

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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### Ministering to the Needy

#### *Biblical Ministry, Part 2*

It was early December, AD 29, and Christ had less than six months until the cross. As Christ and His disciples were walking through the city of Jerusalem, Christ beheld a blind beggar sitting on the ground. We pick up the story in John 9.

John 9:1-4, “And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.”

This was a typical question in a culture that linked personal prosperity with one's merit before God. In this culture the teaching was “God helps those who help themselves.” Accordingly, if a tragedy occurs or you encounter a difficult providence — like Job — it is because you have done something wrong and God is punishing you. If, on the other hand, you experience physical blessing — like Job's friends — it is because you have pleased God.

However, notice Christ's response forever changed the way we are to look at suffering and or difficulty in the Kingdom of God.

John 9:3, “Jesus answered, neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

In other words, the man is suffering according to the will of God.

Just as some are given the ministry to preach the gospel, raise children, and serve in the house of the Lord there are also others that are hand chosen for the privilege of suffering want unto the glory of God. This is the ministry of need parceled out according to the will of God that, “the works of God might be displayed” (John 9:3).

How does need display the works of God?

In John 9 Christ continued speaking in reference to this blind man. “We must work the works of Him

who sent Me” (John 9:4 NASB).

Do you see the link here?

As WE minister to the needy WE do the works with which God charged Christ. The glory, love, compassion, and care of God is shown forth.

And this necessarily raises the question: Are you equipped to participate in the ministry of need? Are you prepared to be the giver as well as the receiver if God should so bless you with this ministry? We must! If we don't we are worse than the apostate.

1 Timothy 5:8, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

In other words, we can talk about Christ until the sun sets, or we can be in a church which preaches grace, or we can profess our love for the Lord, or we can truly be a guide to the blind and a teacher to the foolish, but if we prove faithless to the ministry of need that God has entrusted to this body, we would be better off closing the doors and disbanding!

Perhaps that is why Paul spends 11 verses of this Epistle to discuss the ministry of need entrusted to the Philippians in the form of Paul. This morning, let's examine this text considering this ministry first from the perspective of “The One Giving.” Notice that which must propel a man unto this ministry.

## **The Passion to Give**

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

As mentioned earlier, throughout Paul's ministry the Philippians were a church that stood by his side. Of all the churches that Paul knew, the Philippians clearly were his chief supporters. They had enabled the Apostle to continue in the ministry when everything and everyone had abandoned him.

Recall that in Acts 16 the church in Philippi was founded when Paul preached the gospel to some women at the side of a river.<sup>1</sup> By the grace of God these women — among whom probably were Euodias and Syntyche — came to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Now, when Paul left Philippi to minister in the Macedonian cities of Thessalonica and Berea, the church in Philippi supported him.<sup>2</sup> When Paul moved south into Achaia, the Philippians continued in their support as he ministered in Athens and Corinth.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Paul makes reference to this in our text.

Philippians 4:15-16, “Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.”

As the years passed, the Philippians continued in their love and support of Paul. Yet, for whatever

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Acts 16:13

<sup>2</sup> Compare Acts 17:1-13

<sup>3</sup> Compare Acts 17:14-8 and Acts 18

reason, there came a time when they lacked opportunity. However, the opportunity returned when the time came ten years after the founding of the church in Philippi when the apostle found himself confined to a Roman prison- chained as he was to a soldier. Here he was in a city that was hostile to the gospel. He was ministering among brethren who hated him.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, he was abandoned!

It was with this opportunity that the Philippians sent one of their own to Paul — Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus came not only with the generous gifts of the Philippians, but also with the commission to minister to Paul. This is why when Epaphroditus' health would not allow him to remain in Rome, Paul sent him back with this epistle in which Paul defends the servant — lest the Philippians consider him and their attempt to minister to Paul a failure.<sup>5</sup>

Once again Paul found himself on the receiving end of an incredible gift! Now in this context, what was Paul thankful for? What is it that stood out to Paul and that Paul chose to highlight?

Notice that it wasn't the gift.

Philippians 4:11, “Not that I speak in respect of want.”

Philippians 4:17, “Not because I desire a gift.”

Rather, what stood out to Paul — that for which Paul was thankful — was the “concern” that the Philippians evidenced when they sent Paul their gift!

Philippians 4:10, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care<sup>6</sup> of me hath flourished<sup>7</sup> again.”

The word *flourished* (*revived* in the NASB) is a botanical metaphor used in reference to the unfolding of a flower or the leafing out of a tree after winter. In essence, Paul here is saying that the Philippians had blossomed in their concern.

It is this word *care* or *concern* that Paul has used ten times in Philippians. It does not denote thought or reasoning per se, but primarily references one's mind set or disposition. It speaks of the paradigm or lens by which a person processes and interacts with the world. Paul is saying that the paradigm exhorted throughout this epistle — the paradigm of humble graciousness that seeks the benefit of others with little or no regard for self<sup>8</sup> — had indeed come to fruition in the Philippians!

This paradigm is planted, and lies dormant at the point of salvation. And here with the Philippians it sprouted when the opportunity came for them to minister to Paul in the form of their gift of Epaphroditus. And Paul rejoiced that at last it had now blossomed to maturity!

Now as this obviously could lead to misunderstanding on the part of the Philippians (as if this verse was a rebuke), Paul qualifies his statement.

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Philippians 1:15

<sup>5</sup> Compare Philippians 3:25-30

<sup>6</sup> φρονεω phroneo

<sup>7</sup> αναθαλλω anathallo This is the root of the English term thallus the nonvascular plant body. It is also the root of the Greek muse (Thalia) of comedy and pastoral poetry especially meaning to flourish or blossom.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Philippians 2:5-11

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

This maturation came when God allowed it, because the Philippians were concerned before, but lacked opportunity. We do not know why the Philippians lacked opportunity — that is not the point. The point is that the Philippians’ growth in grace again was such that while selfless living was implanted upon their conversion — it had always been there — now at last it was being worked out in practical ways.

Paul begins this section by commending and thus lauding the Philippians for being driven not by guilty, pity, or improper motives of arrogance and or a sense of superiority but by the kingdom attitude of selflessness which simply longs to be a blessing to any and everyone in its path.

Behold the passion that must govern all who participate in The Ministry of Need. The passion is a mind set which seeks to bless the recipient with no regard for self! The passion seeks to bring Christ void of the longing to bring glory to self! This must be our mindset as we participate in The Ministry of Need!

## **Registered Ministry?**

Most of us are familiar with the © (copyright symbol) and the ® (registered trademark symbol). These symbols mean that an article, phrase, logo or song is the property of some individual. And if we use one of these items we must seek permission or a license because someone else has ownership of it.

Now, family of God, did you know that there is no such thing as a copyrighted or registered ministry?

You say, “That’s obvious!”

And yet it is not.

When you sacrifice your free-time to help another person, and they never say, “Thank you!” How do you feel?

When you minister to another person's financial need and they receive it as if expected. What's your first response?

When you take a day off from work to sit with another person in the hospital and later you discover that what you gave was not enough. What thoughts come to your mind?

If you consider your ministry for long you will discover that much of it comes with a raised and circled “c” which means if anyone is going to receive credit for your sacrifice, it better be you! After all you don't mind serving the Lord by serving the saints if you at least get some appreciation. Why else do you suppose the exhortation is so often given in Scripture?

Matthew 6:1, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.”

If our passion wasn't to derive credit from what we do, there would be no need for this exhortation. And Christ doesn't just exhort us once here, but twice in less than five verses!

Matthew 6:5, “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to

pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”

Whether it be the ministry of prayer, worship, or washing the feet of the saints we must never seek the praise or gratitude of man. In fact, notice the mind set that ought to govern all servants of Christ:

Luke 17:7-10, “But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you [which includes any and all ministry], say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

The attitude or mind set espoused here is that which makes a man qualified to participate in The Ministry of Need. It is an attitude of selfless, other-centered passion which seeks only to bring Christ and so bless another individual.

## The Prodigal's Brother

And yet, how do we cultivate this other-centered mind set? It is so foreign to us.

The parable of the prodigal son is that where a boy seeks his promised inheritance and wastes it on frivolity and loose living. Upon returning home with the expectation of being little more than a slave, he is shocked when his father honors him and lavishes upon him wealth and status.

Now, not surprisingly, his older brother resents his presence and refuses to celebrate. The father lovingly goes out to the brother and inquires as to his dour mood. And this is what the older son says this:

Luke 15:29-30, “And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.”

The key to understanding the boy's resentment is in verse 29. A different rendering says this:

Luke 15:29 (NIV), “All these years I've been **slaving for you** and never disobeyed your orders.”

If your walk with Christ is done out of obligation then your life revolves around “WIFM” (what's in it for me). If you read the Bible, worship and do acts of sacrifice in order to make yourself feel better, or to feel fulfilled, or to receive the praises of men than you have a © symbol appended to everything you do.

May God grow us in grace such that the mind set of selfless service matures in our life such that we live to bring Christ — His face and affections — to everyone in our path.

## A Christian's Pleasure

Now with this, notice the blessing that comes when we live in this way.

Philippians 4:14, “Notwithstanding ye have **well**<sup>9</sup> **done**<sup>10</sup>, that ye did communicate with my affliction.”

Whether you realize it or not, this is an incredible statement packed with significance. What was the divine commentary on the Philippians' act of giving? What is the divine commentary on any and all who participate in this ministry? It is “good, beautiful, pleasant, noble, splendid.”

The term *well* is a very important word in this context. For in the majority of the places in the New Testament where it is used, there primarily are two Greek words lying behind the translation: *kalos*<sup>11</sup> (often times refers to that which is intrinsically good; good by its very nature) and *agathos* (refers to that which, being good in its essence (like *kalos*), is beneficial in its effect).

Here Paul uses the word *kalos* which means that what the Philippians did in looking out for Paul's interests was something that was intrinsically good! In other words it is very good.<sup>12</sup>

## Very Good

In Genesis 1 at key moments in His work of creation, the Lord expresses delight in what He had made. Six times we read that “God saw that it was good.”<sup>13</sup> And then after everything had been created, we read this incredible expression “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

This means that Creation needs no interpretation.<sup>14</sup> To behold creation is to behold the fingerprint of God. And thus, to gaze upon it and to derive satisfaction from it, is, in the words of Eric Liddell, “To feel God's pleasure.”<sup>15</sup> That's the implication behind the word, *good*. And that was the word Paul used here to describe ones participating in The Ministry of Need with the right attitude.

When we do kingdom ministry with no regard for self and we endeavor to bring Christ's face and affections to another by ministering to their need we participate in something that is good in and of itself- AND THUS WE INDULGE OURSELVES IN THE PLEASURE OF GOD. This is what Paul called “life indeed!” (1 Timothy 6:19).

Do you realize how incredible this is?

We live in a world where the longing for fulfillment drives much of what we do. Our fulfillment drives us from the jobs we take to the relationships in which we involve ourselves. We are looking for a sense of satisfaction which says, “What I am doing is right.”

The irony is that we are looking to derive satisfaction from things which either are empty or cannot convey it.

No person, job, amount of money, position, power, or prestige can grant a person abiding satisfaction.

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<sup>9</sup> καλως kalos rightly, so that there shall be no room for blame, well, truly 1b) excellently, nobly, commendably 1c) honourably, in honour

<sup>10</sup> ποιεω poieo

<sup>11</sup> Compare also Genesis 1:31 [LXX]; Mark 14:6; Galatians 4:17

<sup>12</sup> טוב towb מאד m@'od

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25

<sup>14</sup> Compare Romans 1:20

<sup>15</sup> Compare 1 Timothy 4:4

According to our text, this only can be found in the service of God.

## **Jeremiah's Exhortation**

In fact, this was the very point that Jeremiah sought to convey to the people of his generation. They had long since given up on God, and were seeking “fulfillment,” “satisfaction,” and/or a “sense of well-being” in objects or things that were futile. Thus he exhorts the people of God this way:

Jeremiah 2:13, “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

Christ is the fountain of living water. As we were created to enjoy a relationship with the Lord, the only thing that ever can give ultimate satisfaction is Christ and His service.

When will we know satisfaction, joy, and genuine pleasure? When we know and minister to the Lord!

This is the implication that Paul is making here! When we live to bring Christ we have “done well” (Philippians 4:14). When we live for another and reflect Christ's face and affections to the body we receive the commendation from the Lord that says, “good, very good!” When we use our resources, position, and/or power to bless another we will know the pleasure of Christ!

Let Go!

But this is where it gets difficult.

Years ago a man fell from the girder on which he was working only to grasp a beam on the way down. Hanging on for dear life, he was surprised to hear the voice of a man calling from the ground, “Let go! Let go!”

Knowing the man had to be crazy, and yet not being able to maintain his grip, he did let go. .And he fell all but three inches to the ledge just beneath his dangling feet.

Brothers and sisters this is the picture of so many in the kingdom today. We find ourselves clinging to gilded toys of dust. We are holding on to the passing pleasures of this world. We are seeking the opinions of men. We are seeking the affections of another. We are longing and living for comfort, security, shelter, and pleasure and are unwilling to give any and all of these things up lest we be alone, bereft, forsaken, and unfulfilled. We are unwilling to accept that “whoever loses his life for [Christ's] sake, he is the one who will save it” (Luke 9:24). We are unwilling to believe that “she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives” (1 Timothy 5:6). We lack faith to believe that “I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

Rather than release our feeble hold on the passing pleasures, securities, and relationships of this world we grab on to whatever life we have — missing the pleasure of God!

If you want to know the pleasure of God and enjoy abundant life in Christ release your claim on everything in this world, and live to bring the face and affections of Christ to your spouse, children, brothers and sisters in Christ, and to each and everyone around you. Then you will know “life indeed!”

In fact, listen to the testimony of one's who have done this.

The Apostle Paul having dumped his claim to the life of ease that Phariseism would have brought him, Paul said this:

Philippians 2:17, “Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.”

Did you get that?

Paul's greatest joy, pleasure, and satisfaction in life did not come from money, position, occupation, or worldly commendation. Paul's greatest joy came from ministering Christ to others. He poured his life out that others might know the Lord!

Having thrown away his life in the service of Christ, John wrote this:

3 John 4, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

John wrote this as an old man. He was about to be exiled to a rock in the Mediterranean Sea called Patmos. And yet, we can be sure that while on this rock, John did not lack joy. Life for him was bringing Christ to others!

Such is the affection that guards the heart of all who live in order to bring the face and affections of Christ to others!

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 4, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.