

The Preaching Pastor that I Aspire to Be

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Date: 16 May 2010

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[0 : 00] . Friends, let me tell you a story.

It's a made up story but it's made up out of true bits if I can put it that way. I want you to imagine a young man, his name is Peter. He was raised in a strong Christian family and at 15 he had an intense conversion and as a result he began to read his Bible voraciously and he studied at Theological College for a little while.

Then he found himself in a new church. He wasn't the pastor of it but he came to this church and the people that he met there were intense about God. They stressed the need to be different from the world and different from other Christians and they stressed the need to be holy and their pastor was impressive.

He clearly was a man that loved God and Peter wanted to be like him. He spoke with force and power. He preached well and he looked around the congregation.

He liked the people he met in the congregation and he wanted to be like them as well and then he began to listen intensely to the sermons as well and before long he felt pressure growing.

[1 : 15] You see, he didn't want to be like those that the pastor condemned from the pulpit. No, he wanted to be like those that weren't condemned and he didn't want to be like those who failed to conform.

He wanted to conform. He didn't want to be like those who fell short of the standards that the pastor thought ought to characterize really godly people nor did he want to be like those people that the pastor humiliated from the pulpit.

He wanted to avoid the same sort of humiliation. He wanted to be, as it were, a true believer and then the threats began from the pulpit.

Threats against leaving, threats against questioning, threats that were about horrible and eternal consequences that might come for failing to conform. Peter knew the pastor.

He knew that underneath it all he was a compassionate man but Peter felt the fear escalating. Guilt and shame began to grow in him and his view of God gradually began to change.

[2 : 18] You see, he slowly began to feel that God was something of a tyrant. That is, someone predominantly to be feared, someone a bit like the pastor that he was increasingly becoming fearful of.

Friends, let me tell you that Peter's story, if you read widely in Christian literature, is very common. You see, we live in a world filled with people in fear.

We live in a world filled with people who are in need of heroes and leaders and guidance. The world we live in is also filled with people who are just waiting to take advantage of people's need and people's fear and to do it religiously.

And you see, one of the places where these sort of people thrive is in religious communities. And the prophet Ezekiel knew that. Did you hear, have a look at Ezekiel chapter 34.

Did you hear what he said? Did you hear the emphasis that Ruth placed on it when she read it? Jeremiah 34 talks about pastors of God's people. These are God's pastors in the Old Testament.

[3 : 30] And listen to what they are doing. The word of the Lord came to me. Mortals prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to them, to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God, are you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves?

Should not shepherds feed sheep? You eat the fat. You clothe yourself with wool. You slaughter the fatlings. But you do not feed the sheep.

You have not strengthened the weak. You have not healed the sick. You have not bound up the injured. Do you hear the long list of the things that they haven't done? You see, friends, from even in the Old Testament through until our day, there are shepherds of God's people who have not acted as shepherds, who have not cared for the sheep, who have not strengthened the weak, who have failed to heal the sick, who did not search to bring back strays, shepherds who replaced care with abuse, shepherds who have reversed the role of shepherds and who have, instead of being shepherds, become wolves and have gone among the flock and have abused them.

Friends, the horror of abuse in church has been paraded before us over these past 10 or 15 years. The stories that you can read about and hear about on the radio are overwhelming and shocking and often have been perpetrated by the leaders of God's people.

Let me tell you, abuse of clergy is not only confined to sexual areas. It affects and infiltrates every area of church life. And the passage that we have before us today addresses this issue.

[5 : 13] You see, as we turn to this passage today, I want you to use it to reflect upon the ministry that goes on in this church and please, friends, I want you to use it to reflect upon my ministry and the ministry of my colleagues that we exercise here in the church.

I want you to help me and I want to help you think about our life together as God's people. It is one of the reasons that I started with 1 Thessalonians because I think it addresses this issue strongly.

I want this passage today to set the agenda for my ministry here. So I wonder if you'll turn with me and your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians 2. Now perhaps from last week you might remember what I told you about 1 Thessalonians.

Last week you might remember I took you for a little survey through Acts chapter 17 and we remembered how Paul had come from Philippi to the city of Thessalonica. He'd been very badly treated.

He'd been imprisoned wrongly and treated badly in Philippi. He arrived somewhat bruised, you get the impression, into Thessalonica and when he arrived he followed his usual custom.

[6 : 21] He went along to the local synagogue and he started preaching there and he explained and proved that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and some Jews were persuaded and there were a great many devout Greeks who were persuaded and not a few leading Greek women, women of the township were convinced and the Jews looked on.

They became jealous and a mob formed and Silas and Paul were forced to leave the city and ever since, we're told just in the end of our reading today, he had tried to return.

However, circumstances and the devil prohibited him from coming back and Paul began to get increasingly worried about these Thessalonian Christians. As a shepherd, you see, he's worried that their faith is being undermined and perhaps he heard from Timothy that things were going on there and he's worried about the one mechanism that is being used to undermine the faith of his beloved people and that is to undermine his own leadership.

And so in this passage, what Paul does is defend his leadership of these people and he reminds the Thessalonian Christians what they know about him and in doing so, he's left a great record for us as to a portrait of a Christian leader at work.

This is how a Christian leader acts. This is how a Christian leader works in a congregation. He gives us a picture, a portrait of a true Christian pastor and teacher at work and he shows us what a shepherd like Jesus looks like.

[7 : 59] So let's have a look at what he has to say and the first thing I want you to notice is that the passage falls into three sections. You might see it there. The first section goes from verse 1 through to verse, let's say, 7 and a half and in these verses what Paul does is he tells us this is not what my ministry was like and then the second section goes from 7 and a half through to 12 and basically if the first part said this is not what my ministry is like the second part says this is what it was like and the third section is verses 13 to 16 which I don't know if you remember when we read it contains some very tricky things and we're going to get to that a bit later on.

So there's a summary of this passage three parts to it 1 to 7 what Paul was not like in his ministry 7 through to 12 what he was like and 13 to 16 two alternative ways you can respond to the message that he brings.

Now look at verses 1 to 7 with me and it starts with some words which if you heard run us a core through this passage can you see what he says there he says you yourselves know now look at it there that's verse 1 look at verse 2 he says you know look at verse 5 he says it again as you know then in verse 9 he says you remember and then in verse 10 he says you are witnesses and then in verse 11 he says it again and you know can you see what Paul is saying he's saying you folk remember what you saw in me you know these things don't you you know look at my ministry and recognise it recall what you saw with me and what you know about me and what you know about my ministry and what you saw and what you know is clear isn't it look at it in verses 3 to 7 he says you know the content of my gospel of my appeal and you know the character of me the preacher and look my appeal to you did not spring from deceit did not spring from deceit did not was not based on impure motives was not based on trickery it's a wonderful little thing that Ruth did for us here wasn't it it's not like that it is not based on trickery it was a ministry approved by God that did not focus on pleasing people was focused rather on pleasing God it did not use flattery it did not have a pretext for greed it did not seek praise from humans now friends

I reckon if you ran all those categories about the notes over many Christian congregations their pastors would come up short wouldn't they you see the focus of these verses is on what Paul's ministry was not and in his day as in our day much ministry is characterized by these very things that is by deceit by impure motives by trickery with a focus on human beings with flattery with pretextful greed which seeks praise from humans not Paul's his ministry was open and above board it did not take advantage of its hearers in any way it did not abuse his hearers in any way it was clearly and openly a ministry that had their best interests in mind now look at verses 7 to 12 the emphasis on verses 1 to 6 is what Paul's ministry was not like the emphasis on 7 to 12 is what it was like and I want you to look at

Paul's language again in verse 7 he talks about being gentle he likens his ministry to being a nurse caring for her own children he's a messenger you see who lives his message you see he not only brings the gospel he brings himself and he throws himself into bringing that message he shares of his own self look at verse 9 he says he urges his hearers remember what you know this is what you know I labored I toiled I worked with my own hands by what he means by this is he drew no income from them he worked with his own hands rather than financially burdening them verse 10 he was pure upright blameless in his conduct he was like a good father with his children that is what he's saying is I didn't bully you no instead I was urging and encouraging and pleading friends can you hear Paul is very clear here the ministry that he exercised was open and above board not only did it not take advantage of its hearers in any ways it was full of positive benefits for them he gave to them he's like a parent with a child it was deeply parental it was full of himself it is clearly and openly a ministry that has the best interests of them in mind but now look at verses 13 to 16 these are the tricky verses the first part's alright these verses talk of two alternative responses to the gospel here's the first one it's that of the

[13 : 15] Thessalonians you see they heard Paul's message and Paul thanks God for the way they received it you see they received it not just as Paul's rambling words but as the word of God it was God's word and it did its work among them and remember from chapter 1 he praised God for what had happened among them now the next verses talk about an alternative response have a look at it with me he says now I need to say this is fraught with difficulty you listen to it as I'll read it to you again and it sounds awfully anti-Semitic doesn't it let's read it and hear it so he says this a this this displeases

God and they displease God and everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins but God's wrath has overtaken them at last.

Now, friends, if I was just to read that blandly, it does sound anti-Semitic, doesn't it? But let me tell you, Paul's first ministry everywhere he went was first to Jews and then to Gentiles.

He was not anti-Semitic. He loved his people. Read Romans 9 to 11. He loved the Jewish people. He wanted them to come to know Christ. But let me tell you what I think he's saying. I think Paul is saying this.

He's saying, look, you Thessalonians, you responded in the same way that Jewish Christians had when they received the gospel. And like them, you suffered greatly at the hands of your fellow citizens.

[15 : 05] They suffered at the hands of Jews. You suffered at the hands of non-Christian Jews. You suffered at the hand of non-Christian Gentiles. And in the case of Jewish Christians, those Jewish Christians, they suffered at the hands of the very same people who had killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets that preceded him.

The Thessalonians, Paul is saying, you stand in a very long line of godly Jewish people. However, there's also a long line of ungodly Jewish and non-Jewish people.

But there's a line of Jewish ones that stretch back through Israelite history. There is a line stretching all the way back of people among the Jews who oppose God, people who resist God's messengers, people who displease God, people who oppose the message of God, people who will have to face God's anger.

There's nothing unusual about what you received. It has been going on forever. Friends, there's our overview of the passage. Now, I want you to come with me while I try and draw some threads together.

Let's see what the passage tells us about Christian ministry. First, did you notice that when Paul conducts his ministry, he knows it's done before two people or two groups of people?

[16 : 19] You see, his ministry is firstly done before the people he ministers to. You see, he doesn't just sort of speak a word into the darkness.

No, it is a word spoken to people, real people with real concerns, with real lives. Paul does not just drop messages into the dark.

He comes to people. He lives with people. He openly ministers to people and he shares with those people his very own life. You see, friends, any good ministry has its eye on the people it ministers to, not its eye on the person doing the ministry.

It is done before people. It is done for people and people are its principal focus. However, I want you to notice that what is, although this is fundamental to Paul, it's not the full story, you see.

No, ministry for Paul is primarily done before whom? It's primarily done before God, isn't it? And if your ministry is primarily done before God, what will it be like?

[17 : 24] If God is, as it were, looking over your shoulder, what will your ministry be like? It will be very careful, won't it? It will be very careful.

It will not be deceptive, will it? It will be cautious. It will not be full of error, will it? It will eschew deceit, won't it?

Because God hates deceit. Now, while it has been done before people, its focus is not on pleasing people, its focus is on pleasing God. And while it is done before people, its focus is not on receiving glory from people.

No, it seeks glory from God. Not only that, because it is done before God, it is aware of heart issues as well. After all, look at verse 4. Paul observes, God looks at my heart.

He tests the heart. He looks inside. He knows what is going on in my inner being. He knows human motives. He knows what makes me tick. Friends, can you hear what he's saying?

[18 : 23] Christian ministry is a ministry that has two focus. It has a focus on the people who receive the ministry and it focuses on giving to those people and acting in integrity before those people.

The message, you see, is supported and endorsed by the messenger. The messenger must endorse the message by their conduct.

The message of grace, friends, must be accompanied by a messenger who is gracious. A message of truth must be accompanied by a messenger who speaks and acts truly.

A message of integrity must be accompanied by a messenger who has integrity. A message which has people and their good in mind and as a focus must be accompanied by a messenger who has people and their good in mind.

Christian ministry though has another focus as well. It has an eye on God. It is done before God. It knows God will call the messenger to account. He will call the messenger to account for their truthfulness, their integrity, their faithfulness, their heart, their disposition, their actions.

[19 : 35] Christian ministry is done before humans, but friends, it is done before God and with God looking over the shoulder. Now normally a sermon would have application, wouldn't it, for all of us and that's what I'd normally do but I want to depart from that this morning.

So what I want to do this morning is I want to apply the text to myself and as I do it I want you to eavesdrop with me. So I want you to sort of look over my shoulder as I apply this text to myself.

I will just apply it a little bit for you. You see, I think the primary message of this text though is to ministers of the gospel. So it's to people like me and any of you that minister the gospel.

It's to, if I can put it this way, pastor teachers of God's flock. That's what I think I am, a pastor teacher as Paul is as well. However, before just applying this text to me, I want to exhort you as well.

Friends, look at verse 13 again. I would love you to set that goal before you, a goal shaped by verse 13.

[20 : 40] That is, I want you to be people who accept the word of God as what it is, the word of God, a word from God to you in your situation, to us as a congregation.

I want you and myself to be people who allow that word to shape and change us. I want us to be praying that that word will be at work among us.

And I want you to avoid standing in line with that long list of people referred to in verses 14 to 16, who call themselves the people of God, but are really people who displease God. Let's not be like them.

Let's be like the Thessalonians. Let's line up behind them. I want you to urge you to be hearers and doers of God's word. But now let's apply the text to me. You see, what Paul says in these verses outlines for me, if I can put it this way, and you'll have seen it on the title of our overheads today, the pastor teacher I aspire to be.

This is who I want to be. You see, let me explain. When I read this passage, I see Paul, the pastor teacher, and I see a man who has three foci.

[21 : 51] The first is a focus on God. Paul ministers before God, with God, looking over his shoulder. As the previous chapter has indicated, if you just flip back to the immediate verses before this one, Paul believes that God has sent his son into the world to save.

He also believes that God is sending his son to judge and to rescue him from the wrath to come. Paul lives between two comings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a result of the first message of Jesus, or the first coming of Jesus, he has a message to bring. But he will be judged at the second coming of Jesus for how he brings that message.

And God will judge him by how well his person has matched his message. Friends, as your pastor teacher, I stand between two comings of the Lord Jesus.

I stand before the first coming when he told us what God had done in Christ. And I stand between that and the second coming when God will judge me.

[22 : 53] That means that there is one day when I will have to give an account to him. And I must be true to him. I must not shortchange God. I must not defraud God.

I must be faithful to him. I must not deceive. I must not use flattery. I must care for his sheep as a shepherd cares for the sheep. As the Lord Jesus himself, the great shepherd of the sheep, cares for sheep.

And God will hold me accountable for this. However, friends, I also have a second focus, if I can put it this way. My second focus is you.

God has brought me here and appointed me as your pastor teacher. And my main focus is to be you. It is to be your health.

It is to be your well-being. It is to be your growth as Christians. Your lives as God's people. It is preparing you to wait for his son from heaven, whom you will meet with great joy if you stand in him.

[23 : 59] Friends, I not only minister before the eyes of God, I minister before you as well. God is witness to my ministry, but friends, you are witness as well.

You witness my ministry. So I want you to be asking all the time, have I been faithful? Have I been truthful? Have I avoided deceit?

Have I sought praise from humans? Have I been gentle like a nursing mother? Have I deeply cared for you? Have I shared with you my own life and loved you as the Lord Jesus has loved you?

Have I avoided being a burden to you? Have I been like a father with his children, urging and encouraging and pleading with you? Have I avoided bullying you? Have I been one who urges you to live a life worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory?

Have I avoided being like the shepherds in Ezekiel? Have I worked hard at being a good and godly pastor and teacher? Friends, I want you to help me to be honest in this area.

[25 : 07] If I am slipping up, I want you to rebuke me. I want you to take me aside. I want you to tell me. First and foremost, if I am falling short with God, then let me know.

Let me know if I have defrauded you. Let me know also if I have mistreated you. You see, I earnestly, deeply want to be the sort of pastor teacher that Paul is here.

And this is my goal. And to do this, I need your help. So friends, please pray for me. Please rebuke me when I need it.

This is my first and second foci, a ministry before God, a ministry before you. And there is a third. The third focus arises out of this passage too.

Did you notice it? The third focus is on myself. You see, Paul talks about God who peers into my heart, who knows my heart, who tests my heart.

[26 : 12] And so I need to focus on my relationship with God and on my attitudes. And I need to get my affections right. And I need to get my actions right. And I need to get my thinking right.

Friends, only God can make me like that. So I want you to pray for me in this. If I have duties toward you, then you have duties toward me as well.

Please pray that I'll be like this. Pray for my relationship with God. Please pray that it is rich and vital and deep. Please pray that I feed it rightly.

Please pray that I develop a deep affection for God. Please pray that I live rightly with my wife, Heather. Please pray that most of all, I have a deep love of God.

You see, friends, if these things are right, they will stand me in good stead on the last day. And they'll also stand me in good stead as your pastor and teacher.

[27 : 17] And they'll stand you in good stead as I aim to encourage and love you in the faith. And I'll enrich my ministry among you and our joint ministry among each other.

So let's pray. Amen.