

Place: Lurgan Baptist 25:11:2012

COMPLETE IN HIM

Reading: Colossians 1:24-29

5. SAVED TO SERVE

A truck driver was hauling a load of 500 penguins to the zoo. Unfortunately, his truck broke down. He eventually waved down another truck and offered the driver \$500 to take the penguins to the zoo. The next day the first truck driver got his truck fixed and drove into town and couldn't believe his eyes. Just ahead of him he saw the second truck driver crossing the road with the 500 penguins waddling single file behind him. He jumped out of his truck, ran up to the guy and said, "*What's going on ? I gave you \$500 to take these penguins to the zoo*" To which the man responded, "*I did take them to the zoo. But I had enough money left over so now we're going to the movies.*" My that man didn't fully understand what he was supposed to be doing. Likewise, many believers today are fuzzy about their sense of purpose. I wonder have we forgotten that we are saved to serve ? You say, "*That's the work of the pastor or elders.*"

We often forget that the term "*minister*," ought to be synonymous with Christians. Certainly there are those who are specifically called of God as Paul was to but in a much broader sense service is just another word for minister. I mean do you see how Paul describes himself

in (1:23) ? "*Whereof I Paul am made a minister.*" The word "*minister*," is diakonos and means "*one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master, a servant, an attendant.*" Is this not exactly how Paul viewed himself ? A common servant. Writing to the Corinthians he says, "*Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of the God.*" (1 Cor 4:1) He uses the word that means a third level galley slave. In (Ch 3) he says, "*Who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man.*" (1 Cor 3:5) Paul says we are simply servants and nothing more. My is this not what the ministry is all about ? It is service. Is this not how Paul begins so many of his letters ? "*Paul a servant of Jesus Christ.*" (Rom 1:1) Do we not need to recover that perspective ? You see, in our society we have taken the word "*minister*," and elevated it but really it's a word of lowliness and humility.

Is it not good to be reminded by the apostle Paul that we are servants ? That's the highest designation of which we might be worthy. And the essence of service is humility. A poet once wrote,

**When telling Thy salvation free,
Let all absorbing thoughts of Thee
My heart and soul engross
And when all hearts are bowed
And stirred beneath the influence of Thy word,
Hide me behind Thy cross**

Now that's the spirit of the servant. Paul was a servant. And what he does in these verses is he defines his service. And he does so by using three words, **Ministry, Mystery, and Maturity.**

(1) THE MINISTRY THAT PAUL DEFINED

Stuart Briscoe once said, “ *You cannot be reconciled to God without being recruited for God.* ” You will remember that last week we examined the blessed truths of being reconciled to God through the death of the Cross. Paul now turns to the duties we should render to Him because of Who He is and what He has done. (1) Notice,

(a) HIS APPOINTMENT TO THAT MINISTRY:

Do you see what he says in (1:23) ? Look at (1:25) The word “ *dispensation*, ” is better translated “ *stewardship*. ” Paul viewed his ministry as a stewardship from God. Now the steward had oversight of the other servants and handled the business and financial affairs of the household. That freed the owner to travel and pursue other interests. Being a steward was thus a position of great trust and responsibility in the ancient world. And Paul tells us that he been appointed to this position by God. Paul literally was made a minister. What made him a minister ? Was it his education ? Was it his ability ? Was it his grades ? Was it his professors ? Was it his desires ? Well not really any of those. *What made him a minister was the sovereign call of God.* My is this not a perspective

that we need to be recover ? *You know in the world in which we live today, the danger is not in not enough people becoming ministers, the danger may be in too many becoming ministers.* Some of whom have not been called of God. The apostle Paul was clear about his call. Do you recall that standing before King Agrippa he gave his testimony ? He said “ *At midday O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven And I said who art thou Lord ? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise and stand upon thy feet for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make a minister and a witness* ” (Acts 26:13-18) My Paul did not volunteer to become a minister of the Lord Jesus he was appointed by the Lord himself. Do you remember Moses ? At the burning bush and Moses said “ *Here am I.* ” “ *And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt come now therefore and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people.* ” (Ex 3:1-10)

My God had a burden and God devised a plan and God chose a man. That's the way it is. That's the way it is in the ministry. God has a burden for his church, God has a burden for the world and God makes a plan and calls a man, or a woman, to fulfill the part of that plan. Do you recall Moses felt inadequate and the Lord said, “ *Certainly I will be with thee.* ” (Ex 3:12) When John Knox was called to preach his biographer says, “ *He burst forth in most abundant tears and withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behavior from that day until the day*

he was compelled to present himself in the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble in his soul.” John Knox responded to the call of God with a sense of inadequacy and agony at such a responsibility. And God’s answer to Moses and God’s answer to John Knox and God’s answer to anybody called into this ministry is the same thing that he said to Moses, “*I will be with thee.*” My it doesn’t matter who you are, it only matters says God, “*that I’m there.*” Do you see that ? You see it isn’t a question of aptitude or it isn’t a question of education. It isn’t a question of being out of a job. It isn’t a question of getting out of secular work. It is a question of the call of God. My do you sense the call of God in your life ? Of course all of us as believers have been called to serve the Lord ? Are you fulfilling that calling ? Are you utilizing the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given you ? (1 Cor 12:11) (a)

(b) HIS ATTITUDE IN THAT MINISTRY:

For do you see what Paul says in (1:24) “*I now rejoice in my sufferings for you,*” What is the spirit of the ministry ? Rejoicing. Do you know something ? Some of the most disappointed, discouraged, downtrodden, brokenhearted, grieving, sad, sorrowful people that you’ll ever meet are in the ministry. Like Jonah they are hesitant, angry, reluctant, bitter, and resentful. Like Elijah they are ready to call it quits. (1 Kings 19:4) They have lost the joy of serving the Lord. But Paul says, “*Who now rejoice,*” Maybe

you’re saying, “*it’s easy for you to say everything’s going fine in your ministry.*” My what about Paul ? He’s writing from a Roman confinement, he’s chained to a Roman soldier, he’s living under Roman custody. And he says, “*Who now rejoice,*” He was truly a supernatural man. He lived above his circumstances. You see joy is not some happy go-lucky, giddy frivolity. ***Joy is the deep down confidence that God is in control.*** My the joy of the early church was a tremendous testimony to the world. A report was written to the Roman Emperor Antonius Pius in the second century saying that if any righteous person from among them died, the Christians would rejoice and give thanks to God. When a child was born to Christian parents they would praise God. If it died in infancy, the parents thanked God because the child would be one who had passed through the world without encountering sin. My are we different from the early church ? I mean here they were suffering physically, materially, economically and yet there attitude was one of joy. Can you see here (a) (b)

(c) HIS AFFLICTION FOR THAT MINISTRY:

“*And fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ,*” (1:24) Roman Catholics take this as a reference to the suffering of Christians in purgatory. They tell us that Christ’s suffering was not enough to pardon us completely, so Christians must make up what was lacking in Christ’s suffering by their own suffering after death. Not so. Such a thought would be contrary to the work of Christ. He cried “*It is finished,*” My in

Christ's death on the cross the work of salvation was completed. This means that believers like Paul are to glory in nothing but the cross. But the attitude of unbelievers is different. They are who the enemies of the cross are never satisfied with their opposition to Christ, so although the Saviour is no longer on the earth their attacks are upon His servants. In so doing they assault Him. (Acts 9:4,5 2 Cor 1:5) And you know what he said at the end of Galatians ? He said, "*I bear in my body,*" What ? "*the marks of the Lord Jesus.*" (Gal 6:17) What were those ? Those were the scars all over him. They weren't meant for Paul, they were lashed out at Jesus Christ. But the Lord Jesus wasn't around so they got Paul. And Paul says, all of this is done, "*to build the church.*" My there's always a price, there's always suffering if the body is to be built. You see, God not only calls us to serve, but to suffer. I think of the apostles. Tradition tells us that Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross. James was thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple and finding him still alive, was beat to death with clubs. Peter was crucified upside down.

Philip was severely whipped and scourged and then hanged by the neck against a pillar. Thomas was martyred by a lance being thrust through his body while kneeling in prayer. And, Paul, the author of this letter was beheaded. My we may not suffer physically but if we are true to the Lord, we will be misunderstood, misquoted, misrepresented. We will antagonize people, we'll be threatened, accused, and ostracized. Every Bible preacher knows when he preaches the Word of

God, he is going to suffer for the cause of Christ. When he refuses to compromise what this Bible teaches, he is going to suffer for the cause of Christ. When he takes a stand for biblical separation in the church, he is going to suffer for the cause of Christ. When he stands up to those like Diotrophes, who try to take over the church, and try to move Christ out as the head of the church, he is going to suffer for the cause of Christ. Indeed Paul says "*all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" (2 Tim 3:12) You say, "*I'm a Christian and I'm not being persecuted.*" Well, look at the promise. You make up your mind that you are going to live like Christ and for Christ and you'll suffer. (1)

(2) *THE MYSTERY THAT PAUL DISCLOSED*

To us today, a mystery is something eerie and perhaps frightening but this was not the way the word was defined in Paul's day. A mystery is a sacred secret hidden in the past and now revealed by the Holy Spirit. (Eph 3:1-3) You see, here is

(a) *A Mystery Previously Concealed.*

Paul refers to this mystery, in (1:26) as a "*mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations.*" Steve Wagers says that the word "*mystery,*" was a word based on an ancient term which conveyed the idea of "*shutting the mouth.*" The Biblical use of the word carries the sense of that "*which was silent is now vocal.*" You see, there are some things God reveals to no-one. The Bible says, "*the secret things belong unto*

the Lord our God.” (Deut 29:29) God reveals other things only to certain people. (Ps 215:14) Still other things were hidden in the Old Testament but are now revealed in the New. For example there is the,

- 1. Mystery of the Incarnation: (2:2-3)**
- 2. Mystery of Israel’s Unbelief: (Rom 11:25)**
- 3. The Mystery of Lawlessness: (2 Thes 2:7)**
- 4. The Mystery of the Unity of Jew and Gentile in the church: (Eph 3:3)**
- 5. The Mystery of the Rapture: (1 Cor 15:51)**

These are truths previously concealed to the Old Testament prophets and scribes. These are truths that were not made known until God’s appointed time. These are truths which God sovereignly chose to keep hidden until the fullness of time. However, this mystery is not only previously concealed, but now, it is

(b) A Mystery Presently Revealed:

“ *but now is made manifest to his saints,*” (1:26) My that which had been, for centuries, previously concealed is now presently revealed. That which God once chose not to make known now has been made known unto us. That which God kept a secret for thousands of years has now been told unto us. You’re probably asking, “ *What is this mystery ?*” What is God’s best kept secret ?” It is unveiled in (1:27) “ *To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” Does it reveal Christ

in history ? Christ in theology ? Christ in ethics ? Christ in ideals ? Christ in architecture ? Christ in poetry ? Or, Christ in liturgy ? No, it reveals Christ in you, and Christ in me. He who once chose to live above us, among us, and with us, now has chosen to live in us. My the Old Testament predicted the coming of the Messiah. But the idea that He would actually live in His redeemed church, made up mostly of Gentiles was not revealed. Now think about it. “ *Christ in you, the hope of glory,*” That means,

1. The Person of Jesus Christ in your Life:

Will you let that soak in for a minute ? You see, there must be a link between the first century and the 21st century, some relationship that will make Christ real to us today and so Paul speaks of “ *Christ in you.*” My is this not astonishing ? We have just seen in the previous verses something of the person, the power, the position, the passion of the Lord Jesus. Now Paul says this eternal Christ lives in you. I can hardly take that in. Now we already know that we’re in Christ. We discovered that away back in (1:2) “ *To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ,*” you see, when you get saved you’re in Christ. But now we learn not only are we in Christ. Christ is in us. Christ in you, the hope of glory.

2. The Power of Jesus Christ in your Life:

You see, you are in Christ, that’s your new position,

Christ is in you that's your new power. My I can't live the Christian life and you can't either. Do you think you can ? All right you just try in the morning and see. Most of us can't get out of the house before we've already backslidden. Is that right or wrong ? Listen, you can't do it. Do you recall Paul's prayer in (Eph 3) ?
“ *That He would grant you to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.* ” (Eph 3:16-17) You see, the Lord comes to live in us by His Spirit. 1. 2.

3. The Prospect of Jesus Christ in your Life:

“ *Christ in you, the hope of glory,* ” (1:27) That is Christ brings with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come. My *Christ in you means you in glory. There is a Coming Resurrection:* You know as I look down I realise there are many of us battling with the B's of life. *Baldness, bifocals, and bunions.* But do you know there's another one ? *Burial.* My death is on our trail. And old death seems like he's running faster and faster and faster and faster, and you're doing the best you can but you've come to understand it's a losing battle. One day the breath leaves your body and old corruption lays hold of your body and they take your body and they put it in a grave somewhere. Now that's why it's important for you to understand *Christ in you, because it is only if Christ is in you that you have the hope of glory.* For the Christian life has not only to do with the salvation of the soul, it has to do with the salvation of the body. Paul says, “ *But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell*

in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. ” (Rom 8:11) *A Coming Resurrection.* But don't stop there. *A Coming Realization:* “ *Christ in you the hope of glory.* ” The Psalmist said, “ *As for me I will behold thy face in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness.* ” (Ps 17:15)

**Oh think ! To step ashore and that shore heaven
To breathe new air, and that celestial air
To feel refreshed and know tis immortality
Oh think ! To pass from storm and stress
To one unbroken calm, to wake and find it glory**

(3) THE MATURITY THAT PAUL DESIRED

For he says “ *Whom we preach perfect in Christ Jesus,* ” (1:28) My the goal of the ministry is the maturity of the saints. “ *Perfect,* ” involves maturity. Do you recall Paul's words to the Ephesian believers ?
“ *And He gave some, apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* ” (Eph 4:11-13) That goal was shared by Epaphras, the founder of the Colossian church. (4:12) My here is to be our goal, maturity, Christlikeness. Now did you notice,

(a) THE MEANS TO THIS MATURITY:

You see, as a preacher Paul pastors the people through the proclamation of the Word of God. The fact of the matter is that the songbook can never take the place of The Book. Programs can never take the place of preaching, and spiritual entertainment can never take the place of spiritual enlightenment. Do you see what Paul says ? “ *Whom not what we preach,* ” a person, not politics, a person not a program, a person not a party. Then Paul introduces two things.

1. The Negative:

“ *Warning every man,* ” The word simply means to give encouraging counsel in the light of sin and the inevitability of coming chastening. In other words if you keep going down that path, you’re going to get into trouble. Now that’s admonishment. Eli, the old priest, was told that the reason that he lost his children and lost his priesthood, was because he failed to admonish them. (1 Sam 3:13) What a contrast to the apostle Paul who said to the elders of Ephesus, “ *I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.* ” (Acts 20:31) My is this not to be the style of our ministry ? Do you ever Christians talking and saying, “ *Well, we just want to ease them into the church so we don’t do much teaching.* ” Well, you’ve missed the point for our job is not to coddle people but to warn them.

2. The Positive:

“ *And teaching every man in all wisdom,* ” (1:28) That refers to imparting the positive truths of the Word of

God. Now this is the responsibility of every believer generally (3:16) and of church leaders specifically. For Paul says that an elder must be “ *apt to teach.* ” (1 Tim 3:2) My do you want to become more like Christ ? Then there needs to be an appreciation of, an assimilation of, and application of the Word of God to your life. And what is,

(b) THE MIGHT FOR THIS MATURITY:

“ *Whereunto mightily,* ” (1:29) The word “ *labour,* ” means to work to the point of exhaustion. My have we come near that yet ? “ *Striving,* ” is the picture of an athletic contest, demanding maximum effort. Yet with all this endeavour Paul did not rely on his own power, but rather “ *according to his working which worketh in me mightily.* ” It’s agonizing, it takes maximum effort but you don’t do it alone. It’s His working, working in you mightily.

Well, there you have it. **Saved to Serve.** My is it not a privilege to minister ? Think of what we were. *We were Alienated, but now we are Ambassadors, we were Sinners, but now we are Servants, we were Hopeless, but now we are Heralds.* It is said that Charles Haddon Spurgeon, wonderfully gifted by God as a powerful preacher, used to say to himself over and over again as he slowly mounted the steps to his pulpit, these words, “ **I believe in the Holy Ghost, I believe in the Holy Ghost, I believe in the Holy Ghost.** ” May we know His power for our ministry !