that designates a very common duty, a very mundane duty. In a very real sense, it's an unskilled job.

Diakonos speaks of its commonness. The Apostle Paul also refers to himself with another word, other than *diakonos*, we find that a number of times at the beginning of his epistles. He calls himself a slave of Christ, and he uses the word *doulos*. *Doulos* refers to submission...to submission; *diakonos* to a common service; *doulos* to a submissive service.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 1, he refers to himself as a servant using a different word than either of those two. He calls himself a servant of Christ, and he uses the word *huperetes*...*huperetes*...*huper* is the preposition for under and *retes* comes from the verb to row. He calls himself an under-rower. That would be the low-level slave at the bottom of a trireme. A trireme is a ship, a wooden ship with three rows of men pulling oars below deck. The under-rower was the one at the bottom. Triremes were amazing ships. I happened to be reading a book on the Athenian Navy which is fascinating and I'm learning all about triremes...I could get carried away here, but I won't.

In the darkness of the bottom of that ship, having no idea where they were going, without ever seeing the light of day, and sometimes slaves chained to their oars, they pulled an oar with hundreds of other men to move these massive ships through the Mediterranean. That speaks of lowliness. That speaks of obscurity. Paul saw himself as one who was common in a role of submission that was very lowly.

As he looked at his life, he defined himself in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 as a clay pot...a clay pot. He said, "We have this treasure of the gospel of the truth of God in clay pots," earthen vessels in the translation that you may use. But it's a clay pot...common, under orders and lowly.

In Acts 20, he reminded the Ephesian elders that he served the Lord in this way with all lowliness of mind. He had a lowly view of himself. And that is why the terminology is chosen to describe those who are ministers. From the world's standpoint and because we are the representatives of God, it is an elevated position. But from our perspective, in comparison to the glory of God, it is a lowly, common submissive role. Paul understood who he was. In fact, in 1 Corinthians he said, "We are considered by the world the off-scouring...we are considered by the world the scum. And the Greek words mean the stuff that stuck to the pan after the meal has been cooked, it has to be scraped off. We're not just at the bottom of the barrel where the scum stuck to the bottom of the barrel. We're the off-scouring. In his day, of course, that's how they were viewed by the world. And that was okay with Paul. It was one of the enemies of Martin Luther who called him a privy pot, and Luther would have agreed with that.

So we start with this notion of humility, this notion of selflessness, this notion of commonness, submissiveness and lowliness. We are simply clay pots that contain this glorious gospel. To get a complete view of that, the words of Paul need to be heard. "We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your slaves," 2 Corinthians 4:5. You're slaves for Jesus' sake. Not only are we the slaves of God, but we are the slaves of others. We have this treasure in clay pots so

that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves. We should never be the explanation for the impact that our ministry has. We are simply the clay pots.

Well that's the definition that we start with. And now I want to take you into this passage and I want to show you the eighth aspects that essentially make up the profile of ministry here. First of all, is the source of our ministry...the source of our ministry.

At the end of verse 23 Paul is concluding this massive section in chapter 1 on the glory of Christ, the deity of Christ, the majesty of Christ, the exaltation of Christ as the supreme One, as well as the head of the church, firstborn from the dead. The one who has first place in everything. All of that is in verse 18. And he's talking about the gospel of reconciliation, how He made peace through the blood of His cross and how we who were formerly alienated can now be brought near. It's a passage on the glory of Christ and the glory of the gospel. And then Paul, at the end of verse 23, says, "Of which," referring back to that glorious gospel concerning Christ and salvation, "I was made a minister." The he repeats it in verse 25, "I was made a minister."

He is saying, "I did not make myself a minister," that's obvious. "I was made a minister." He is the recipient of this action on him. By what? What made you a minister? Was it your education? Was it your ability? Was it your giftedness? Was it your personality? Was it your training? Was it timing? Was it opportunity? Was it the church? Was it some official ecclesiastical body? What or who made you a minister? Who made you into this lowly, common, obedient servant?

Well the answer to that comes in the testimony of the Apostle Paul. He tells us and we hear him tell us in the twenty-sixth chapter of Acts, this is what he says, "I was on my way to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests." He was going there to arrest and if need be kill Christians. "At midday, O King," he says to Agrippa, this Gentile ruler. "At midday I saw on the way a light from heaven brighter than the sun shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me...in the Hebrew dialect...because as all Old Testament professors know, God speaks Hebrew. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." And I said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet, for this purpose I have appeared to you to appoint you a minister." I was made a minister, he says. I was a persecutor on my way to Damascus and in one moment I was made a minister.

The source is none other than sovereign God, the Lord Himself. I have made you a minister, appointed you a minister, and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you, and you do know that on four separate occasions the risen, exalted, transcendent Christ appeared personally to the Apostle Paul. I will use you in My rescue operation for both Jewish people and Gentiles to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God that they may receive

forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who had been sanctified by faith in me. I was made a minister because God slammed me on the road.

This is a sovereign act of God. It's described, the original account of that, in the ninth chapter of the book of Acts. Paul is giving you the personal testimony of the history which Luke records. Listen to Romans 15, here Paul speaks. "I have written," in verse 15, "very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again because of the grace that was given me from God to be a minister of Christ Jesus." Okay, he was chosen to be a minister and it was by grace. You get that? Did he earn it? What way did he earn it? He's persecuting the church. He's persecuting Christ. He's killing Christians, throwing them in prison. That is not the path to earning your ministry stripes. It was grace, the grace that was given me from God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God. Consequently I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me. What message do I have? I don't have any message except what Christ gives me. I was made a minister. I was plucked up by a sovereign Lord with sovereign power and made a minister.

In 2 Corinthians 4 he says, "We have this ministry as we receive mercy." It came by grace and it came by mercy. He didn't deserve it. He didn't earn it. And neither did you and neither did I. It is grace and it is a mercy that we are in ministry.

Paul was always stunned by this. You go to the end of his life and he's writing his final pastoral epistles and he makes such an interesting statement in 1 Timothy. He says, verse 12, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me because He considered me faithful, putting me into ministry even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor, yet I was shown mercy and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant."

If you're in ministry, my friend, it is a mercy, it is a grace gift. If you are a servant of common nature, submissive character, lowly designation, third-level galley slave, and you have been placed there by our sovereign God.

Now go back to Colossians chapter 1, if you've been wandering with me a little. Back to verse 25, "I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit." That sums it up. That to me was the defining statement of my life. I was made a minister. For me, it was also an experience on a road. When I was 18 years old and just about to hit my nineteenth birthday and returning from my first year of college, reluctant to serve the Lord to some degree with a somewhat wayward heart, although I had committed my life to Christ, I was more interested in what I wanted than what He wanted and He threw me out of a car going 75 miles an hour down in the state of Alabama and I slid on the highway for 125 yards and basically wiped out my back, ended up three months in bed. That was my Damascus Road.

What was the Lord saying to me? You're not in charge of your life, you're not in control of your life. The fact that I survived being ejected from a car at that speed was the goodness and kindness and mercy of God. One thing struck my mind, even as I was on the side of the road fully conscious was, "Okay, Lord, whatever You want me to be, I sign up here and now. I can't fight this." And on that day I was made a minister.

My whole life changed. My whole perspective changed. Three months later I went back with a whole new passion and zeal to pursue that as my life. I understand that. So I understood that with Paul. Mine was certainly not a supernatural experience, mine was a natural experience with divine providence. But I understand what it means in verse 25 that I was made a minister, according to the stewardship from God bestowed upon me for your benefit. For whose benefit? Your benefit, the benefit of the church, the benefit of believers, the benefit of the body of Christ, the benefit of the souls of men. I was given a stewardship from God. It was placed on me, not for me but for you. That kind of perspective is so foundational in life. Stewardship is the word *oikonomian*, *oikos* is the word for house. "*Nomian* comes from *nomos*, or the law, the ruler of the house, a house manager. I was given the responsibility of managing the house. This is like bishop, an overseer. I was given a deposit, a stewardship, a management responsibility. In Galatians 2:7 and 8 Paul calls it being entrusted with the gospel. I was given this ministry from God. That is why Titus 1:7 says a pastor must be a steward of God. You have to understand that there has been given to you a trust, just like your children are a trust from God, to be nurtured and given back to Him, so ministry is a trust from God.

That's why Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 says, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel," right? Don't commend me if I do that, don't pat me on the back if I do that. I have been given a trust. I have been given a deposit. I have been given a stewardship. And that is why the Apostle Paul tells Timothy who is starting to defect, "Guard that which has been entrusted to you." You had better guard that because you also have been made a minister and given a stewardship, not for your benefit but for the benefit of others. And I will give an account to God. Hebrews 13:17 says, "I will give an account to God for how I have discharged that stewardship.

Somebody important, somebody precious to me, somebody that I love came along and gave me something very, very precious and said, "Would you hold this for me? Would you protect this for me?" I would do that with my life. And I have to do far more than that when I understand that the one who gave me this stewardship, the one who gave me the deposit is God Himself. And that is why in Isaiah 66:2 it says, "The Lord is looking for people who tremble at His Word." There's a sense of holy fear, a sense of holy responsibility, the word *churath*, tremble, is to be terrified. The Lord is looking for someone who is terrified at His Word. You have the same phrase used in Ezra 9:4; Ezra 10:3; people who tremble at My Word. That word *churath* is used of the shaking of Mount Sinai. In Exodus 19 it's used of the shaking of the islands of the sea, in Ezekiel 26. It's used in Isaiah 41 of the shaking of the whole earth in judgment. The Lord is looking for people to be placed in His ministry who tremble at

that responsibility.

So the source of ministry is God Himself. And I follow injunctions of the writer of Proverbs who 18 times uses the Hebrew word *yarrah*, which means fear...fear...fear, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, fear of the Lord is knowledge. Live in the fear of the Lord always, Proverbs 23:17.

So the source of ministry is God. Secondly, the spirit of ministry...the spirit of ministry. Verse 24, "Now I rejoice." Can I just stop you right there? That's the spirit of ministry. What's the spirit of ministry? Well for some people I'm afraid it's discouragement, it's resentment, it's anger, it's bitterness, or in some cases it's severity, or disillusionment or being judgmental, or overly somber. What was the spirit of Paul's ministry? Joy...joy...deep down joy, not superficiality, not silliness, not giddiness, not the kind of joy that you have when you're young and you don't know enough to be as sad as you ought to be. Look, the Apostle Paul said when he looked at Israel, "I have continual sorrow and heaviness of heart over My people, Israel. I could almost wish Myself accursed for their salvation if that would bring it about."

Look, he lived his whole life bearing a profound burden of sorrow. But that profound burden of sorrow over the condition of the lost never stole his joy in ministry. I rejoice. And if you go back again to 2 Corinthians, it was an amazing thing to rejoice because he says in verse 8, "We're afflicted in every way, not crushed, perplexed, not despairing, persecuted, not forsaken, struck down, not destroyed." I mean, they were coming at him everywhere all the time. Constantly, he says in verse 11, "We're being delivered over to death. Death works in us."

That kind of experience he unfolds all the way through 2 Corinthians, until he gets to chapter 11 and he gives you a whole litany of things that he suffered. He suffered all those physical things that he lists there. And then he suffers the pain of the disillusionment and the failures and the defections of the church. Who is weak and I don't feel the pain? Who sins and I don't feel hurt? Who bears the burden of the church? He was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, despised, threatened, jailed. By the way, when he writes this he is in prison in Rome, sitting in a cell from which he writes Colossians and from which he writes Philippians and Philippians is the epistle of...what?...joy. He's like Jeremiah. Jeremiah preached his heart out to the people to warn them of the judgment of God and nobody listened. In fact, at the end of his life they threw him in a pit. What was Jeremiah's attitude? We call Jeremiah the weeping prophet cause he wept, he shed tears. His heart was broken. His eye literally wept the tears of God.

But listen to what he said in Jeremiah 15:16, "Your words were found and I ate them. And your words became for me a joy and delight in my heart." Nobody listened to him, never. But the privilege of hearing from God and knowing God's Word and preaching God's Word was if no one ever listened for him a joy and a delight. And he tells you why. "For I have been called by Your name." He's saying

what Paul said, "I had a deposit. I had a stewardship. And that stewardship was for me, though I was rejected and resisted and rebelled against and thrown in a pit, the privilege of that was a joy and delight.

Sometimes you hear pastors say, "Ah, I'm going through burnout." Burnout, what are you talking about? You don't get burned out by doing work. Plumbers don't have burn out. Ditch diggers don't have burnout. People who work hard don't have burn out. Burn out means you have unrealistic expectations that aren't being met. You think you deserve more than you get. That's because you think you deserve something and you deserve nothing. Low expectations are the prevention for burn out.

What do you think you deserve? Jeremiah? Isaiah says, "How long do I preach if nobody's going to listen? Their ears are going to be fat, their eyes are going to be blind, their hearts are going to be like stone. Nobody is going to listen to you. How long do I do that?" He said, "Until there are no cities left to do it," Isaiah 6.

What produces burn out is pride. Humility produces joy. What a privilege. And by the way, 2 Corinthians 2:14 says, "We always triumph in Christ, right? Paul says, "Look, it's enough to wear the uniform, it's enough to represent the Savior, it's enough to march in the victory parade whatever happens to me. How marvelous is it to be a savior of life to life and a savior of death to death? Who is adequate for these things? So the spirit of the ministry is joy. What a privilege. What a mercy. What a grace.

Thirdly, the suffering of the ministry...the suffering of the ministry is vicarious. The source of the ministry is God. The spirit of the ministry is joy. The suffering of the ministry is vicarious. Back to verse 24, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...for your sake." He refers to himself there being in prison in chapter 4 verses 10 and 18, he refers to his imprisonment. But he says, "This is not suffering for its own sake, this is suffering for your sake." This is in the cause of the gospel.

To the Philippians in chapter 1 he says that my imprisonment has fallen out for the furtherance of the gospel. God has a purpose in your pain. God has a purpose in your suffering. Second Corinthians 12 Paul says, "There was given to him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan, a stake that was driven through him and he prayed three times the Lord would remove that. And the Lord said to him no, My grace is sufficient, My power is perfected in your...what?...your weakness. Suffering weakens you and the weaker you are, the stronger Christ is. You've got to get yourself out of the way. You're the biggest obstacle to the effectiveness of your ministry. So he says, "My suffering is vicarious." Listen, when you suffer, when you're misrepresented, misjudged, falsely accused, attack, assaulted, belittled, treated with disdain, whatever it is, and strange climate that we live in today comes at me mostly from professing Christians, the world sort of leaves me alone. This is vicarious. This is vicarious, in a sense, this is the price you pay for speaking the truth for the edification of the people of

God for the strength of the church.

He goes even further, verse 24, "And in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body which is the church in filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction." Again he says this is for the church. This suffering is for the church. But he adds this amazing note that I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction. What does he mean by that? Does he mean that I have to add something to the atonement? Is he talking about the cross as if it was incomplete? No, because Jesus said, "It is...what?....finished." There's no lack in the atonement. There's nothing to add to salvation. What does he mean, "I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction?"

What he means by that is his own suffering, not Christ's suffering. He's not adding to the suffering of Christ. I...he says...in my suffering am literally filling up affliction intended for Christ. In other words, they hate me because they hated Him and He's not here so they hit me. Another way to think of it would be I take the blows for Him who took all the blows for me. That's why in 2 Corinthians 4:10 he says, "Am always bearing in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus." If Christ came back, they'd kill him again. If He came back again and again and again, they'd kill Him every time He came back. He doesn't come back, so they kill us, they martyr us, they abuse us, they imprison us.

So in this vicarious suffering there is a sense in which you are suffering on behalf of the church, that's one aspect of it. And then there's this incredibly glorious thought, you're actually suffering on behalf of Christ, not in the sense of providing anything for the atonement, but in the sense, as Galatians 6:17 puts it, bearing in my body the marks of Christ. Every scar he had, every place a whip had ever hit him, every place a stone had ever taken a huge chunk out of his flesh, everywhere a bone had been crushed and broken in the stonings and the floggings and the beating with rods, everything he had ever suffered, every scar, every mark that was left on him, he looked at as a mark of Christ. He was just a man, why would he take all this? Why would they do all this to him? It wasn't because of him, it was because of Christ that they did this. Our suffering is vicarious on behalf of the church and amazingly on behalf of Christ. How wondrous is it? How amazing is it? How appropriate is it that Christ be in heaven all glorious, exalted, never to be struck again and we here take the blows meant for Him.

Why do we do this? For the sake of the body which is the church. This is necessary to bring people into the church, evangelism, persecution against evangelists, missionaries. This is necessary for the edification of the church so that the body can be built up to maturity.

Number four, the source of the ministry is God, the spirit of the ministry is joy, the suffering of the ministry is vicarious, the scope of the ministry, verse 25, the scope that I might fully carry out, literally the Greek says that I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God. The preaching is added in italics, probably shouldn't be there, "That I might fully carry out the word of God."

What do you mean? Literally the Greek says to fulfill the Word of God. What do you mean to fulfill the Word of God? You mean the Word of God calling you into ministry? Do you mean living out the Word of God by example? Do you mean teaching the Word of God? What do you mean? All the above...all the above. It is purposely ambiguous. It is purposely undefined. Fulfill your ministry, 2 Timothy 4:5, do it all, preach all the truth to all the people. Fulfill your ministry.

You know, Peter says, "Shepherd the flock of God over which He's placed you." Shepherd the flock of God over which He's placed you. Fulfill the Word of God, fully carry out the Word of God. What was it that God called Paul to do? Well he was up there as a pastor, wasn't he, in Antioch and the Holy Spirit comes along and says, "Separate men out of this and send them on a missionary trip." And that's what happened to Paul. He went on three missionary trips basically to the same locations. He didn't go east, north, south, west. He actually had four missionary trips, the fourth one was financed by Rome. But he went to the same place.

The first missionary trip he went and preached the gospel and established churches. The second missionary trip, he went back to the same place and strengthened the churches and appointed elders and extended it a little further. The third missionary trip, the same place and the same people, the same elders and extended a little further. Fourth is a jail ministry.

I learned those many, many years ago that Paul had a very specific purpose and he kept going back to the same place, and the same place, and the same place. And yet the impact of his ministry literally has changed the world. And a little phrase came into my mind in those years and it's been there ever since, "You take care of the depth of your ministry, you be faithful where God places you, and He'll take care of the breadth of your ministry." If what you do in your little place honors God, it will go as far as God wants it to go. I've never had a thought about how many people in the world can come here. How far into the world can we send people? How far in the world can books and tapes go? How many languages can they be translated into? I have absolutely no idea about that, no thought about that, no plan for that. I never planned that. I never planned any of that. That is God's business. And I learned this from Paul. He just kept going back to the same place, the same place, the same place.

Look at Jesus, I mean the economy of Jesus' ministry is stunning, that tiny little piece of real estate. He was limited by God's location. And then He was limited by God's will. He said, "I only do what the Father tells Me to do." And then He was limited by God's timing. He kept saying, at least four times, "My hour hasn't come. This isn't the right time." Then He was limited to God's people. He says, "I didn't come but to the Jews, the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And by the way, I didn't come to call the righteous to repentance either, just sinners, just sinner Jews in this little tiny country at the right time and the right moment. And by the way, He was also limited to God's message. He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but render to God the things that are God's," and He

spoke concerning the things of the Kingdom of God. And even more economy of efforts staggering. He didn't try to fill the stadiums of Jerusalem with massive crowds, He worked with twelve guys who turned the world upside down.

The economy of effort in the life of our Lord is staggering compared to the megalomania of people today. When I was in Charleston, South Carolina, I was talking to Bishop Wilson. I said, "What's your vision for ministry?"

He said, "My vision for ministry, what I want God to do, seven square miles the Lord has placed me here, seven square miles on the east side of Charleston, an African/American community, that's the seven square miles that I want to penetrate with the gospel of Christ." At the same time I got a press thing from Saddleback, Rick Warren, saying, "He intends to plant a hundred churches across the world every year."

Are you kidding me? A hundred churches a year across the world? Be realistic. I'll take my place with Bishop Wilson and pray for his seven square miles. In Romans, at the end of Romans, Paul says, "I'm very glad to remind you...again back to that passage where it was grace that was given to me to be a minister of Christ Jesus, to the Gentiles so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." And then he says this, "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed." I'm not going to talk about anything except what Christ has done in me. I stay on course...I stay on course. The scope of the ministry is to preach the whole truth to all the people in the sphere to which the Lord has called you. Don't be like the guy who jumped on his horse and rode off madly in all directions.

The subject of the ministry...the subject of the ministry is in verse 26, "That is the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages in generations but has now been manifested to His saints." And what is it? "To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." What's the subject? The subject is the mystery that's been hidden. What is the mystery that's been hidden? Paul in Ephesians says, the mystery is that which God has hidden from the past and now revealed. New Testament teaching, that which in the progress of revelation goes beyond the book of Malachi. Okay? From Matthew to Revelation is that which is classified as mystery. Mystery is not something you can't understand, it's not a riddle. *Musterion* is that which was hidden and is now revealed.

For example, in the New Testament you have the incarnation referred to as a mystery right here in Colossians 2. You have Israel's unbelief referred to as a mystery. That wasn't seen in the Old Testament in Romans 11. You have the church is a mystery, Ephesians 3. The Rapture is a mystery, 1 Corinthians 15. The bride of Christ is a mystery, Ephesians 5. The final form of world evil is mystery, Revelation 17. These are things the Old Testament didn't see that are unfolded in the New

Testament. We are preachers of the mystery. People always ask me, "Why the New Testament? Why the New Testament?" Because I'm a minister of the mysteries. I'm a New Covenant pastor of the mysteries.

What about the Old Testament? Use that as examples to fit into the unfolding of the ministry of the mysteries. And what is the main mystery that we proclaim? What was never seen? That is that the Messiah would not only come, but the Messiah would live in us, that He would be in us.

The Jews didn't even get it. They didn't even understand Psalm 110:1 that the Messiah would be also the Lord, He would be David's son and David's Lord, even though that was revealed. Well this part wasn't revealed, that the Messiah would come and that He would be God and that He would live in His people, not merely with His people. Christ in you. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." I died with Him, I rose with Him, and He lives in me. Preach the indwelling Christ. This is essentially the gospel and all the glories of the mysteries of the New Testament.

So what's the subject of our ministry? New Testament truth...New Testament truth. Use the Old Testament as examples, speaking of the nature of God, the works of God, the mighty works of God which inform our praise. The Old Testament teaches us the blessing of obedience and the cursing of disobedience, many things to learn that we are ministers of the mysteries.

The source, God; the spirit, joy; suffering vicarious; the scope, all the truth to all the places God has called us, the subject of the ministry, the mysteries connected to the indwelling Christ and what it means to be a saved individual in the church. The style...just a couple of comments, I'll be done, the style of ministry.

What do we do? How do we do this? It's so simple. Verse 28, "We proclaim Him." Oh okay, *katangelo*, to herald. That's a word that was used when a town crier came into town to announce something that was a message from the king. This is before the printing press, obviously and news was given by a herald. This is public proclamation. That's what that word means, public proclamation. You have a messenger, *angelos* is a messenger. We get the word angel from it. It's a messenger. It's a word used, by the way, in the book of Revelation to describe the messengers of the seven churches who would be delegated pastors sent to John to receive the letter to the church in particular, what our Lord wrote, *katangelo* intensifies that. We are proclaimers. We are messengers with a public proclamation.

So what do we do? What's the style of our ministry? It's open. It's public. It's proclamation. Second Timothy 4, "Preach the Word." It's preach, *kerusso*, another verb used to describe the same thing is to proclaim. And it has a positive and a negative. Part of it is admonishing every man, that's warning, *noutheteo*, warning. And part of it is teaching, *didaskantes*, that's positive instruction. So we preach

with a tone of warning and a tone of instruction in all wisdom...in all wisdom, with all wisdom, the whole counsel of God, to borrow the words of Paul in Acts 20, the whole counsel of God, all divine wisdom. The style of the ministry is preaching.

Two more, the sum of the ministry. Sum of the ministry, what are we after? What's the goal? "So that we may present every man complete in Christ." Wow, that is a big task. I'm looking out over at you, how many of you if we passed out a little flier, check off if you're complete in Christ. People say to me, "Are you going to continue to minister at Grace? Yeah, I've got a lot of work to do with some of you. I've got a lot of work to do with me. We aren't done, are we? Paul says, "Not as though I have attained." The sum of the ministry is to present every man perfect, it's not to draw a crowd. I can draw a crowd. I can draw a crowd by giving away money. That will get them here. Give everybody ten bucks. It's about what you'd have to pay if you hired a dog and pony show anyway, just pay them to come. Much more challenging to present every man perfect, mature in Christ.

How about this? Galatians 4:19, "Paul," I think he puts it on the line here, this is what drove his heart. And again, these are things that are formative for me. "My children with whom I am again in labor," birth pain. This is painful stuff, disappointing, challenging. "I'm in labor until Christ is formed in you." That's it. "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." That's my calling, in order that I might be a model for you to follow. We are given to the church for the edification of the saints till we all come to the maturity of Christ, right? Ephesians 4. That's what we're after. It isn't about spreading me around, it isn't about putting my face on fifteen flat screens in fifteen locations so people can hear me. It's about perfecting the saints which is a far more intense thing and a life consuming thing.

Well, a final note, sorry I took a little extra, a final note, the strength of the ministry. Who can do this? Who can fulfill all this? Verse 29 tells us the strength of it. "For this purpose also I labor striving."

You know what? It takes work, hard, hard work. Labor is a word that means to work to the point of sweat and exhaustion. Striving is the word *agonizomai*, it's agonizing effort. But there's a parallel truth to that agonizing effort that is the real strength of the ministry, "According to His power which mightily works within me." That's the strength of the ministry. I labor to the point of sweat and exhaustion. I agonize but parallel to my effort alongside this labor is the power which mightily works in me. It's Philippians 2, isn't it? Work out your own salvation for it is God who works in you with His mighty power.

Those two parallel truths are part of every great doctrine in the Scripture. You must repent and believe to be saved, but it's the work of God. You must obey and worship to be sanctified but it's the work of God. You must persevere to the end, but he Lord holds you secure. We minister with all our energy, all our might, but the power is God's. So we end where we began, the source is the strength. Paul's ministry was all that God wanted it to be 'cause he was faithful to these things.

Father, thank You for our time this morning and stir up these things in our hearts and enrich us by them. Give us clarity as we think about our responsibility in ministry and we thank you for such a high and holy privilege. May Jesus Christ be exalted through us, we pray in His name. Amen.

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