

# Ministry

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Date: 28 February 2022

[0:00] Turn with me to Acts 20 if you have your Bibles there. Looking at Paul's charge to the Ephesian elders and the statements he made as he left them and farewell them.

! And we take it up from Acts 20 verse 17. It reads, And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, You know from the first day that I came into Asia after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and all the people of the church.

Also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, so that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

But none of these things move me, neither counts I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul says that I want to finish my course, I want to finish this running race with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

[1:46] Paul says that I want to finish my course with joy and the Spirit.

there serving the lord that's what i want to talk about tonight serving the lord it's ministry ministry is serving the lord and and we can all do that it's it's for all of us every one of us someone has said about ministry serving the lord the foundation of ministry is character the nature of ministry is service the motive for ministry is love the measure of ministry is sacrifice the authority of ministry is submission the purpose of ministry is the glory of god the tools of ministry are the word and prayer the privilege of ministry is growth the power of ministry is the holy spirit and the model for ministry is the lord jesus christ paul gives us here really in this verse 19 i suppose the core of ministry defining it here it's that work of humbly serving the lord and you each one that knows our lord you can serve the lord humbly serve and i know i've said it before the word ministry is spelt w-o-r-k it's it's work it's hard work sometimes paul says bonds and afflictions are coming ahead of me it means work it means serving it means toil it means labor being a servant and the word minister means servant and every believer really is a servant every believer has that call to serve in some way paul tells us serving the lord firstly with humility with all humility of mind verse 19 so first let's look at humility to serve the lord with all humility of mind so being a minister and you know minister ministry it doesn't mean having your names in lights it doesn't mean having certificates on the wall it doesn't mean titles and fame and glory it means doing the little things the things that can so easily be overlooked for example and we can all do this welcoming visitors that's an important thing isn't it there's a new face sometimes we might gravitate to people we're familiar with but please let's look after visitors when they come and visit they see us take the time the effort introduce yourself the um welcoming put yourself out you can be stepping outside the comfort zone always isn't it meeting a new person can be a challenge we can all feel a little unsure meeting someone new but it's an important ministry ministry it means taking the lowest place it means sweeping the floor it means cleaning the toilet it means washing the dishes it means cleaning up the kitchen it means putting the chairs out putting the songbooks away there's all sorts of ways we can do something and matthew 23 verse 11 we read how the lord puts it that he that is greatest among you shall be your servant it's kind of contrary to how you put the like the pyramid of the ceo at the top well it's actually he's actually at the bottom the minister the servant is the chief servant whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted so if we take that lowest place and do something to serve then that's the right thing to do as a believer now you've heard me say this before i know how

muhammad ali was on a plane one day and a flight attendant said please fasten your seat belt and he was really proud and he said superman don't need no seat belt and she responded superman don't need no airplane either you know he was a big shot and he got brought down well and truly there and he who exalts himself shall be humbled so let's not be so high-minded that we miss the work of serving in those little things that we can do the little things hudson taylor a great man of god said this when god wants to do his great works he trains somebody to be quiet enough and little enough then he uses that person let go of pride as the biggest obstacle to ministry is pride we see our lord set the example in philippians 2 as he descended from heaven's glory and took upon him the form of a servant it says let this mind be in you which was also in christ jesus who being in the form of god thought it not robbery to be equal with god but made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross and he humbled himself and became obedient to that to what to death humbled himself that's what he did moody an evangelist devolt said this he said god has two thrones one in the highest heavens and the other in the lowliest heart god lives in the holy holy place heaven but he also lives in the humble heart of the saint every believer the humblest of saint have you come to that place of humility it's the place of carrying the cross that true obedience to the lord that place of surrender to surrender now some make a point oh they've surrendered to ministry well we should all surrender to ministry we should all surrender to being a servant of god and it takes that humility paul says serving the lord with all humility of mind so it means humility number one it means secondly service being a servant we see paul was that true servant as he tells he was serving the lord with all humility of mind with many tears and temptations which befell him by the lying in wait of the jews you know there's people out to attack his ministry there's people that were out to undermine to uh withstand him he had enemies he had opposition his ministry was hard yakka and it's the same for you and me you know living the christian life can mean that tough going that hard slog you know there's opposition there's there's difficulties there's tears and temptations as we talked about tears earlier today it's been said that really every church is filled with willing people some willing to work and others willing to let them let's be in the ones willing to work right servants occupied a very low place in the society of the time and we think as you picture it servants slaves of old time that was a very demeaning uh lowly place wasn't it for a servant uh under a master uh we we can't really picture that in our day i guess the worst analogy we could think today is having a really rotten boss he gives us all the all the drudgery all the all the scum jobs no one else wants to do and he gives that to you but it's nothing like really that servant master relationship of old time but there's one word that was used in the scriptures for minister which means subordinate uh to be subordinate to be under the oarsmen and the picture was of these great ships you know as you see pictured in old movies where there's this great big ship and the people uh on the oars underneath uh like at the bottom of the vessel pulling the oars uh of the ship and the this word minister was derived from uh not the one who was saying stroke stroke stroke you know sitting on a seat in comfort and just telling all the others to to pull the oars but the ones who are this same word minister is used for those who slogged away pulling at the oars uh keeping that ship going forward and so that's the picture of ministry is serving like those in the bottom of the vessel pulling the oars and doing what we can do so there's many ways we can serve our lord a person in this church told me i'm not always able to help in practical ways but i can give giving itself can be a ministry romans 12 verse 8 says that our giving is a kind of a ministry so even if you feel like you can't tangibly put your own strength into it there's another way you can serve true greatness comes as we take the place of a servant a servant is ready to work to fill the needs of the time and i like to think of it how like in the old days of of where you had a stately mansion and you had servant quarters and those that were in a task to be the butlers and maids and such or the grounds person or whoever it be that kind of relationship they had to be always ready to be summoned by the master as they might ring the bell or or summon the servant to take a task on that's that kind of picture there that had to be responsive and they had to jump to the orders of the master and the lord jesus illustrates this kind of picture there's different parables of of this of being a servant in the word of god and the lord jesus talks about it and illustrates it for example in matthew 20 verse 25 he says you know that the princes of the gentiles exercise dominion over them they that are great exercise authority upon them but it shall not be so among you but whosoever will be great among you let him be your minister and whosoever will be chief among you let him be your servant interesting thoughts isn't that just to take that in even as the servant of man came not to be

ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many so in explaining greatness he talked about servanthood as that real quality of great great reward of great uh regard we read in mark 9 33 where our lord came to caperna and there he was amongst those that that had would be just were disputing along among themselves and they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest they disputed about who is who is the greatest you know there's a bit of an argy-bargy a bit of a um pecking order thing you know a bit of a who's greater than who and people wanted to kind of be uh one up on the others and big note themselves verse 35 he sat down and he called the 12 and said unto them if any man desire to be first the same should be last of all and servant of all so our lord defines greatness saying really if you want to be great you've got to be a servant if you want to be great in god's kingdom be a servant it's the picture of that isn't it and he brings a little child along at one point and he picks them up in his arms and he recognizes that that it's the little ones that are great it's having that that responsiveness isn't it that not childish as in immature and squabbling and fighting but childlike in that the good qualities of of childlikeness of being willing to receive and and to to listen and to to to respond that's how god wants us to be to him and so ministry recognizes that everything we have belongs to god i knew a man and people know who i'm talking about when i say a man named ken and ken was a one a sort of guy that um that was always there ready to lend a helping hand and he made a point to me of saying one day when he was asked

about some task and he talked about his car and his trailer and he said it's god's car and it's god's trailer and ken was one of those in early days of the church who worked hard behind the scenes and often used his trailer many times to help with church needs helping people move things and it's just that kind of person that nothing was too hard for him and we can be like him in the sense that i don't drive my car it's god's car so if if this needs to help then because it's god's car then it's no trouble for me i'm just i'm just the driver you know what is ministry it's having that kind of heart isn't it think well yeah what can i do what is in my um what is in my capacity to do and let me do it you know it doesn't take a pastor to visit someone who is sick and lonely you could do it you could write a note of encouragement to someone who's discouraged you can pitch in and help with the cleanup after a church activity it doesn't have to be the pastor or the pastor's wife and the pastor's wife said amen maybe you can help fulfill the place of service find that place where you can serve things that you can see they're doing then you don't have to wait to ask permission to do it you don't have to wait to be told to do it it just volunteer and do it perhaps you could offer someone some help some practical support ministry is for all of us really it's for all of us will you do your part a ministry serving the lord is the least we can do it's really our privilege to do that our lord gives the example of how a servant does the bidding of his master in luke 17 verse 10 and it tells of these ones who are picturing really you and me as god's servants and how they've done you know various things and the lord says likewise you when you've done all those things which you're commanded to do which i commanded you say we are unprofitable servants we have done that which was our duty to do so when we do something for god we don't make some big show about it some make it something to brag about or show off that we've done it as if it somehow gives us some you know credit above other people but it's we're doing it because it is our duty to do we've done that which was reasonable to do we're just unprofitable servants we're just doing that which is that what what we really ought to do it's it's only right that we do it it's not that we're doing anything special and so ministry really means filling the place of duty when something needs doing we get it done we're doing it without being told and think of that picture again back in old times of servants and masters and such that being a servant if we are actually such a servant and we are it means we do things without being rostered to do it without being asked without being badgered or hounded or pleaded with when we enter heaven's gates that's when we'll get our pat on the back that's when we'll get acknowledged that's when we'll be welcomed with the words well done thou good and faithful servant answer into the joy of thy lord have you served roll up your sleeves and serve every christian has that vital part to play it's been said the backbone of the church is really ordinary people doing ordinary things it's not about now some some people unduly magnify certain offices or responsibilities in the church without realizing we're all in this together i'm quoting here again when joshua went to battle against amalek

[18:31] moses aaron and her went to the top of the hill to watch we take this up in exodus 17 verse 11 and it came to pass when moses came and he held up his hand that israel prevailed he was holding up the rod and as he was holding it up israel prevailed and when he let down his hand as he

had i'm got a bit tired amalek prevailed and so it says but moses hands were heavy started to get you know when you hold things up for a while your hands get tired moses hands got heavy it says and they took a stone and put it under him and he sat there on and aaron and her came alongside him and they stayed up his hands the one on the one side and the other on the other side and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun and as a result the israelites won the battle now that picture of the rod of god the authority of god the i guess really the a picture of the presence of god or the honoring of god as the rod pictured as they held it up they prevailed the the lord gave victory to them but when that subsided the enemy prevailed it's a picture really of ministry in that moses was ministering holding up the sign of god's presence the rod and he needed support he needed others to come on on the one side and the other side and as aaron and her stayed up his hands as his hands were steady the battle was won so moses upheld arms got on it but he couldn't have held them up all by himself it's the same really with the church situation it is a um a mistake to put the pastor put it all on the pastor all right i'm not saying you're doing that but we're all in this together is the point and there's a supporting talks about the ministry of helps uh it's as aaron and her lent moses their strength the battle was won and as we lift up the arms uh we'll we'll see god bring victory so are we willing to be in the ministry and don't think you've got to have some special um significant uh you know lightning bolt moment because we all are in the ministry in effect because the ministry is broad it's wide it's it's everything that encompasses serving god is the ministry it's really our whole life ought to be the ministry it's not like we clock on and off we're in the ministry when we're down at the work site when we're out in the home place as we're helping at home the ministry is there ministry is 24 7 as we look after the people that we love that's ministry and think about what it means to be a servant and again back to that picture think of the master and the servants in the servant quarters a servant doesn't get to pick and choose what they do if the master needs it done it gets done because the servant is called to do it so it's not like we just get to do what we like in serving others we're serving the lord too and again like i say even in a family situation we can make it the people that we love our family is again being a servant and be a servant find play find ways you can serve even at home do the jobs that maybe you can help your mom your dad if you still got or or your folks or or your your children i suppose if you're in the other way around but you have that heart that you want to help out be a support really a servant has no time of their own waking or sleeping every hour belongs to the master it's a bit like i suppose being in the military that they really uh they've got to be ready uh at three o'clock in the morning if they say right report to the parade ground and they don't have nine to five it's that sense isn't it that really it's in the way it's like that for a servant that every hour belongs to our master that we're constantly on call listening for the master's word it's when he summons us to do something we say yes sir and he certainly a servant really doesn't get time off because all of his time is the masters all the time and a servant has no limitations that they can say oh well that's not my line of work or you know i'm not very good at that well if the master says do it we do it there's no there's no getting around really if the master directs us then we don't say oh that's not my kind of cup of tea that someone else is more qualified than me if the master gives you something to do and puts it on your heart to do it then do it and and you'll be glad to do it when you hear the master's voice you don't have to think it over and decide whether or not you're going to do it you'll just say yes lord a servant has no right as well to compare his work with that of other servants well what about this servant they get they get a more cushy job to do than me well it doesn't matter it's what what this what the master gives us to do we ought to do and even if another servant's work is harder or lighter than our own that is not our concern as a servant

because it's what the master puts on us and burdens us and calls us to do we are to do and so there's no right to criticize what another servant is doing it's about our relationship and really when you think about a servant a servant owns nothing they're not really paid wages they can't decide what they will give away or what they will keep they cannot even give their master a gift except from the master's own store you know the servant really everything that the servant has is what the master has given them anyway so everything that we own belongs to the master is the kind of picture isn't it and servanthood is demanding it can mean trials and tears as paul talked about and he talks about trials and tears as i touched on this morning think of it the fellowship of his sufferings you know maybe i could write a bestseller book the fellowship of his sufferings i don't think i'll get as many people buying that as your best life now the fellowship of his sufferings isn't something you know that the fellowship of his sufferings doesn't sell books or fill mega churches but the fellowship of his sufferings is the scriptural thing isn't it and it's really the highest honor that we have is the opportunity that we have to voluntarily serve the master that we love so on the plus side of all of that the servant has no worries we're actually cared for and provided for by the master our food our clothing our shelter we're in the master's house we're in his keeping we're watched over by him and we live on his bounty his provision the master's resources everything that you have everything that you have with your life ultimately he's the giver of every good and perfect gift and so being a true servant means sacrifice and it means a giving it means labor and effort it means hardship and loss and it means some cost there's there's a giving that is beyond at times our imagination but that giving brings a reward it's been said everyone wants to harvest but nobody wants to plow there's that sense of plowing that sense of the the hard slog that sense of the unseen things the behind the scenes tasks where we might not be recognized you know it's often the unsung heroes the unseen heroes but the lord

sees the lord sees he sees what you do he sees your heart he sees how you're serving and he sees what you're investing of your life the servant of god it can mean a shedding of blood of sweat of tears david brain had said to jonathan edwards david brainer a a man who really poured out his life in such a way that he he gave his life at an early age on on the very brutal front lines of the mission field he said this he said i do not go to heaven to be advanced but to give honor to god it is no matter where i shall be stationed in heaven whether i have a high or a low seat there but to live and please and glorify god my heaven is to please god and glorify him him and give all to him and be wholly devoted to his glory so we see paul says serving the lord he talks about humility he talks about the serving the service being a servant means that you have a master so the third point is unto the lord we talked about humility we talked about service or serving and now the third point is unto the lord paul says that he was um serving the lord with all humility of mind now to be a servant means you have a master who is your master who are we serving ministry is serving unto the lord and we're servants of the lord now some would say and they might say this quite glibly sometimes as some ministries use it as their kind of slogan sometimes jesus is lord but notice notice what the scriptures say what this scripture says it puts it more plainly and strongly about this this phrase jesus is lord it says that no man speaking by the spirit of god calleth jesus accursed and no man can say that jesus is the lord but by the holy ghost he's not just lord in a broad uh you know he's lord of he's one of many lords he is the lord the lord and that's an important point i think that he is really the lord the lord he is really the one will gladly serve unto the lord and it's even the most humbling task uh we can render is the highest honor when it is done for his glory it's house of william kerry another missionary statesman served the lord in india for many years and he was concerned for his son felix this young man felix had promised to be a missionary but he reneged on his vows and he was appointed ambassador to burma by the queen of england he was given a very cushy um cushy number there uh an ambassador to burma by the queen of england and carrie wrote his friend and said pray for felix he has degenerated into an ambassador of the british government when he should be serving the king of kings it's two in a way isn't it as much as he had a high and uh acclaimed kind of job uh a pretty uh sought after kind of high level job serving the queen as an ambassador his father the missionary considered really that serving the king of kings is a far greater role a far greater aspiration that the master that we serve is the greatest king moody wrote on his bible at the place of isaiah 6 verse 8 which is a an appeal as our lord calls for those to serve and it reads isaiah heard the voice of the lord saying whom shall i send and who will go for us then said i isaiah here am i send me and this is what moody wrote in his bible at this place he said i am only one but i am one i cannot do everything but i can do something what i can do i ought to do and what i ought to do by the grace of god i will do so how can you apply this message to

practically be a servant to be a minister is there a need that you can see an opportunity for you to serve then serve is there an opportunity then serve is there a gap that you can fill then fill it a visiting missionary to taiwan hiked with some taiwanese pastor back into the mountain villages and they met with some national christians and had some ministry time the roads were wet and muddy and their shoes were really covered in mud and such and later someone asked this taiwanese pastor what he remembered most about this missionary you know it's quite a famous missionary and without hesitation the taiwanese pastor said this he cleaned my shoes it's doing the little things do what you can where you are with what you have there's a time where king george was addressing the nation at a great conference and the electricity failed and a humble workman grabbed the loose ends in his hands and bridged the gap and made the circuit complete again he didn't create the power by which the king's message was transmitted he would just close the circuit so it could flow he was the way that the the message of the king could flow and it's the same with you and me that's all we're doing we're just doing something and it could be a humble thing for the sake of the king he took that risk of holding these wires but he stepped in he stepped up there's little things that you can do someone said i can i am only one i can't do everything but that won't stop me from doing the little i can do another thing about ministry is don't quit it go the extra do more paul said i want to finish my course didn't he he said there verse 24 that i might finish my course with joy that i might finish my ministry you know we finish our ministry when we get to glory that's when we finish our ministry don't quit find a way to serve and serve serve well there was an elderly widow who was restricted about what she could do and you might think well what can i do i've got infirmity uh maybe some some might be watching here and think well uh i can't i'm not physically able there's a limitation and we all have some limitation and this widow she was limited but she prayed about what she could do and she realized that she could be a blessing to others by playing the piano and she put a notice in the newspaper pianist will play hymns by phone daily for those who are sick and despondent the service is free so she put this notice out there with her phone number and people called and and she would ask them what hymn would you like to hear and so she played the hymns for these folk over the phone and within a few months she played some several hundred times to cheer up many people some of whom poured out their hearts and she was able to help and encourage them so friends there's there's thoughts there isn't there there's something we can do all of us can do something you know i was uh i was asked this morning when i was vacuuming the carpet someone said why are you doing that it's a good question isn't it oh yeah that's the reason julie wasn't here no really it doesn't there's opportunities if we'll open our eyes honestly isn't it and i'm quite happy to i'm quite happy to vacuum the carpet really i'm not so proud prideful to to not uh to not do that but what can we do honestly people we can all find excuses why we can't serve but if there's something you can do do it be willing to pay the price and sometimes ministry can be a thankless task uh generally uh the feedback you get is not always positive you can expect opposition uh and you've got to take it on the chin ministry means the work of humbly serving the lord so be willing to pay the cost living stern that pioneer missionary to africa he walked over 29 000 miles his wife died early in their ministry he faced severe opposition from his scottish brethren the people that should have been supporting him and helping him on the mission front were probably against him and he prayed send me anywhere only go with me lay any burden on me only sustain me sever any ties but the tie that binds me to your service and to your heart so be a minister be a servant of god this week serving the lord with all humility of mind with many tears if need be with temptations with temptations with trials with tests nothing will move me says paul he had the path ahead of him he says i'm going to finish this race this course i'm going to fulfill my ministry let's pray lord we thank you for your word that it challenges us to action give us grace lord we pray each one might know that you are their lord the lord we want that lord that you are the lord of our life and we ask you lord to work in us that we trust you in faith and receive your gift of salvation and then lord you get our feet into action help us find things we can do that will glorify you and most of all that it will be your will that we do not our own not our own good pleasure but your good pleasure lord that it will be to your praise to please you because that's what we want lord help us to find and do your will in jesus name we pray amen