

BLISTERED-FEET MINISTRY

A Meditation on Colossians 1:24-25

R. C. Sproul, a well-known author, seminary professor and pastor, recalls a conversation he had with one of his students. “I remember a starry-eyed college student who looked at me and said in wonderment, ‘What was it like for you when you were just a minister?’ I lost it. I exploded in a paroxysm of indignation. ‘What do you mean *just* a minister? Don’t you realize that the parish ministry is the highest calling on earth? God had only one Son and He made Him a preacher!’” It’s an awesome privilege to be called to preach.

You might be tempted to say, “But I’m just an usher.” When a Bible teacher with a doctorate degree in Theology was asked about his “lowly” position as an usher, he responded by quoting Psalm 84:10: “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” It’s a joy to be involved in ministry in any capacity. It’s an honor to preach...teach Sunday school...pass out bulletins...clean the restrooms. The apostle Paul never lost the sense of wonder and awe that Jesus called him into the ministry.

In Colossians 1:24-25, Paul gives us his perspective of ministry, and what it takes to advance the kingdom of God.

First, ministry is suffering in Christ’s place. Paul says, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, 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” (vs. 24). This is almost a blasphemous statement. Could anything be lacking in Christ’s affliction in regard to his atoning work on the cross? God forbid! (Heb. 9:26-28).

The suffering in Colossians 1:24 has to do with persecution, not with atonement for sin. The afflictions of Christ are not complete yet, because he is still being persecuted in the world through His body, the church. Persecution of the church is persecution of Jesus. Jesus takes this persecution personally. When Jesus confronted Saul on the road to Damascus He said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?” (Acts 9:4). When we minister in Christ’s place, we can expect to share in His sufferings as well. And Paul *rejoiced* in his sufferings for the church.

Second, ministry is in God’s providence. Paul says, “I became a minister (I was made a minister; NASB) according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you” (vs. 25). God sovereignly calls us to salvation, and He sovereignly calls us to ministry. Pastor John MacArthur observes, “[Paul] operated under the knowledge of a divine mandate that was not even voluntary initially. All who are called to preach should feel the compulsion, the fear of judgment, and the sense of stewardship Paul felt” (*Colossians*, p. 73).

In 1 Corinthians 9:16-17, Paul said, “...when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me” (NIV). Paul didn’t volunteer to be a preacher. It wasn’t one of several different vocations he had to choose from. Jesus basically said, “You’re going to be my ambassador to the Gentiles. Do what I tell you to do. Go where I tell you to go. And, yes, you will suffer greatly for my name.” Many believe that the modern Church is weak because it is lacking in volunteers. Could it be the exact opposite? Could it be that we have far too many volunteers, and not enough servants/ministers who are compelled to do ministry, because they are called by God?

Keep in mind that afflictions are not just the result of advancing Christ’s kingdom; they are the *means* of advancing Christ’s kingdom. J. Oswald Sanders illustrates this point by telling the story of an indigenous missionary who walked barefoot from village to village preaching the gospel in India. After a long day of many miles and much discouragement he came to a certain village and tried to speak the gospel but was spurned. So he went to the edge of the village dejected and lay down under a tree and slept from exhaustion.

When he awoke the whole town was gathered to hear him. The head man of the village explained that they came to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet they concluded that he must be a holy man, and that they had been evil to reject him. They were sorry and wanted to hear the message that he was willing to suffer so much to bring them.

Paul knew the power of “blistered-feet ministry.” He said, “I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10). God ordains the ends (salvation), as well as the means (suffering).

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Website: www.foxlakechurch.org Email: wchristensen@foxlakechurch.org 847-587-1331