

THE GLORY OF THE MINISTRY

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, Who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." I Timothy 1:12.

To Timothy, a young minister and Paul's own son in the faith, the great apostle presented this sublime evaluation of his high calling, portraying the glory of Christian service.

The Gospel Ministry Is A Glorious Calling

I. Because of the One Who Calls.

The true ministry is not a mere profession, but a divine calling. The gospel ministry is not to be considered a mere "job". Through the years God's great messengers have been deeply conscious of this calling. Moses heard the voice of God from the blazing bush, calling him to the task of delivering God's people from the land of Egypt. Amos the shepherd said, "The Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy" (Amos 7:15). Isaiah received his call in beatific vision in which he saw the Lord and heard Him ask, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah responded, "Here am I; send me!" To Jeremiah God said, "Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet" (Jer. 1:5). John the Baptist was ever conscious of his God-sent mission. And Paul seemed wide-eyed with wonder that he had been called to preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ marvelling that unto him, who was "the least of all saints," this grace should be given. The Lord had enabled him and counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry.

This sense of God's call is the underlying glory of the ministry, the gleam and the glow so necessary to perseverance in service. Lose this glow and nothing is so drab, commonplace, and depleting. No burden is quite so heavy as the burden of trying to do the work of the Lord, without a vision of the Lord. Visionless gospel preachers become mere traders in the religious market, crying their wares from Sunday to Sunday in drab tones of necessity--pathetic figures in the presence of apathetic hearers, doing a ministerial chore with neither grace nor graciousness--selling their talents to the highest bidder and offering a sermonic pittance for a pittance of salary.

Life is a tedious treadmill when the gleam is lost. Many a discouraged servant of God knows this all too well. Moses lost his gleam amid the murmurings of his cantankerous people. He smote the wilderness rock twice in anger and said, "Must we fetch you water out of this rock?" This petulance was costly--it lost him the promised land. Every minister of Christ who in the petulance of discouragement loses the vision divine and endeavors to carry God's load in his own strength, loses also the promised land of supreme achievement and blessing.

II. Because of The Message.

Our theme is good news--not good advice or condemnation, but the grace of God in Christ. Good news--glorious news! Good news about a loving God, about sins atoned for, about deliverance from sorrow, about a stingless death and a defeated grave--news the world sorely needs today. Our Lord proclaimed it in His first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, His home town, when He preached good tidings to the poor, deliverance to the captives, the opening of the prison house to those who are bound. How that message must have thrilled the people of Nazareth! How it must have thrilled His own soul as He presented it!

The good news we proclaim is that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures." We proclaim this good news of God in Christ with a view to winning others to faith in Him as their personal Saviour and fidelity to Him as their Lord and Master.

What a message we have! Angels would gladly tell it, but God has commissioned men to proclaim it. In radiant phrases Paul sets it forth in Ephesians, "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is the grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." 3:7-8.

And to be a preacher one must be possessed by his message. There is a glory in being the living channel of the living and life-giving message, to have one's mind operated upon by the Spirit of God, to have one's lips the instruments of divine purpose, to have one's whole personality worked upon by the Spirit to the end that God may do the work which is paramount in this day--the winning of men and women to Jesus Christ.

III. Because Of The Associations Of The Ministry.

Even though the popular mind may portray Christians as narrow, ignorant, and acrimonious--vastly inferior folks--as a minister I have had association with really superior people--with lives which have been touched by Almighty God and transformed. For strengthening of character, for encouraging glimpses of virtue and sheer nobility, give me the associations of the gospel ministry. Eternity alone will tell what I have learned in the sickroom and in the house of sorrow. My character has been strengthened by observing obscure heroism among God's people. I have handled the jewels of life.

IV. Because of Its Glorious Privileges.

1. Being a real Christian gentleman.
2. Being a good example to others.
3. Gaining the confidence and love of others.
4. Acquiring a large number of friends.
5. Being Christ's representative in the world.
Enjoy a privilege not granted to the angels to speak and to teach for Him.
6. Helping people to get right with God.
7. Helping saved people to live victorious lives.
8. Being useful.
This minister does by giving counsel and rendering service, speaking with the burdened, comforting the sad, encouraging those striving to live the Christian life. It is a real joy to draw forth from the fountains of revealed truth, things new and old, which will heal hearts, quiet fears, renew courage, strengthen faith, and rekindle hope.
9. Holding forth the Word of Life.
Declare the living Word, echo the thoughts of Christ, point people to the narrow gate, and feed the souls of the redeemed.
10. Being happy in his work.
The preacher's joy is in the Lord and in the doing of His will.

Paul had a dual sense of glory and responsibility. While the glory of the ministry exalted him, the perils of his high calling filled him with reverential fear. There echoed in his soul, like the tolling of a solemn bell, the solemn possibility, "when I have preached to others, I myself might become a castaway." Yes, there are grave perils in this glorious calling. Perils always accompany privilege.

1. There is the peril of the heights.

Dr. Jowett spoke of the deadening familiarity with the sublime. Mountaintops are exhilarating. The sense of highness with panoramas of beauty spread out before us exalts the soul. But many live on mountaintops and lose all sense of the majesty of the heights.

The minister is always in danger of losing the sense of the high privilege of the heights upon which he continually lives. It is tragic to lose Jesus in the temple, to live with the Book and to lose power, to let prayer become an unpleasant duty, to have church services to become a chore, and to have conversions to become commonplace. Many a minister degenerates thereby into a mere guidepost on the road to heaven, orthodox enough, faithful enough in routine matters, but lifeless and uninspired. It is possible for the minister to become counterfeit without scarcely knowing it. Glorious experiences can become drab if we do not guard the sense of the heights on which we live.

2. There is the peril of the depths.

A minister lives in the midst of human suffering. Sorrow continually comes to his door and unless he watches carefully he may become calloused to the bleedings of life. What other men encounter only once or twice in a lifetime is his continuous experience. He walks among the sick and the dying. Things that haunt the spirits of others for weeks may pass over him in an hour, and his great temptation is to shield himself in cold professionalism against these sorrows.

3. There are the perils of spiritual pride.

Some of the severest defeats have come in the midst of great success. At Caesarea Philippi Peter heard the commendation of the Lord, "Blessed art thou." A little later, because obviously his soul was lifted up in pride, he heard, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." Pride of achievement is a terrible snare. Our business is not only to preach Christ crucified, but to preach Him in a crucified way.

A young Scottish theological student was asked to preach in a very prominent pulpit. With great confidence and considerable speed he went into the high pulpit, feeling that he could sweep the congregation with his oratory. But he stumbled and halted through twenty minutes of pitiful effort, and then came down out of the pulpit after the service to weep out his chagrin. After the others had gone, a good old Scotch mother in Israel endeavored to help the boy, giving him this admonition, "Laddie, if ye had gone up as ye came down, ye would have come down as ye went up."

Our Lord wants our best, He is entitled to our best, the work deserves our best, the world needs our best, and we owe our best.

Guiding Principles For The Ministry

1. Be yourself.

Hero worshippers. Some have strong temptation to become some great preacher other than himself. Sunday, Truett, Graham.

2. Love people.
Pray, "Lord, help me to love people, good people, bad people, people who are better than I. " John wrote of Jesus, "Having loved His own, which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."
3. Be an example.
Paul said to Timothy, "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in manner of life, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." In godliness, prayerfulness, faithfulness, patience, and spirituality, the pastor must lead the way.
4. Preach the Word.
5. Proclaim the Gospel of Christ.
Christ died, Christ was buried, and Christ arose from the dead on the third day. Magnify Christ. Send your hearers away saying, "What a wonderful Saviour! What amazing grace!"
6. Depend on the Holy Spirit.
7. Preach helpful sermons.
Many broken hearts and burdened souls.
8. Be faithful.
To God, His Word, His churches, His people, and your duty. "Well done thou good and faithful servant."