

A Minister Emerges

Acts 9:19-31

Halifax: 18 March 2012

Introduction

Our Lord truly loves His church.

- The supreme way His love is demonstrated is by sending Jesus to be the minister of the covenant!
 - **John 3:16: God so loved the world that He gave...**
 - **Rom 5:8: But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**
 - **2 Cor 5:19: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them”**
- And then God continues to show us His love by sending out the ministers of Christ.
 - Their task is to set forth Christ for reconciliation.
 - The context of 2 Cor 5:19 shows the relationship...
 - **2 Cor 5:18-20: Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.**
 - He raises up ministers and uses them to connect us to Jesus Christ.

And of course the most important ministers of all were the Apostles!

- They are the ones who gave us the Holy Scripture and all that we need to know about Christ!
 - And perhaps the Apostle that God used most of all was the Apostle Paul!
 - He is truly one of the Lord’s great gifts to His church!
- We have already seen how the Lord halted Paul in his persecutions!
 - First He knocked him down!
 - Then, He picked him up!
 - A marvellous example of God’s mercy.
 - This week, I want to show you how the Lord furnishes him to be the best minister of Christ the church has ever had!
 - And in doing so, we will consider God’s great love for His church in furnishing her with ministers...
 - And we will look at how God furnishes all His ministers—
 - especially ministers of the gospel,
 - but even all of us as we are all called to serve Jesus according to our own particular callings.

I. See how the Lord furnishes His ministers with gifts that will bless the church.

A. Gives them a love for the church.

1. v. 19—Saul spent time with the disciples.
 - What a change this was!
 - He wanted to be with them!
2. This love is prominent in his entire ministry...
 - Remember...
 - how he yearned for them, praying for them..
 - visited them despite danger
 - wanted to know how they were doing “When I could bear it no longer...”
 - how he longed to see Timothy...
 - This love was rooted in his love for Jesus...
 - “the love of Christ constrains me!”
 - He wanted everyone to love Jesus and to honour Him.
3. This love is essential for ministers!
 - without it—no faithful service...
 - God gives this love to *every* Christian.

B. Second—He furnishes His ministers with a passion for Christ.

1. Verse 20 says **“Immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God!”**
 - a. Paul could not keep quiet about Jesus!
 - He had opposed him (cross)
 - now he can’t stop talking about him
 - All were amazed!
 - It is amazing when people change!
 - b. So his ministry is characterised by preaching Christ.
 - preaches the cross
 - present every man perfect in Christ.
2. This is what makes a minister useful—that he preaches Christ...
 - not pragmatism and self help, but Christ as the way
 - not high brow philosophy, but Christ as the wisdom of God
 - not feel-good sentimentalism, but Christ crucified
 - not psychology, but Christ, but the grace of Jesus
 - not sensationalism, but Christ, but Christ as revealed
 - not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord...
3. Whatever your ministry, it must also be full of Jesus to be of use!
 - If you give to the poor, it must be as one enriched by Jesus.
 - If you care for little children—it is as one who points them to Jesus.
 - If you show hospitality—it has the aroma of Jesus.
 - Oh pray that He would make you useful as a minister of Jesus!

- C. Third—the Lord furnished His ministers with the abilities they need!
- Paul developed:
 - **Acts 9:22: But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.**
 - 1. The Lord had a very great work for him to do...
 - so right from the start he began developing his gifts!
 - a. already had tremendous abilities!
 - zealous and passionate
 - superb education—Greek philosophy and Judaism
 - an amazing intellect and ability
 - b. But now he is increasing!
 - A powerful vessel for Jesus
 - *confounded* the Jews (emptied their arguments)
 - *proved* Jesus was the Christ...
 - The word rendered “proved” is literally “placing together.”
 - the more he did this—the more he grew.
 - 2. God will do this for you too...
 - serve with your ability and your ability will increase
 - ill: witnessing
 - not that any of us will be furnished with such gifts as Paul...
 - but sufficient for our calling
- The Lord furnishes us not for ourselves, but to serve others.
- It is for His people! How He loves us!

II. And now see further how He prepares His ministers for ministry through suffering.

- A. Right from the start, Jesus begins to bring Paul under persecutions...
1. plots to kill him...after many days (not years)
 - **23: Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.**
 - probably when he visited Arabia
 - East of Damascus
 - Damascus was under Arabian control (a governor of the king)
 - It was, perhaps, upon his return, that this plot was hatched...
 - But the plot fails
 - **Acts 9:24-25: But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.**
 - The Lord is not through with Paul!
 2. So he escapes from Damascus, but a similar persecution awaits him in Jerusalem.
 - This is described in v. 29

- **Acts 9:29: And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.**
 - a. It is not surprising that Paul would be targeted for persecution...
 - he changed sides!
 - besides—all who live godly will be persecuted
 - Persecution arises from guilty consciences—
 - You used to make them feel good about themselves
 - b. Besides that, there was the powerful preaching!
 - when argument fails—violence arises.
 - remember Stephen?
 - people can't deal with truth—must suppress it
 - c. But again, he gets away safely with the help of his believing friends.
 - **v. 30: When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.**
3. The Lord has good reasons for sending persecution—to prepare us for ministry
- a. First, persecutions deepen our love for Jesus...
 - we look more closely at him to see if it is really worth it!!
 - the deeper we gaze, the more we see His beauty and glory
 - b. Secondly, persecutions deepen our fellowship with Jesus...
 - “the fellowship of His sufferings.”
 - learn what Jesus endured
 - receive His sympathy and comfort
 - c. Thirdly, persecutions allow you to prove to others your love for Jesus.
 - you serve despite the cost...
 - people take notice (isn't that what you want?)
 - d. Fourth, persecutions increase your hope in God's promises.
 - no continuing city...
 - a city whose builder and maker is God...

TRANS> So Jesus sends persecution to prepare Paul for his future work!

- He will need all the things that persecution produces—
 - love for Jesus,
 - close fellowship with Him,
 - proven character as one who loves Jesus,
 - and strong hope in God's promises.
- Jesus sends persecutions to us for our good—
 - so do not despair—rather rejoice (as Jesus said)
 - You are in good company, and great will be your reward in heaven!
 - Persecution is a gift:
 - **Phil 1:29: For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake**

- But persecution is not the only thing that Paul is given to prepare him for service...
 - He is also given something that is in many ways more difficult to bear...
- B. It is given to him to be rejected by other believers!
- **Acts 9:26: And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.**
1. It is understandable how this happens!
 - a. Paul had been a violent, unmerciful persecutor!
 - it took some convincing!
 - many had been personally affected by his persecutions...
 - besides- we are to be wise as serpents...
 - b. And so it is that after Paul narrowly escapes persecution in Damascus,
 - he makes his way down to Jerusalem...
 - But look at the reception he gets!
 - **Acts 9:26: but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.**
 2. This would be hard to bear!
 - Saul was human...
 - he had left old family and friends...
 - he had just been run out of Damascus...
 - he wanted encouragement in fellowship...
 - he wanted to gather for worship...
 - But they would not have him!
 - It's understandable, but it was sure hard for him!
 3. Many believers must face this trial (especially those being prepared for office)
 - a. Pastors and elders must learn to keep on going with no friend but Jesus!
 - I saw slander as a very young believer—
 - those who were discipling me gave me the cold shoulder.
 - I felt that I must prove myself...
 - What did God teach me?
 - the only thing that matters is what Jesus thinks of me.
 - Eventually I was vindicated.
 - b. I have had to bear the same again in ministry...
 - Rejected by my colleagues in presbytery for holding to truth
 - Again, I learned that it only matters what the Lord thinks of me.
 - I cannot be a faithful minister if my eye is on pleasing men.
 - It must be first and foremost on pleasing Jesus.
 - Paul had to learn this!
 - Prepared him to stand against Peter for the gospel.

- c. And it is the same for you!
 - You will be misunderstood, doubted, and rejected by other believers!
 - If it is because of sin, you will have no comfort till you repent...
 - If your conscience is clear, the Lord will strengthen you greatly.
 - Jesus had to bear this trial...
 - the Jews rejected Him.
 - then His own disciples! (would not pray with Him, would not stand with Him)

TRANS> But look!

C. The Lord is merciful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear!

1. He sends that wonderful servant—Barnabas—“the son of consolation”
 - a. This is the man who sold his property to help out the poor!
 - His name means “son of consolation—paraklesis...
 - The name given to the Holy Spirit as the comforter or helper...
 - It is, you will remember, the name that speaks of the one who comes alongside of you to help out in whatever way is needed!
 - It is the one who is able to see the difficulties of others with a clear and understanding eye—
 - unlike most of us who don’t care!
 - b. See how this dear brother comes alongside Paul in his rejection!
 - **V. 27: But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.**
 - We don’t know how Barnabas found out the truth about Saul...
 - travels? correspondence? interview with Paul?
 - People like Barnabas are resourceful!
 - They find a way because they want to help!
 - We look for excuses so we can say we wanted to help...
 - O that we could have a lot more Barnabases around!
2. But they are around and let this be a great encouragement!
 - In my trials—Dave and my wife Mary stood with me.
 - Before I married, I did have a time when I felt completely alone...
 - But very often, there are those Barnabases God sends to you.
 - Later on, Paul’s Barnabas was a Timothy...
 - The Lord never allows His own to be utterly broken.
 - He always sends whatever consolation is needed.
 - Of that you can be sure!

TRANS> Yes brothers and sisters, our Lord is constantly looking out for His church.

- He furnishes and prepares ministers because He loves us...
 - Jesus Himself is the ultimate servant of the church and all of us are called to imitate Him.
 - He prepares all of us for more faithful and fruitful service among His people.
 - The training can be very difficult—but it is always good!
- Indeed, through Saul, the whole church had been severely tested through his violent persecutions...
 - But now a time of consolation is brought to them—just as it was to Saul...
 - A time of rest for growth and development...

III. See how the removal of Saul as a persecutor brought blessing to the whole church for a time!

A. As a result of Saul's conversion, all the churches had peace...

- **Acts 10:31: Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.**
 - God has used this one man to stir up and to sustain the terrible persecution and now Jesus had not only apprehended him, but also turned him!
- 1. It was a huge relief to them!
 - Surely it was difficult...
 - not knowing when your church meeting would be broken up and men and women be dragged off to prison...
 - attempts made to make you blaspheme Jesus...
 - floggings and even executions.
 - But God brings all things to an end for us—as Psalm 57 says.
 - His mercy is high above the heavens!
- 2. Not only was it a huge relief, it was also a great encouragement!
 - What a demonstration of power and grace to see Paul converted!

B. See how the church made good use of this time of peace!

1. Peace can be harmful for the church if we abuse it.
 - We easily forget God in times of comfort and ease.
 - Look at us in the west!
 - We complain about everything, yet we are so spoiled!
 - God warns us in Deuteronomy...
 - I really struggle with people missing worship when there is not a good reason to miss it...
 - when there are lots of believers whose lives are in danger and who have to go to great inconveniences to meet in secret because of persecution!
 - We are so soft!

- As we have seen today, we need troubles to sanctify us.
 - But peace can sanctify us too if we will only use it rightly!
- 2. You see here that the church is said to have been edified during this time of peace.
 - a. Far from abusing it, they walked in the fear of the Lord during this time.
 - That means that they gave God His proper place of honour!
 - They did not look at Him as a powder puff God.
 - They did not look at Him as the candy man
 - They gave Him His place as their Lord and Master and devoted themselves to service!
 - They used the time of peace to attend more faithfully to His ordinances—
 - They could devote themselves to the word and to prayer and to the sacraments and to the care of the needy.
 - It was a time of edification instead of a vacation!
 - The church in the west is due for persecution because we have been vacationing too long!
 - Who among us is really devoted to prayer?
 - Walking in the fear of the Lord means that you give Him His place of supreme importance.

TRANS> Not only are they said to have walked in the fear of the Lord, but

- b. They were also edified because they walked in the in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
 - This word “comfort” is the one that refers to Barnabas...
 - The Holy Spirit Himself came alongside them to minister to them in whatever way was needed!
 - He was constantly there for them, blessing them.
 - When they needed convicting, He convicted them.
 - When they needed encouragement...
 - When they needed light...
 - When they needed courage...
 - When they needed wisdom...
 - Even though it was a time a peace, these believers were hard at work building the kingdom!
 - That is why they were constantly drawing upon the Holy Spirit in their labours.
 - If they had been in vacation mode, they would not have been walking in the Spirit...
 - He comes to help us when we are serving and that is what these believers were doing!

- C. And the result if their faithfulness was multiplication!
1. The church is meant to be a growing body.
 - In times of peace, we ought to be very busy serving the Lord and spreading His word.
 - What an opportunity we have to spread the word today!
 - God promises to multiply us!
 - Sometimes, the efforts we make may not succeed, but God will bring us people in other ways if we are truly walking with Him.
 2. May it be so!
 - Our Lord dearly loves us!
 - He gave Himself for us to save us.
 - And now He is at work in us—
 - to furnish us and prepare us for ministry as a body.
 - We have a time of peace—let us make the most of it!
 - Walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
 - Let us do so together and we will be richly blessed.