

1 Timothy 1:12-18 **He Put You In The Ministry**

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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If you remember from last week, Paul is writing to Timothy who he has sent to straighten things out in a town called Ephesus in modern Turkey. Apparently some of the leaders in the church there are going way off on a tangent and leading people astray, advocating a mystical approach to Christianity. They are coming up with crazy stories based on genealogies and what Paul calls “fables” or we might say “old wives tales.”

Last week we said there are things that are true Christian beliefs, and there are things that are not. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy to say “reinforce the walls around the faith – re-establish the boundaries” because these teachers in Ephesus were breaching the walls of truth and teaching false doctrines.

Now, Paul is about to use his own personal experience to illustrate that the direction those leaders want to go is empty. They think they’re headed in a good direction, but Paul has already been down that road and it led him nowhere. The false teachers want to emphasize more of Old School Judaism and Paul says “no way, don’t go there.” He didn’t become who he was today by radical adherence to the Jewish laws, but by the grace of God.

He explains that here in our text:

[12](#) And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, [13](#) although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. [14](#) And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. [15](#) This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. [16](#) However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. [17](#) Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

As we consider this passage this morning there are three things I want to point out to you – three things that Jesus did for Paul and then to also consider how Paul responded to them and what it means for us.

The first thing is that Jesus redeemed Him.

If you don’t know the story of the New Testament it is kind of hard to appreciate the magnitude of what happened with Paul. But he gives us a broad overview in vs 13:

“I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man.” A blasphemer is someone who speaks irreverently about God – basically you’re talking trash about who He is or what He is doing. Paul was guilty of this because He spoke out against Jesus and the Christians back when he was a Pharisee.

But not only did he say things, he actually opposed the Christians – he persecuted them, and that wasn’t just a mild form of opposition, he says he was an insolent, or violent man. The word means someone like a bully who uses their strength or position of power to force their will on someone else. Paul had Christians arrested and was present when they were put to death for their faith in Christ. He took things to the absolute extreme in opposing the first Christians, and then one day Jesus turned his world upside down by calling him to become a Christian and putting him in the ministry.

And how did Paul respond to that? Did he say, no, no, not me? God could never use me? No, he accepted what God wanted to do with him.

But then, and this is important, he had no trouble reminding Timothy and others of what His life had been like. He shared this testimony publicly.

Paul says, I have been given this incredible position in ministry, this opportunity to serve Jesus and others and it wasn’t because I was so mystical, so spiritual, so zealous – he says, essentially he was a wacked out fanatic who was headed in the completely wrong direction when God reached down and took hold of his life, spun him around and gave him more than he could have ever asked or imagined.

In fact, Paul says here that one of the reasons why God used him was **because** he was so messed up. And he says he was ignorant of what he was doing – he didn’t really understand who Jesus was and what was happening when he was persecuting. Now, he was still guilty of sin, but he didn’t understand the reality of Who he was opposing. And do you remember what Jesus prayed from the cross? Father forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing. And then later when Stephen was martyred and Paul was standing by watching it happen, he prayed the same thing, Father forgive them for this.

The whole point is this – if God can take someone like Paul who is blatantly, militantly, against Him and spin his entire life around 180 degrees, why can’t he do that with you, or the person you think will never be saved?

So, the first thing Jesus does is redeem Paul, but simultaneously he also put him in the ministry.

[12](#) And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry

This is something that really stood out to me this week.

Paul says Jesus PUT him in the ministry. Paul didn't ask for it. Didn't network for the position, didn't apply online or send Jesus his resume. No. Jesus PUT him in the ministry.

Now, we all have several wrong ways of thinking about ministry. We have the wrong definition for it, we think we can't be called to it, or we have no desire for it, all because we don't understand who Jesus is and what He wants to do through us.

What is ministry? What does it mean to be a minister? The word in Greek is diakonos, which might sound familiar because we also get the work deacon from it; it means one who serves. A servant. So a minister is supposed to be one who serves. And consider this next time you feel frustrated by bureaucracy – the same root word is behind administration – they are supposed to be servants who help you get the job done. When the Bible was translated from Greek into Latin they chose the word minister to translate diakonos because a minister was a servant, based on its root – minus. Or as we might say, minus, “less.”

We think of pastors and missionaries or chaplains as being ministers, or in “full-time ministry” but the interesting thing is, actually, we're all in ministry, regardless of our title or what we do. In Ephesians, Chapter 4, Paul says that God put people like pastors into the body of Christ to “[equip]... the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,”

So, the pastor's job isn't ministry, his job is to equip YOU for the ministry.

I have a ministry to this church, but also to my wife and my kids, to my neighbors and friends and that doesn't go away no matter who is signing my paycheck. Remember, the greatest command, we might say the greatest ministry is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. We're all in the ministry together – every one of us has been given a sphere of influence in which to serve.

You might not be a full time evangelist, but you know unsaved people and God wants to use you to reach them. You might not be called to serve in an orphanage in Haiti, but God gives you children of your own and says, love and serve them, teach them about Me. You might not preach on Sunday mornings, but a friend at work says, “Hey, I have a question about the Bible.” You're in the ministry.

We might call it the ministry of the mundane. But it's the most real form of ministry there is – the day to day, grinding it out, everyday realities of life ministry. And it's where we fail most often because we don't realize that Tuesdays are ministry too.

There's another way we misunderstand ministry, and that is, we don't think we're in ministry because we don't think we're qualified for it. I think one of the reasons why Jesus **puts** us into ministry is because we come up with too many excuses or reasons why we shouldn't be in it.

It's a twisted form of self-focus that says God can't or won't use me. It's either a lie or twisted pride or both. What do I mean?

Twisted Pride – I was so bad God can't use me – You are not God's Kryptonite. Spurgeon once wrote "Brother, there is no reason why, if you have gone very far in sin, you should not go equally far in usefulness."

Lie

- I'm too young
- I didn't go to seminary - neither did Spurgeon or Billy Graham
- Bad doctrine - guy at First Command

Your past may influence you, but the gospel defines you.

We're all in rehab and we should be sharing tips and tricks with each other, not trying to hide our frailties. The Bible tells us to "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal 6:2)

Paul was open in sharing how messed up his past was, but he also frequently solicits prayer for his situation and needs (e.g. Eph 6). He got the concept that it's not who you were without Christ, but who you are in Christ that matters.

We should be able to talk with each other too - "This is what I'm coming out of, but this is what God has been doing in me," or "This is what I'm dealing with, this is what God is showing me"

You just want to make sure to avoid the Boastimony – remember the focus of a testimony is always the way God provided for you, not how bad your need was or is.

Jesus knew what He was getting when He took Paul and when He reaches for you – we're all scrap metal, but that's why He reforms us. Yes, you are incompetent, but that is why He makes Himself available to you.

So we need to get our thinking straight about service. We're not autonomous, Jesus didn't come into our lives as a life coach to help us figure out how to make more out of ourselves. And he doesn't hire you to do a job. We don't "volunteer" for ministry, we're PUT in it. Remember, the Bible talks of us as slaves, children, and soldiers, all of whom can be told what to do.

And how did Paul respond to being put into the ministry? He says right there in verse 12, first thing out of his mouth, he was thankful.

Now this is important because might I remind you that things were not going so well. There were problems in Ephesus and elsewhere – it seems like Paul was constantly facing friction in some realm of life. But he was still thankful for the opportunities Jesus gave him.

So why do we complain about the opportunities we have for ministry?

- Because we don't see with His eyes. We see only the bad aspects of our situation, not the good. We see how much work it seems like it is to live a life that is focused on serving

God and others. We see how hard it is going to be. But we also need to remember that a light shines brightest in the darkness.

If we could see it all through an eternal lens, if we could see what God is doing, what He has done for us, and how He is allowing us to be used in the lives of others, maybe we would be more thankful too.

- Why else do we complain about our ministry opportunities? Because we've taken them on ourselves instead of being directed to them by him.

This is one of our biggest problems – we bite off more than we can chew and then feel overwhelmed. The reason is because we decided all by ourselves how much to tackle. Remember, we need to let God establish the boundaries of our ministries and life. But a huge part of doing that is being content in Him and not thinking we need to have or do more.

- The final reason we complain or get depressed about our mundane ministry opportunities is because we're trying to do it in the flesh. We need to remember that He gives us the areas in which we serve and the people He wants us to serve, but that He also gives us the strength to do it.

When was the last time you prayed God help me to love my wife the way you want her to be loved? God help me to minister to my children the way you want them to be served? God help me to serve my friends by saying or doing the hard thing so they have an example of righteousness and godliness to follow?

This leads us into our next point about what Jesus did in Paul's life.

Jesus not only redeemed Paul, not only put him in the ministry, but also empowered him for that ministry.

God's calling is His enabling. One doesn't come without the other. He doesn't choose someone who is worthy, He makes you worthy. Or as we say in Calvary Chapel circles "God doesn't call the equipped, He equips the called."

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12

[4](#) There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. [5](#) There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. [6](#) And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. [7](#) But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: [8](#) for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, [9](#) to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same [\[fn2\]](#) Spirit, [10](#) to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. [11](#) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Now, I don't have the time to go into all of those separate gifts this morning, but the big point I want you to get is that they are given. They are given to every Christian, for sake of serving others, and they are given by God.

So, if you are a Christian, in addition to the general strength and power of the Holy Spirit in your life, you also have some specific gifting as well, something that you are better at than most other people and you've been given all of this for the sake of serving God and serving others. For ministry.

You CANNOT be the spouse, parent, employer, friend, supervisor, pastor, sound guy, usher or Children's ministry worker that you are called to be without God's power, but the power is freely given so there are no excuses.

Paul's little statement here to Timothy is really a kind of summary of the whole Christian life.

God redeems us – takes a life that is broken and bent or headed in the wrong direction, and cleans it up, dusts it off, knocks the dents out, and gives it a point and a purpose, and then provides the strength or the fuel that is necessary to accomplish that purpose.

So ask yourself – has God redeemed you? Has He wiped out the stains of your past sins like He did with Paul? Now let me warn you – there is a difference between knowing He can do it, and actually asking Him to do it. He offers forgiveness to you, but it's not automatic, you need to ask Him for it. Have you done that?

If so, do you understand the reality that those things no longer define who you are? Do you understand that even as a Christian, you no longer have to be the person you were a year or two ago. None of us has to be 'stuck' as who we were – your past influences you, but the gospel defines you. God is greater than your past, greater than "the way I've always been" there is nothing that has to hold you back.

So what ministry has God PUT you into? What opportunities has he surrounded you with day in and day out? What is your ministry of the mundane?

And do you realize that not only has put you in your situation, but He has also enabled you for it? Or, are you struggling day by day to get through it? Just trying to "make ends meet" with no recognition of the fact that God wants to use you as the channel through which He flows into the lives and circumstances and choices around you?

Important stuff to consider this week – stuff that could influence your attitude and approach to everything. Stuff that, if you get it right, could lead you to say:

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.