



True Ministry

Some believers, after receiving the Lord, have a growing interest in becoming involved in ministry. They have received gifts from the Holy Spirit. They have met the God of the universe and are enthusiastic to serve Him, influence others and impact the world around them. They have a zeal for God's work and are anxious to further His kingdom.

This is a good thing. It would be very encouraging if all those who receive Jesus had this desire to serve and please God. It would be nice to see many with the same commitment.

Unfortunately, in far too many cases, these well-meaning individuals do not arrive at the end result they seek. It is very common to see them go off on various tangents and miss the mark of what true ministry means. The sad result of this is that they do not become really effective in their work.

Their efforts are often energetic but not truly powerful and do not produce much lasting fruit. All too many become discouraged and do not continue on to serve the Lord in the fullness which could be theirs.

Many begin their journey toward what they think of as "ministry" by studying, be it in seminary or Bible school. Others participate in various kinds of "training" experiences with different types of groups. These can include things such as training in theater, mime, puppets, dance and music. Having an acquaintance with the scriptures and participating in attempts to spread the gospel is undoubtedly a positive thing. These are experiences which God can use in the lives of these individuals as they walk with Him.

But here a misconception can occur. True ministry is not merely sharing information with others concerning the things which we have studied. Genuine ministry is not just engaging in activities such as evangelism or church planting. True ministry is the transmission to others of what we have experienced of Jesus Himself. It is God being revealed in and through His servants. It is ministering the Lord Himself to others.

One of the Greek words which is translated “minister” in the New Testament, is **DIAKONOS** which literally means “dispenser.” True ministers are “dispensers” of Christ, pouring out to others the things with which God Himself has filled them. We could think of this as being “dispensers” of Jesus.

Just as a soda machine dispenses soda pop when you open the valve, so we too should be so full of Jesus that when people are open to us, then they also can receive some of Him through us.

True ministry is not just passing along information about Jesus. In order for any ministry to be powerful and genuine, the things which we minister must first become real in our lives. We must first experience them ourselves. It is then, and only then, that we can minister to others in an effective way.

For example, many will preach that “Jesus saves.” But are those reciting these words actually being saved themselves? Are they truly being changed? Is their character being fundamentally altered? Are they being delivered from sin? Is their daily life an expression of the purity and holiness of God? Is Jesus’ character, including patience, long-suffering and love, being seen in them?

If not, then this phrase “Jesus saves” becomes just an empty slogan. It is powerless to help anyone else. If it is not working for the person preaching, how much less will it aid those who are hearing him?

You see, you cannot pass on to others something which you yourself don’t have. You cannot minister truths which are not real to you. The fact that “Jesus saves” is true in an eternal sense does not change this reality. Unless and until we have experienced this eternal truth for ourselves, we are powerless to minister it effectively to others.

Far too many today are content with knowledge. They have studied and learned. They have read books and heard teaching and preaching. Through this, they have accumulated a mental understanding of many biblical truths. Once having understood them, they imagine that they are then qualified to “minister” them to others. Yet this is not the case. We can only effectively share with others what we ourselves actually have.

The “ministry” of truths which are only theoretical in the lives of those ministering, fills the church of our day with a palpable sense of unreality. Those hearing these messages do not really expect their lives to change. Since it is obvious to a careful observer that many of the preachers are not experiencing the things which they affirm, the hearers also lose confidence that these truths could be real to them.

Soon Christianity becomes, for many church attenders, a sort of vague, “spiritual” experience. It turns into a pie-in-the-sky someday when you die kind of fairy tale.

Many come to hear preaching and teaching, already expecting to hear things which have had little if any effect on the preachers and they also do not expect to change their own lives either. This produces believers who have a form of godliness, but do not have the power of God operating in their lives (II Tim 3:5).

An unfortunate consequence of this lack of reality in the church is that many other equally unreal things also find space to enter in. Many other spurious and even wrong doctrines and practices are spread through different congregations while very few perceive the unreality of them. But this is logical. If the gospel is not very real to them, then other equally unreal things might easily be accepted as true too.

THE SOURCE OF TRUE MINISTRY

In order to effectively minister Jesus Christ, we must have become intimate with Him. We must have spent time in His presence. We must have walked with Him through many and various life experiences.

Our faith must have been tested and tried. Our faithfulness and obedience also will need to be proved over time and through many difficult circumstances. We must have come to know God personally and intimately.

It is not sufficient to simply have learned about Him through some instruction, teaching or training. Our understanding of Him cannot be second hand, but must be genuine and personal.

Such experience is not something which happens overnight. It is neither cheap or easy. Those who are truly intimate with God and therefore have something worthwhile to minister are those who have spent a lot of time in His presence. These are those who have passed through the fire of many trials. They are servants who have been found faithful through testing and adversity.

Perhaps we could take Moses as an example here. At forty years of age, he was convinced that God had called him and chosen him to liberate the people of Israel.

We read: “For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand” (Acts 7:25). It obvious that since he expected “his brethren” to understand this, he himself also knew it. And he was right. He was the man called by God to do a mighty work of deliverance.

So, being confident of his calling and seeing an opportunity, he began his work for God. He proceeded to kill one Egyptian and then flee into the desert. This was all he could manage. His own intelligence, preparation, determination and even divine calling led to this fiasco.

Moses was one of few men ever to be used by God in such a dramatic and powerful way as he was used in later life. But such a ministry needed more than just willingness, an understanding of his calling and human preparation in the courts of Pharaoh. He also needed molding in the hands of God. This preparation lasted forty long years.

At the end of this time, Moses’ self-confidence had disappeared. His natural energy and zeal to “fulfill his calling” had evaporated long ago. He no longer was

anxiously waiting for his chance to shine while he single-handedly delivered God's people from bondage.

He was no longer a young man full of ambition and natural strength. We read: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num 12:3 KJV).

It was after this treatment and preparation by God that Moses was ready to work together with God to accomplish His plans. He had become extremely humble and meek. He had been molded by the hand of God.

Paul, the apostle, was another man who was mightily used by God. Yet he too needed divine preparation. Naturally, Paul was a strong, intelligent, capable person. He had a fleshly, strong, religious zeal for God which led Him to oppose what the Lord was really doing. He had certain advantages of birth and position. So, before God could really use him, these things had to be treated. They needed to be broken down and eliminated.

Shortly after his conversion, Paul spent some years in the wilderness. There, he spent time in the presence of God. It was during this period that the Lord changed him.

When he first converted, he was immediately in the synagogues and in the temple, disputing with the religious leaders. His natural zeal and energy had been transferred to his Christianity.

Yet, this was not sufficient. This was merely Paul working for God but not God working through Paul. The Lord wanted much more from him than winning debates with religious leaders. He desired to express His own life and nature through this vessel.

When God's treatment was finished, Paul was no longer disputing and arguing. He was ministering the person of Christ. His confidence in his natural strength, intelligence and abilities had been broken. He states: "...when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor 12:10). He also quotes what Jesus said to him: "...My power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor 12:9).

You see, there is a great difference in our doing things for God and God doing them through us. The first is a kind of religious, human effort which is not very effective in changing lives.

The second is a powerful manifestation of the Person of Jesus Christ in and through your life. This is the substance of genuine ministry. Unless and until we arrive at the point of being prepared to minister the person of Jesus Christ to others, we will have little real impact on the perishing world around us. We must be transmitting Jesus to others, not merely some information about Him.

PRIDE AND AMBITION

Now we come to the place where very many men (and women) of God fall. This is one of the more common ways in which they deviate from the work and will of God and go off in their own direction. It works like this:

When God begins to use them, when their ministry begins to blossom and impact others, when more and more people begin looking to them and at them for blessings and guidance, they become proud.

It is very easy, when the God of the universe begins to use you in some way or other, to allow thoughts to creep into your head. These thoughts may go something like this: "God is using me. I am an especially chosen instrument of His. I have gifts that seem to be superior to those of others." It is not rare for these and many, many other such thoughts to spring up in our minds.

But pride, when it germinates in the human heart, brings an end to genuine ministry. It contaminates what God is doing. It pollutes the pure things which God is giving to that person so that when it flows out through them, it is no longer righteous. It has been tainted by the fleshly, human ego.

How easy it is, when the anointing of the Holy Spirit is upon you, to take a ride yourself. How common it is, when God is flowing through you, for the flesh to enter into what is happening and take some of the glory. How natural it is instead of glorifying only God, to take the opportunity to let others see how great you are and how much God is using you.

Let us take as an example a preacher. Let us imagine that the Lord has given this brother a special message. As he preaches, the anointing comes upon him and he senses a special flowing of divine power.

Soon, he allows himself to be swept up in this flow. He begins to enter into the game himself. He catches the wave. He allows his own feelings to express themselves. Maybe he pounds the pulpit. Perhaps he modifies his voice, runs around or shouts. He begins to let his emotions enjoy what has been given, not for himself, but for others.

Soon, he becomes an actor in his personal theater of “ministry,” enjoying the attention, limelight and fame. He uses the power of God, which was given to serve others, to gratify his desire for recognition and honor among men. Pride has entered in and contaminated the work of God.

This same error is often experienced by those leading worship. When the presence of God is manifested in a strong way, they begin to bask in this aura. Instead of “retreating” or stepping back and letting God alone be glorified, they begin to take center stage and soak up some of the glory for themselves.

Along these lines, it is easy to wonder why is it that almost all those who lead in worship are up in the front where people can see them? Couldn't they function just as well from the rear where they do not draw attention to themselves?

There is no doubt that there exists, even in the secular world, a kind of “high” – a special sensation of power and exhilaration – that people feel when holding sway over a large audience. Musicians and actors are well acquainted with this feeling.

There is nothing like the “rush” you can feel when the whole audience is moving in rhythm with your beat (message, gift, etc.) They are looking at you! They are mesmerized and captivated by what you are doing. Wow! Aren't you something! The feeling of power is awesome.

But, my dear brothers and sisters, this is carnal. This is human. It is not from heaven. Instead, it is from below. This kind of thing stokes the fire of human pride. It brings glory to the person and not to God. It is a pit into which many

men and women of God fall when He begins to use them with the intention of glorifying Himself.

Pride alienates us from God. We read that “God resists the proud” (Js 4:6; I Pet 5:5). As our ego increases, He moves away. He begins to distance Himself from us. We read: “Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord” (Pr 16:5). We are also told: “A haughty look, a proud heart... are sin” (Pr 21:4).

Perhaps you remember the first one in history who began to use the gifts and anointing of God to glorify himself. This individual had been chosen and raised up by God to do a work for Him. He had received power and gifts. He had been given amazing abilities to do his work.

But with the passage of time, he began to enjoy others noticing him. He started to like being the center of attention. He soon basked in the light of having others admire and even worship him.

His pride germinated and began to grow. Soon, he began to use these things that God had given him to attract and draw a large number of followers to himself. The name of this individual is Satan. Are you following in his footsteps?

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

When Jesus walked on this earth, He gave us a completely different example. He walked in humility. He never sought personal fame or recognition. In fact, it seems as if He did everything backwards from a human point of view.

For example, when he cured people, He strictly instructed them to keep quiet about it. He didn't want anyone to know. We read that after cleansing the leper: “He charged him to tell no one, ‘But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded’” (Lk 5:14).

This is just one example among many in which Jesus insisted that those who experienced miracles not tell anyone.

Yet Jesus was the Son of God. He was the Savior of the world. How is it that He did not desire to be known and become famous? Shouldn't this be exactly what He needed to seek? Didn't He need to expand His ministry and reach as many as possible?

Yet such attitudes had no place in Jesus' heart or work. He did not seek to be known. He did nothing to promote His own fame, expand His ministry or gain recognition.

One time his own brothers confronted Him about this very thing saying: "For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world" (Jn 7:4).

They were exactly right. Anyone who wants fame and recognition should act as they suggested. They should use every opportunity. But what they didn't realize is that Jesus was not seeking to be "known openly." That wasn't His goal. His heart did not yearn for these things. He did things secretly for exactly this reason, so nothing fleshly or human would enter into His ministry.

Incredibly, Jesus was not seeking followers. He wasn't trying to impress anyone. He was not using the miraculous things which the Father did through Him to advance His prestige, line His ministry coffers or attract the multitudes. In fact, many times He deliberately avoided the waiting throngs.

One of my favorite verses reads: "And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side" (Mt 8:18). How unlike the natural human tendency this is! We might expect something much different.

Let us imagine that pastor Joe Schmoe, sees a great multitude before him. He may imagine that this is his chance to "minister." There is the crowd waiting to hear him! So he jumps up on the nearest boulder, gets the attention of the multitude and begins to preach.

This would seem the normal scenario, but it was not Jesus' way. He avoided fame. He refused earthly honor. He clearly stated: "I do not receive honor from men" (Jn 5:41). Not only did Jesus not seek it, He did not accept it if and when it came! Earthly honor, glory and fame had nothing to do with His ministry. He

avoided such things because they were human and tainted with the sin of pride and ambition.

Yes, Jesus did sometimes minister to and teach the multitudes; but He did it only for godly reasons. He often “had compassion on them” because of their needs and lost condition (Mt 9:36; 14:14). His ministry to them had nothing to do with seeking fame or followers.

When the multitudes came to make Him king, He went away. We read: “Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone” (Jn 6:15). Such earthly honor had no place in His plans and purposes.

Another time, Jesus was ministering in a small village. The people there liked what they heard. They were really impressed. So, when the next day dawned, the crowd came looking for Him wanting more of the same.

But when they tried to find Jesus, He was nowhere around. So they went out searching for Him. When they finally found Him, He was in the desert praying. They then tried to persuade Him to come back. “But He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent’ ” (Lk 4:43).

YOU ARE THE CHRIST!

There is no doubt that Jesus was and is the Christ of God. Peter was one of the first to receive this revelation. A person would naturally suppose that since this was the core, the very essence of His ministry, Jesus would want everyone to know about it. He would desire that this revelation would be spread abroad to the whole world.

Yet, in striking contrast to this natural thinking, after Peter’s confession, “...He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ” (Mt 16:20).

What? Tell no one? How in the world could the Son of God not want everyone to know who and what He was? It was because nothing human interested Him. He was not seeking recognition. He was only doing the things which His Father had sent Him to do.

If then our Lord and Master refused earthly fame and honor, where does that leave us? Where should our hearts be? What are we really seeking? What is more important to us, the praise of men or the praise of God? (Jn 12:43).

THE ESSENCE OF MINISTRY

Jesus was seeking nothing for Himself. He was not looking for fame or fortune. He wasn't even desiring that everyone would like Him or approve of Him. He had another motive. He was only doing what He saw the Father doing.

Jesus was not doing His own thing. He wasn't even speaking words out of His own heart. He was motivated in every way by a higher source. We read: "The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works" (Jn 14:10).

Here is Jesus' secret. Here is the source of all true ministry. The Father lived inside of Him. He was filled to overflowing with the life of God. So it was this life which motivated Him.

It was this supernatural fountain which was the source of His words, actions, feelings and even expressions. Jesus was not alone. The Father was always with Him and even inside of Him. We read: "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (Jn 8:29).

In the same way, any true ministry on our part cannot be something which springs from ourselves. Its source cannot be us. Instead, it must be something which originates from the Life of God within us. It must be Jesus who is initiating what is said or done. He and He alone is the source of all true ministry. Ministry is never something which we do for God. Instead, it is the words and works which God does through us.

Here there is no room for pride. There is no space for self-seeking. God must be the only one who is glorified. To the extent that we allow our ego and pride to enter into what God desires to do, to that same extent the power and effectiveness of what is ministered is diminished.

Some years ago, there was a great revival in the country of Wales. During that time, almost everyone in the nation was converted. One man who was powerfully used by God at that time was Evan Roberts. Evan was a man broken by God. He had become meek and humble.

I heard that when he was called to preach at some meeting or other he would exercise discernment. If he sensed that the crowd was there to see and hear him, he would not get up to speak. Perhaps he even left.

But when he knew that the people were there to hear from God, he would minister what He had given Him. Evan lived to honor God and not himself.

Why is it today that we see so little genuinely powerful ministry? Why does it seem that the works done by the early apostles were more spectacular? Perhaps it is because today there are so many human elements which have crept into our ministry. So many today are using the things of God to build up personal kingdoms, become wealthy and attract followers.

There is no doubt that God turns away from such spiritually ugly, human works. It may be that in the beginning some men and women received something from God. But, if and when they become proud and self-seeking, God withdraws from the scene. They are then left with what they can do with their own energy, charismatic personality, oratorical ability and human charm.

Someone once said: “True ministry always meets a need. But it is not supposed to be the need of the one ‘ministering’ to be seen and heard.” This is very true. Meditate on these things.

EVERY EVIL WORK

When men begin to seek and attain their own “ministries” they need to carve out a “territory” for themselves. They need to attract and then segregate to themselves a good number of followers. The more, the better. This inevitably puts them in competition with one another to see who can become the greatest. Each one needs more adherents than the other.

This situation breeds all kinds of sin. Soon you see pride, contention, envy, strife, criticizing, back biting, hate, etc. We read: “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (Js 3:16). How often this describes the situation in which the church finds herself today!

Dear brothers and sisters, this has nothing to do with the kingdom of God. It is not genuine ministry. It is the product of the flesh of man trying to use the things of God to glorify and please itself. It is a manifestation of another, darker kingdom.

True ministry is the expression of Jesus Christ. It is the revelation of another Life which lives within us. It is motivated, not by anything selfish or human, but by the Father. It is not the transmission of information, but rather the manifestation of God Himself.

Here there is no room for us. Ego has no place. Our own will, needs and desires cannot enter. True spiritual ministry is a very narrow thing. There is only room for one Person, Jesus Christ.

If and when God brings us to this place of humble service, our ministry will become more effective. God will entrust us with more and more of His power. The less we ourselves appear, the more He can do His glorious work through us. The more we simply do “what we see the Father doing,” the more potent our work will be.

When God has broken down our own ambition and pride, when we are no longer seeking anything for ourselves, then we will be a vessel which is sanctified and prepared for the Master’s use (II Tim 2:21). It is then that we will know true ministry.

By David W. Dyer

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