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1 Thessalonians 2:1-20

Four Pictures of the Christian Ministry

What is ministry? John Piper said: “The main task of preaching, and the main purpose of small groups and all the ministries of the church are to help people see the greatness of what Christ has purchased for everyone who will value it above the world. Helping people see it and savor it, so that God’s superior worth shines in their satisfaction and in the sacrifices that come from such a heart.”

Basically the Christian ministry is what we do to help people grow spiritually so that they would become like Jesus to the glory of the Father. One mistake we can easily make it to confine the job of ministry only to the pastors or ministers. Doing the ministry is definitely done by the pastors or ministers; but it is not limited only to them. Any work the church does is ministry whether it is small groups, Sunday worship, bible studies, fellowship, prayer meetings, and so on needs the people who are ministers in a broad sense. So every Christian has to be a minister at large.

The closest Greek word to ministry in the NT is diakoneo, meaning "to serve". In the New Testament, ministry is seen as service to God and to other people in His name. Jesus provided the pattern for Christian ministry—He came, not to receive service, but to give it. The closest Greek word in the NT to minister is διάκονος [diakonos] which is a compound word of dia (through) and konis (dust). Diakonos literally means ‘through the dust’. It clearly has the context of working, cleaning or serving. The English Word ‘decon’ comes from this word.

Last Sunday, we talked about Christian Evangelism. Today, we are going to talk about Christian Ministry.

What is the Christian ministry? Specifically, what are the four pictures of the Christian ministry? We are going to find the answers to this question from 1 Thessalonians 2.

Please turn with me to 1 Thess. 2. We are going to read the first 6 verses to begin with. Here’s the Word of God.

1. The Faithful Steward (2:1-6)

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,

2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

3 For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit;

4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts.

5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness--

6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

The tone of this chapter and the next is not a typical letter of Paul. It is more or less *apologia pro vita sua* (defense of one’s life). As we looked at the background of this letter, Paul and Silas had to leave the city abruptly in humiliation due to the situations where their lives were in threat caused by the Jews who opposed the message of the gospel Paul preached. It seems like some of the Thessalonians were being carried away by the enemies’ plot to slander against Paul in an attempt to discredit Paul’s ministry at Thessalonica (John Stott, Message to Thessalonians).

The fact of Paul’s abrupt departure and failure to return seemed to fit the accusation being made against him. This might have triggered Paul to have determined to write a letter because the truth of the gospel and the future of the church were at stake. The first picture of the Christian ministry from these first 6 verses is the picture of the faithful steward.

V1-V2: For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

A faithful steward is the one who takes an initiative to make him available for the sake of the gospel. Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of his first coming to their city in spite of suffering and hardship he had to endure city after city. But Paul did come to Thessalonica and spoke the most important task entrusted by God: the gospel proclamation in boldness.

3 For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts.

A faithful steward is the steward of God’s word, the gospel. Gospel proclamation pleases God. Gospel is gospel of God: which means at the core we are telling who God is, His grace and His love. Paul as a faithful steward of the gospel, he proclaimed what is entrusted to him with pure motive to the glory of God. Gospel is what is approved and entrusted by God so that a faithful servant would commit to the proclamation of the gospel. That was what Paul was about and this is what is demanded to us who does the ministry of Jesus.

5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness-- 6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

Paul is elaborating about who receives the glory, the messenger or God Himself. A faithful steward seeks glory of God. God is his witness. This is a powerful notion. God is witness means God sees what you are doing. A faithful steward holds God accountable with his ministry. Gospel begins with God and God receives all the glory at the end. A faithful steward is the one who takes the gospel from God and proclaim it as a steward and gives God all the glory.

1. The Gentle Mother (2:7-8)

7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. 8 Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

Gentle- epioi (GK) – kind; I am gentle and humble (Jesus).

A nursing mother --- trophos (GK); a women who feeds her child.

Affection - **ὁμείρομαι (GK)** homeiromai; having a strong yearning in love.

Dear – ἀγαπητός agapeitos (GK); one who is dearly loved; valued; prized; beloved;

Paul related the people he ministered to as if he would relate to them as a mother who is gentle, tender, loving and affectionate to her dear child.

Ministry is like a gentle and loving mother who feeds her child in love and pity. As the gospel is the uncompromised message to proclaim, the ministry does not simply stop there. It takes a follow-up as if the mother would provide her gentle care for her child. This is a picture of life sharing in a close relationship.

1. The Guiding Father (2:11-12)

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11 just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children,

12 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

V11: exhorted, encouraged, implored

Paul’s three-fold ministry as a father:

1. Exhort
2. Encourage
3. Implore

Exhort: παρακαλέω – to earnestly support to encourage a response or action.

Encourage: παραμυθέομαι (paramytheomai) – to comfort – to alleviate sorrow or distress; give emotional strength to.

Implore: μαρτύρομαι (martyromenoi) – to solemnly assert something, offering firsthand authentication of the fact; often concering grave or important matters.

The Christian ministry is like a father who solemnly asserts and charges his children to act upon the truth of the gospel while keeping his spirit of encouragement to boost up his children’s emotion or morale.

1. The Loving Brother (2:17-20)

17 But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while-- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and *yet* Satan thwarted us. 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy. (1Th 2:1-20 NAS)

The word ‘brethren’ appears 21 times in 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Paul saw him one of them, a part of the family. Paul considered them his joy as he looks forward to see them in Christ’s glory when Jesus comes back.

Hebrews 12:2 --- Jesus endured the cross, for the joy that was set before Him.

Paul was also looking forward to the glorious day when he would rejoice over them in the presence of Jesus Christ.

Joy – joy of presenting the church to His Father (Jude 1:24 -- 24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, (Jud 1:24 NAS)).

“After the U.S.S. Pueblo was captured by the North Koreans, the eight-two surviving crew members were thrown into a brutal captivity. In one particular instance thirteen of the men were required to sit in a rigid manner around a table for hours. After several hours the door was violently flung open and a North Korean guard brutally beat the man in the first chair with the butt of his rifle. The next day, as each man sat at his assigned place, again the door was thrown open and the man in the first chair was brutally beaten. On the third day it happened again to the same man. Knowing the man could not survive another beating, another sailor took his place. When the door was flung open the guard automatically beat the new victim senseless. For weeks, each day a new man stepped forward to sit in that horrible chair, knowing full well what would happen. At last the guards gave up in exasperation. They knew that they were unable to beat that kind of sacrificial love.” (https://gewatkins.net/brotherly-love/)

We are spiritual kin to each other through Jesus who brought all of us to be adopted into God’s family. We share together eternal co-heir ships with Jesus. While we are on earth together, let us love each other as if we are brother and sisters to each other.

We have established the four picture of the Christian ministry:

1. A faithful steward --- Gospel cannot be compromised. We are entrusted with the gospel of God.
2. A gentle mother --- Gentle kindness is called in our ministry for with affection and tender-heart.
3. A guiding father --- Father’s leadership with exhortation and encouragement is required in ministry.
4. A loving brother --- Brotherly love is called for in our ministry.

These are the fold-fold goals we’d like to carry out together. We may not be able to offer all of these models at the start, but we can offer at least some aspect of them to each other. These four pictures are the building blocks from which we can establish a community of Jesus Christ in this local body.

Let us think about the choices we have to make these four-pictures of ministry to be part of our lives.

* Hindrance or Help: Am I going to hinder or help the ministry?
* Watch or Work: Am I be watching or working?
* Get or Give: What attitude do you bring with you --- What am I getting or what am I giving?
* Indifference or Involve:

Ask not what the church can do for me, ask what I can do for the church to the glory of God!

Let us pray.