

Colossians 4:7-18
(Matthew 9:35-38)
“Fulfilling Our Ministry”

Introduction

In the opening verses of this letter, the apostle Paul commends the Colossian Christians for their love for all the people of God (1:4). It is easy to think of Paul as a controversialist, a theologian, a disciplinarian, and he certainly was each of these and much more. But what shines through above all else in Luke's description of Paul in the book of Acts, as well as in Paul's own letters, is his love for God and for God's people. He loved the church of Jesus Christ, a church that he had once hounded and persecuted.

As we come to the end of our study of this letter, it is good to take a closer look at how Paul's love was expressed, even in circumstances that most of us would find so difficult and distracting as to make ministry to others, even thinking of others, seem impossible. Paul is in prison under threat of death, and yet he is doing everything he can for the sake of the church.

Some of us here today, perhaps most of us here today, think that we would do great things for God and for his people if only the circumstances of our lives were different. If only we had more time, if only our resources were not so limited or committed to other things, if only we had not squandered such great opportunities in the past, if only our job were different, or our marriage or finances, then we would serve the Lord with gladness. Then we would not be so focused on ourselves and on the problems that threaten to overwhelm us every day.

But Paul's ministry seemed very little effected by circumstances. Each new thing, especially the hardest of things, he took as an opportunity for a creative response that would advance the cause of Christ and reach people who had not previously been reached by the good news of God's redeeming love. God does not require of any of us that we have gifts he has not given us or that we go back and change what we cannot change. He invites us to trust his power to make all things new, to take even the most broken places of our lives and use them for good, and to show again that he puts his treasure in jars of clay like you and me. Three things particularly stand out in these concluding verses:

Body

- 1. Note how Paul, even while in prison, stayed focused on others.**
- 2. Note how Paul, even while in prison, stayed focused on their maturity.**
- 3. Note how Paul, even while in prison, stayed focused on God's mission.**
- 4. Note how Paul, even while in prison, stayed focused on God's grace.**

Conclusion

“Well,” you may be thinking, “that’s all fine and good, but I’m not like Paul, not even close. I’m obviously not an apostle, and I’m not even a speaker or writer. I’m no Bible scholar, and I don’t know how to relate to all of this.” Here’s the key: God does not want you to be Paul. He wants you to be you, but to be you the same way that Paul was Paul. In other words, God’s grace can make you as blood-earnest about the gospel of Christ as was Paul. God’s grace can give you as great a passion to serve God in your context with your gifts, as Paul was to serve God in his context with his gifts. And that same grace can sustain you whatever troubles come as surely as it sustained Paul in prison and kept him focused on the things that last, the things that matter, the things that build God’s Kingdom, and so give our lives eternal significance and prepare for us an eternal weight of glory.

Remember the old gospel song: “If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus and say he died for all”? If you are willing to live by God’s grace, for his glory and for the good of those around you, God will use you as surely as he used Paul. You are the one God has given to your family, to your friends and neighbors, to those you see day after day at work. He has placed you right there to make him known in all the small and wonderful ways that God’s people make him known: by nurturing friendships, by pursuing your ministry whatever it may be, by remaining centered on grace no matter what difficulties come your way. God’s strategy for reaching the world is right here in this room: it is you and me. God has no other plan. He has entrusted to us and to others just like us his mission to save the world.

God stands as ready to change our world through us as he was to change Paul’s world through him, as we let the peace of Christ rule our hearts, let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, and do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us. The challenge to each of us is the same challenge that Paul gave to Archippus: “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord” (4:17).

What of you this morning? Do you yet know what ministry God has given you? If not, are you willing to discover it? If so, when will you begin? And if you know what it is, what are you doing to pursue it, to fulfill it, to one day hear the Master say, “Well done, good and faithful servant”?

“See to it that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”