

A Ministry Worth Having Acts 20:17-38

Notes

I. INTRODUCTION

A ministry worth having. A ministry worth having, above all else honors and obeys the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every believer, every life which has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus has been given a ministry for service to our Lord.

If we seek to serve and honor Christ, then our lives, our ministries must be worthwhile. We must seek to honor Christ in all we do; share him with all we meet; and to build his church for his glory.

That is strange though, isn't it? Not many of us consider our lives as ministries and I honestly think this is why many of well meaning, Bible believing, and Christ seeking believers do not fulfill God's call on their lives-because we fail to consider and treat our lives as living ministries, serving Christ.

We cannot begin to have a worthwhile ministry if we do not understand that each of us have been given a ministry.

"Did you know that Christ has called you into ministry?" "Why no, he has not called me into professional ministry."

Beloved, Christ need not call you to be a professional minister to serve in his name and for his glory. We might well miss many blessings and opportunities if we think this way.

Every person who has experienced redemption in Christ is given a ministry for the Lord. The question is, "Will we have a worthwhile ministry?"

If we are going to do something for the Lord, let us do it with all we have. Let us seek to make the biggest impact we can. Let us make a statement for Jesus.

Jake, a game warden was always amazed at Sam, a local fisherman. Sam showed up at the end of the day with several stringers filled with fish, even when no one else caught nothing. The game warden finally decided to ask Sam how he did it. Same told him to show up the next morning.

Sam and the game warden met up long before dawn, got in the boat, started the motor, and 40 minutes later were out in a secluded part of lake. Sam made sure no one else was around. When they stopped the motor, everything was as still as it could be.

Sam reached in his tackle box, pulled out a stick of dynamite, lit it, and tossed it in the lake. When it hit the level in the lake, there was an enormous explosion. In a matter of seconds, fish of all sizes began to float up. Without a word Sam began to row his way over and with his net, he picked up the largest fish that made scale and began to string them.

The game warden screamed, “Wait! Your breaking every rule in the book. I’m gonna arrest you on every charge. You will be paying fines for the rest of your, and you will spend time in jail.”

About that time, Sam reached in his box and pulled out another stick of dynamite. He lit it and tossed it in Jake’s lap and said, “Are you gonna sit there watchin all day or are you gonna fish?”

As believers, we need to understand that God has not called us to live a halfway kind of life. He has called us to be all in.

So maybe the question for us today is, “Are you going to sit and watch Christ work, or are you going to start fishing for souls?”

I think the reason many of us do not go all in for Jesus is that we think that we must win the game. We think that we must have the perfect life, job, children, spouse and make the perfect decisions and the thought of not being able to do this discourages us.

Beloved, this is faulty logic. We are not called to win the game; Jesus has already defeated the enemy. He calls us to suit up, put on the uniform and just follow his game plan-dying to self and glorifying the Father.

This is how we can have a worthwhile ministry. This is how our lives can be made to glorify God-follow the pattern of Jesus.

In Acts 20 Paul gives a speech to the Ephesian church leaders telling them goodbye. In this speech Paul provides us with several principles to follow so that we may follow Christ and have a worthwhile ministry.

Up to now:

Paul Left Ephesus- Through Macedonia and Greece

Sent for and encouraged the disciples

Set out for Macedonia/Arrived in Greece, stayed 3 months

Plotted against by the Jews/Went back through Macedonia

Accompanied by Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus

Paul sailed from Phillipi to Troas

Raised Eutyclus from the dead after an all-night preaching session

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them,

“You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to

Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

²⁵ “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. ²⁶ Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

³⁶ When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸ grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

- In Paul’s address to the Ephesian elders, he gives us 10 principles to having a worthwhile ministry. We will cover 5 this week and 5 next week.

In Order to Have a Ministry Worth Having You Will:

1. Be Present (18)

“I was with you the whole time,”

Paul was in Ephesus for three years. He knew the people. He lived with them, worked with them, fought with them, ate with them, cried with them, married, and buried with them. He was with them.

He was able to make an impact on their lives because he chose to be present in their lives.

By being present two things happened for Paul and the church. He was able to observe, learn, and love them and they were able to observe, learn, trust, and love him.

It is almost impossible to have an effective ministry without being there.

Think of Jesus’ ministry. John 1 says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Paul as well as Jesus gives us this example.

We cannot hope to have an impact in peoples' lives if we are not present in their lives.

How will they know you care enough to listen? How will they know you care enough to serve?
How will they know you care enough to give them Jesus if we are not with them?

If we want an impact in our community and in our schools, we need to value and then prioritize being present with a gospel-centered attitude.

And being present doesn't mean being perfect or having all the answers. It means being present, filled with the Spirit, following Jesus' example in that moment.

Being present for ministry is important for both the individual and the church.

The church cannot function if its members do not show up for ministry. The church cannot be the hands and feet of Jesus if we are not available to the community.

A worthwhile ministry is a ministry of presence.

Are you practicing being present for others in Jesus' name? Are you making yourself available to serve in the church when called upon?

2. Work Hard (19)

“with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews”

Like most places Paul went, Jews would rise up, run him out of the synagogue, and persecute him.

Paul gives us a description of his own life and the hardships he faced in 2 Corinthians.

2 Cor. 11:21-28, *“Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*

Paul describes his life as:

- Worked harder than most
- Been in prison more than most
- Been flogged more than most
- Beaten with rods three times

- Stoned and left for dead
- Shipwrecked three times
- Never stopped moving from place to place
- Danger from every side
- Sleepless nights
- Hungry nights
- Cold and naked
- Constant concern for those he ministers too

Serving Christ, loving people, and following the ministry of Christ is hard.

Christianity is not for wimps!

The pressure of the world, the killing of sin, having the compassion of Jesus towards those who sin against us/putting self aside for others/serving in Jesus' name-this is hard work.

But rest assured, God will not call you to do a work he has not equipped you to do.

Some of you right now may be tempted to give up. You may be thinking it is too tough for you to live for Jesus. You can't forgive another wrong. You can't go through another trial. The mountain is too steep/the valley too low.

Is the reason you are not participating in ministry in our church, in our community because it is too hard for you?

God will never, never call you to an area of service he has not prepared for you, or prepared you for.

Beloved I want to encourage you. For while the work is hard, the Lord is right with you, giving you strength to take each step in faithful obedience for his glory.

Having a worthwhile ministry also means practicing humility.

3. Practice Humility (19)

"serving the Lord with all humility and with tears"

Paul never sought to elevate himself above others with position, privilege, or power.

He used his gifts in humble service so that others may be built up.

Phil. 2:3, *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves. ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:"*

The difficult part of this is that we hate to put others ahead of ourselves.

"What about me?" "My rights?" "My wants?" "My preferences?"

The humble person is a person who values others to the point of lifting them above self.

“Well, I don’t think I could ever do that.” Jesus did. And the same Spirit and the same power that gave Jesus the strength to practice humility, lives within you.

Robert Morrison wrote, “The great fault, I think, in our mission is that no one likes to be second.”

J. Oswald Sanders responded to this quote by saying, “The world has yet to see what could happen if everyone lost the desire to get the glory. Wouldn’t it be a marvelous place if nobody cared who got the credit?”

Think about prideful and arrogant people. Do you enjoy being around them? Do you enjoy hearing them talk about their experiences, accomplishments, degrees, and status? Do you enjoy talking to someone like this? No, none of us enjoy this.

Humility is the opposite of this. Humility is the absence of self and the advocating of others, even above us.

Humility advocates for others, is interested in others, blesses others.

What about you, do you care who gets the credit? Are you willing to serve without glory? Are willing to make visits, shed tears, change tires, cook meals, all without ever letting anyone except the person you helped know?

A worthwhile ministry is one where we are practicing humility and we do not care who gets the credit.

4. Serve in Your Giftedness (20)

“teaching you publicly and from house to house,”

Paul went from house-to-house teaching and preaching the gospel. The first century church did not have the organizational structure we do today. When they began to have structure, they borrowed from what they knew and added as needed.

Prior to any formal organization, churches were at individual houses. So, you could have 10 gospel evangelical churches in one neighborhood, no one competing, no one fighting over territory, just neighbors coming to share a meal and the word with one another and then leaving and going into the community and living what they were talking about the previous day.

This is the environment Paul ministered in. He taught in the synagogue during the day and in the evening, he would go from house-to-house teaching.

Paul used his gift to serve the church. God gave Paul the gift of teaching, and even though Paul was not a great orator, Paul used the gift of teaching and preaching to build up and strengthen the church and to evangelize the lost.

God does not desire you to use Paul’s gift, or my gift. God desires you to use your gift.

God has gifted each person here with natural talents and skills and he has also given each of your spiritual gifts for the building up of the body.

The church does not function if believers do not serve in their giftedness.

Are you using your giftedness to serve Christ in his church?

We have places of service for introverts and extroverts; for singers and greeters; for teachers and helpers; for servers and cooks; for organizers and planners.

We have places for you to practice your faith, to be generous, to be kind, to be gracious, to show compassion, and love, faithfulness, and commitment.

Here's the deal- the church will not function the best it can, and you as a believer will not have full joy and peace, if you are not living out using your spiritual gift.

A worthwhile ministry is a ministry which is living out, serving in your area of giftedness.

5. Share the Gospel (21)

“solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I am about to say something controversial, but I truly believe it is a NT principle.

A ministry which does not seek to share the gospel with the lost or does not seek to train up individuals to share the gospel with the lost is not a NT ministry.

Social ministry without gospel emphasis is not Christ's ministry.

Whatever else Jesus did in his life of ministry, he always consistently pointed people toward himself as Messiah and we must do the same.

It is imperative that we, as believers share the gospel.

Whatever else we do, however else we serve, we are to be actively praying, looking, and participating in sharing the gospel with the lost.

Paul says, I testified to everyone, Jews and Greeks, of repentance and faith.

There was no one he saw as not deserving or needing the gospel of Jesus.

What about you? Are there people in your life that you are not sharing the gospel with for some reason?

“Well, yea, my brother, cousin, mom, dad, best friend, or coworker got mad at me the last time I told them they needed Jesus.”

Yes, they are going to get mad. I wouldn't like it if someone told me I am a horrible sinner and that I am going to hell.

I fully expect a battle when the gospel is present. Why? Because Satan isn't just going to give up people without a fight.

Yes, they may get mad when you share the first part of the gospel, but if you hold on long enough, you can show them the depth of God's great love for them and how Jesus died for them.

Does that mean they are automatically going to become a believer? No, but our job is to present the true gospel so they will know the truth.

A worthwhile ministry is a ministry worth having.

Is your life a ministry?

Every single believer here has the potential and the privilege to have this type of ministry.

So, the first part of having a worthwhile ministry is to:

- Be present
- Work hard
- Practice humility
- Serve in your giftedness
- Share the gospel

Do you desire a worthwhile ministry? I know God desires one for you. I know I do. I know I would love nothing more than for each one of us, from the youngest to the oldest serving Christ both in our individual lives and in his church.

What is keeping you from having a worthwhile ministry?

Do you need to start showing up?

Do you need to make a commitment to get rid of laziness and complacency?

Do you need to repent of pride and follow the example of Jesus?

Maybe you realize that you are not using your gifts for Christ? I can promise you we can use them; we can do something with what Christ has given you.

We would love to help you discover your area of giftedness and service.

What about the gospel? When was the last time you shared the gospel? When was the last time you told someone about God's great love?