

Mar. 8, 2020

Portrait of a Faithful Pastor

Colossians 1:24-29

A Faithful Pastor sees himself as a steward of divine treasures entrusted to him for the benefit of the church.

LTS: 2 Tim. 4:1-8:

Last week we talked about the need for Christians to trade in comfort-seeking for risk-taking as people who live NOT for what is seen but for what is unseen. The driving force of the Christian life should not be earthly pleasure, but divine promise; Namely, the promise that:

“...these light and momentary afflictions are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

To summarize, Paul’s exhortation is this: Stop living for things that don’t last! Live for the eternal reward you will receive at the Resurrection! This is what motivated Paul every day. He lived for the promise of the resurrection. And the fruit of that kind of living was at least two-fold.

First, his risk-taking with the gospel produced an abundance of spiritual fruit. Many people came into the joy of reconciliation with God and fellowship with His son. Many churches were planted. So many, in fact, by the time we get to Acts 19, we read (10) “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”

In time Paul’s risk-taking, Gospel preaching ministry bore such fruit as would change the world!

The Second kind of fruit born of Paul’s risk-taking lifestyle was a significant amount of personal suffering. And yet (24), he rejoiced because he viewed his suffering as sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and he counted it a privilege to do so. Therefore, he counted his suffering Joy, and he kept his eye on the prize of resurrection reward.

As Christians, we look at the life of Paul we see a faithful servant of the Lord and we desire to be like him. That is especially true of men who are pastors. Its good to have an example to follow, a life to emulate, a hero to learn from. And that's what we find in the apostle Paul. But What does it mean to be a faithful pastor? And by extension, what does it mean to be a faithful Christian? In the passage before us I think we discover a concise (though incomplete) answer to the question that I think will benefit and encourage us all.

In Col. 1:24-29 we have a Portrait of a Faithful Pastor. I see two main categories in this text:

- I. What a Faithful Pastor Is:
- II. What a Faithful Pastor Does.

Now, since we will be sharing the Lord's Table this morning, we only have time to talk about the first point. What a faithful Pastor Is:

First: He is a servant of the church (25b)

Second: He is Minister Called by God (25a)

Third: He is a Herald of the Truth (25b)

But before we consider the details of v. 24-25, let's read this passage in its context.

Read Col. 1:24-29

What is a Faithful Pastor?

I. He is a Servant of the Church (24b)

1. At the end of verse 24 we read, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings For your sake (i.e. the church in Colossae), and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister."

2. Paul's faithfulness is manifest in his devotion to the church. Notice that he considers himself a "minister." The word here is *diokanos*, from which we get the word deacon or servant. He didn't view himself as a celebrity pastor concerned with constructing great building and drawing large crowds. He saw himself as a servant of the church.

3. In fact, he viewed the church as Christ's precious bride. She needed to be taught, and disciplined, nurtured and protected. Paul served as her spiritual father until the day when he would present her to her rightful husband. Christ had given him the special responsibility of making sure she grew to maturity so that at the wedding feast of the Lamb she would be prepared, as it were, for marriage. And he took this responsibility personally. It was his life. That's why in 2 Cor. 12:14 he says,

Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.

4. Now that is the heart of a faithful pastor. Clearly Paul was a strong leader in his apostolic ministry, but at the same time he always viewed himself as nothing but a lowly servant of the church. He called himself the "least of the apostles, and the "chief of sinners. People in high places mocked him. They said, "his presence is unattractive and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10). But he didn't mind. He knew that God had put the treasure of the gospel in his little "earthen pot" and he was content to use that treasure to build up the church.

5. How could such an incredibly successful pastor maintain such modesty and humility? I think it was because he never got over how much Christ had forgiven him. At the peak of his ministry he wrote to young Timothy saying (1 Tim. 1:12-13), I thank him who has... judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy...

6. You see, Paul never got over the fact that the church he was privileged to serve was the very church he attempted with every fiber of his being to destroy. And he did it thinking that he was accomplishing the will of God! How devastating it must have been to his pride to discover that he had been the enemy of God all along.

7. The man who once sought to destroy the church now loved her with his life. Listen to part of a letter he sent to the church in Thessalonica. He wrote,¹ 1 Thes 2:5–8.

We never came [to you] with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

6. I have to confess that as a young pastor I tended to err on the side of harshness and abrasiveness with Christ's church (some of you know it's true). But God has a way of humbling and tenderizing those to whom he entrusts the care of his most precious possession. Paul was deeply humbled by Christ and the fruit of that humility was love for the church. It was Paul's delight to be the servant of the bride. He freely suffered for the church and he understood that as far as God is concerned, she is the body of Christ. So, Paul says to this little, insignificant, backwater church of Colossae (24), "I rejoice in my sufferings for you sake." A faithful pastor sees himself as a Servant of the Church. Second, the faithful pastor understands he is a minister called by God.

II. He is Minister Called by God (25a)

1. In v.25 he says, "I became a minister according to the stewardship from God." The term "Stewardship" indicated responsibility, authority, and obligation given to a household slave.¹ We know that Paul was "called by God" into the ministry because we have the record of his encounter with Christ in Acts nine on the Damascus Rd. Being a servant of the church was not something he planned to do. It's true that he studied to be a rabbi in Israel, but he did NOT set out to be a servant of the church. Nothing could have been further from his mind! He didn't volunteer, he was drafted!

2. In later years he would sometimes begin his letters with the phrase, "Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle." He wanted people to know that he did not muscle his way into the position. Rather, it was thrust upon him by Christ himself.

¹ Fritz Rieneker and Cleon Rogers, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek N.T.* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1988), 570

3. The testimony of most pastors and elders of local churches is that they too seemed to be called of God to serve the church in a unique way. Now, don't misunderstand. I don't think for a minute that everyone who stands behind a pulpit and talks on Sunday is a minister called by God. Many such men are false teachers. Others are biblically unqualified or disqualified from the ministry. Some men are spiritually qualified and theologically educated, but in the mystery of God's sovereign purposes they never become pastors. And then there are still others who had no ambition to shepherd the church of God, but God placed them there anyway and causes them to bear fruit.

4. How does a man discover whether he is called of God to shepherd the flock – to become an elder/pastor in a local church? Well, Paul helps us with that by laying down certain qualifications 1 Tim 3, Paul says such a man must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospital, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money and must manage his household well, and not be a new convert.

5. Even then, however, a man may still wonder if he is called of God for such an office. So, let me offer some practical counsel in the form of three questions.

A. Do you desire to do it? Paul says if a man desires to be an elder it's a good thing.

B. Have people affirmed your ability to teach and lead? I mean, someone who is not your mother or your girlfriend. ("He must be able to teach)

C. Have the spiritual leaders in your life offered you repeated opportunity to teach and lead?

6. By the way, I find it encouraging to remember that Paul didn't always meet these qualifications. Sometimes a man will say... I desire to be an elder, but my past life was so wretched... I don't think I could ever qualify. Well, that will be something the elders of the church will need to explore, but I'm encouraged that the Saul of Tarsus eventually qualified, and he had a wretched past!

7. Paul knew he had been drafted into a stewardship from God for the sake of the church. So, we've learned that a faithful pastor sees himself as a servant of the church, that he is a Minister called by God, and finally...

III. He is a Herald of the Truth (25b)

1. Look at v. 25: “I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

“Fully known” means to give full scope to the word of God, that is, to proclaim it all; to complete it, finish it, to tell it completely. The faithful pastor understands that he is to preach Christ in all his glorious fulness to everyone, regardless of race, nationality, or social position.² And he understands that he is to preach it all and hold nothing back.

2. Modern preachers often think that they can reach more people if they soften the message and make it more palatable to the hearers. Paul never did that. Remember, he viewed himself NOT as an artist, an author, or orator but merely as a servant. He understood his place in God’s mission. He understood that the message was NOT his. He was merely the “delivery boy”, the “mail man,” the currier. His role in God’s redemptive plan was simply to deliver God’s message, all of his message, and to leave nothing out.

3. Some will say, “But wait! If we teach, preach, and evangelize with the Bible as its written, no one will believe! At least not in this culture!” Sure there are relevant principles that can enhance one’s quality of life. Shouldn’t we just preach those truths? Won’t people be more likely to believe and be saved?

4. Paul didn’t believe that for a minute. And if you think sharing the gospel in our day is difficult, it’s nothing like what Paul encountered in terms of resistance. Why, because he was preaching a message that was so contrary to the culture in which he lived.

5. Think about it. Everywhere Paul went he preached the gospel of a crucified Messiah. Not only that, but he preached that message at a time when Jews and Gentiles alike were viscerally repulsed by the idea of crucifixion.

6. For both cultures, the stigma of crucifixion made the idea of a gospel that claimed Jesus as the Messiah an absolute absurdity. A glance at the history of crucifixion in first-century Rome reveals what Paul’s contemporaries thought about it. One author

² William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996)

observes, “It was a horrific form of capital punishment... The condemned died an agonizingly slow death by suffocation...”³

- Years before Paul arrived on the scene King Darius crucified three thousand Babylonians
- Alexander the Great crucified two thousand from the city of Tyre.
- Alexander Janius crucified eight hundred Pharisees, while they watched soldiers slaughter their wives and children at their feet.
- Titus Vespasian crucified so many Jews in 70 A.D. that the soldiers had no room for the crosses and not enough crosses for the bodies.

7. This sealed the horror of crucifixion in the Jewish mind. As far as they were concerned crucifixion was for the outcasts of society. “The idea that anybody who died on a cross could in any sense be an exceptional, elevated, noble, important person was absurd.”⁴ The Roman Empire’s policies on crucifixion led Romans to view any crucified person as absolutely contemptible and as a symbol of that contemptible status they crucified their victims naked to inflict maximum humiliation.. The Romans used it only for the scum, the most humiliated, the lowest of the low.

8. So disgusting was the practice of crucifixion that Cicero wrote, “This very word ‘cross’ should be removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears.”⁵

9. In the face of all this, Paul came, and all he ever talked about was... the cross! He said things like:

- Gal.6:14 “...far be it from me that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
- 1 Cor. 1:18 “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

³ John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2003), 26

⁴ MacArthur, 27

⁵ MacArthur, 28

10. Justin's first apology in A.D. 152 summarized the Gentile view: "They proclaim our madness to consist in this, that we give to a crucified man a place equal to the unchangeable eternal God."⁶

11. The Gentile view of people who were crucified was bad, but the Jewish attitude was worse. They saw crucifixion not only as a social stigma but as a divine curse. And they had biblical warrant for their opinion. Deut. 21:23 says, "He who is hanged on a tree is cursed of God." So, as they saw it, the stigma of the cross went beyond social disgrace, all the way to divine condemnation.

12. "The Mishnah, a second-century A.D. commentary on the law of the Pentateuch, indicated that blasphemers and idolaters alone were to be crucified... How could the Messiah be a blasphemer? How could God be blasphemer of God? The Jews gagged on the idea of a crucified Christ. To them it made the gospel unbelievable [and profoundly offensive]."⁷ This explains why Paul often found himself the object of hatred – occasionally violent hatred. He didn't go looking for trouble. It came to him merely as a result of preaching a message people found impossible to believe.

13. Nevertheless, in the mystery of God's providence many people found themselves irresistibly drawn to the Savior who, in love, laid down his life on a cross for sinners.

14. Today the issues that make the gospel unbelievable are different. In our pluralistic relativistic society, for example, the notion that there is a God before whom we will all give an account is vulgar – even hateful! If you believe in God, then you must believe that absolute truth is found in the Bible. You must believe that marriage can only be between a man and a woman. You must believe that there are certain practices that are rightly labeled sexual sin; all of these are repugnant to unbelievers in our day. Nevertheless, the gospel of Jesus Christ is man's only hope for salvation.

15. So what does a faithful pastor do? What does a faithful Christian do? We preach Christ crucified, risen, and coming again. We preach that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but through him. And when we preach, and teach, and share the gospel with our friends, we do it the way Paul did: in love, with

⁶ MacArthur, 28

⁷ MacArthur, 29

much grace and kindness; not with a condemning spirit but with affection and compassion and prayer.

A Faithful Pastor sees himself as a steward of divine treasures entrusted to him for the benefit of the church that Jesus Christ might be glorified