

The Work of the Servants of the Lord

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[0 : 00] The first of which is found in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 49, reading the first six verses. And this particular portion deals with what the prophet considers is the perfect servant.

Isaiah 49, verses 1 to 6. Listen to me, O coastlands, and hearken you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb. From the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword.

In the shadow of his hand he hid me. He made me a polished arrow. In his quiver he hid me away. He said to me, You are my servant, Israel in whom I will be glorified.

But I said, I have labored in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity. Yet surely my right is with the Lord and my recompense with my God.

[1 : 19] And now the Lord says, Who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him. For I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength.

He says, Is it too light a thing that you should be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel?

I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. Then in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, beginning at verse 5 to verse 9.

1 Corinthians chapter 3, verses 5 to 9. 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 9.

But only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor.

[2 : 56] For we are God's fellow workers, you are God's cultivated field, God's building. Amen.

May the Lord bless us. These readings may they be to his praise and to his glory. The theme of chapter 4, as I've said many times already, is this business of division and quarreling in the church. And we picked it up in chapter 1, where he makes this appeal. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and there be no dissensions among you, but that you may be united in the same mind and in the same judgment.

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people, that there is quarreling among you, my brothers and sisters. Then we found in the course of looking at this, in chapters 1 and 2, there was a tangent, a digression, to the main theme, which is on the preaching of the cross, and also on the futility of the philosophers and legal experts of the day.

And last week it was billed as returning to the main theme. And the way the apostle returned to the main theme was to ask the Corinthians to look at themselves.

[4 : 24] And what he did was to consider three different types of people. The unspiritual person, the spiritual person, and concluding that they were none of these things, but they were a carnal person, i.e., they weren't under the control of the Spirit of God.

And where we are in verses 5 to 9, he sees now saying, I don't want you to think about yourselves now, I want you to think about us.

Us as the servants of the Lord. And first of all, we have this, the identity of the servants. What then is Apollos? What is Paul?

Servant through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

Now what he is saying here is this, that the ministry of Paul the apostle and Apollos the preacher-teacher are linked.

[5 : 37] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. This foundation of the church can be found in Acts chapter 18.

And it's a very wonderful story because it starts in verse 5, saying this, that when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah, the Christ, was Jesus.

And there he is concentrating on this very vital theme. And suddenly, the door opens.

And the door opens for the floodgate of the gospel in Corinth by the likely conversion of Crispus, who was the ruler of the synagogue.

It is from that conversion that all the others flowed. So we at times have it in our idea that what we need is for a certain type to be converted.

[6 : 58] And this would be of great benefit to everyone else. But God's plans are different. Crispus died in the synagogue tradition, suddenly had his heart enlightened to the truth of the gospel.

As far as Apollos is concerned, we read of him in Acts 18, 24 to 28. Verse 24. A Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.

He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the Scriptures. Now, when Apollos arrived in Ephesus in A.D. 57, the Apostle Paul was in the midst of his third missionary journey and was in the region of Galatia and Phrygia.

Getting back to verse 24, he's described as being an eloquent man. The Greek adjective is *logios*, which means eloquent or learned.

And in the case of Apollos, both of these meanings are true. Because the place that he came from, Alexandria, at that time, was a center for education, for the study of philosophy and rhetoric.

[8 : 31] Apollos was well-suited for the ministry that God had for him. But then it goes on and says, he was well-versed in the Scriptures.

Now, the original Greek reads like this in English. He was able in the Scriptures. That is a marvelous thing to anyone, a statement to be made of anyone.

Able in the Scriptures. Able to take up the Old Testament. That's what's being talked about. He knew all the texts that referred to the coming of the Messiah.

And so, what is being said about him in verse 28 of chapter 18 is this, that powerfully he confuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

And when you take that last phrase and compare it with the ministry of Paul in Acts 18.5, it says that Paul was testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus.

[9 : 48] So, in other words, the analysis, the description of the ministry is that they are identical.

Well, what's the difference? In the case of the Apostle Paul, he is recognized as an apostle, a founder of churches. While the latter has been, that is, Apollos, he was a teacher of the Word of God.

But the strange thing is that when we read 1 Corinthians, we find that around Apollos, a faction had grown up.

We are of Apollos, they said. Now, how can you account for this sad event? He came from, he was a native of Alexandria, eloquent, and able in the Scriptures.

Now, at this time, Alexandria was known for education as a center, the study of philosophy and rhetoric. Later in the history of the church, it would become a leading center for the study of theology.

[11 : 07] But that is a later age than the one that is being described for us here. Now, in his ministry, in 1 Corinthians, what the apostle is doing is to show that the ministry of the cross has nullified the natural wisdom which was to be found in the philosophers of this age.

And so, he quotes from Isaiah 28, 14, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will set aside.

So, the philosophers of the day of Paul and Apollos are well known for their eloquent speeches in their attempts to solve the political and other problems of the known world.

So, the probability exists that when the Corinthians listened to Apollos and the way he went about it, being a learned individual, his eloquence reminded them of the philosophers they had once listened to.

And so, a faction grew up around his ministry and the way that he presented the truths of the gospel. That is probably what is at the back of this.

[12 : 28] What then is Apollos? Why are you of him? That's the probable reason. But in verses 5 to 6, the apostle is at pains to show that Apollos like himself, despite his learning, despite his eloquence, despite his ability in the scriptures, is nothing more than a servant of the Lord, whom the

Lord was pleased to use.

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

Excuse me. So now we go on, having listened to their identity of who these servants are, and the estimation that was placed upon them by the local people, to the work of the servants.

Verses 6 and 7. I planted Apollos watered, but God gave the growth, so neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God gives the growth.

And when he comes to consider the ministry of himself and Apollos, he takes a metaphor and an illustration from the practices of gardening.

[14:05] And he states that what he has done may be likened to planting, whilst what Apollos has done may be likened to the gardener who comes along and waters the seed.

Both are necessary for the production of a fruitful plant. When we consider the verb that Paul has used here, which means to plant, it's absolutely unique.

in the whole of the New Testament, and it's only in this verse that he uses this with respect to his own ministry. As far as his ministry is concerned, he, by his ministry of apostleship, had founded it, and in that sense, was responsible for planting it.

Now, the idea of the church resting on a ministry of apostles is found in Ephesians 2, 19-20. So then, you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

Now, what is it that Paul is saying about the ministry of the first-century church? Right at the end of chapter 12, in verses 27 and 28, he says this, Now, you, the Corinthians, are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

[16:02] And God is appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues.

Now, all of these activities are not offices, they are ministries. And the idea that is being contained in that verse is to show the varieties of giftings that the ascended Lord had placed in the body of Christ.

Here he's talking about Paul as the apostle, and Apollos as the teacher. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

Now, we stand still for a minute, because I've already referred that the way the Greek Testament talks, Greek language, talks about events of the past is to use two different tenses.

So, for example, in the statement, Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, that only happened once, and it's called the historic tense.

[17:24] So, when we read, Apollos I planted, Apollos watered, it's the same kind of tense. The actions that are being described are something that happened once and once only.

But when we come to the statement, God gave the growth, that's entirely different. That's called the imperfect tense, which is like a sort of past tense, a continuous past tense.

Yes, Paul preached the gospel. Apollos taught, but the growth that was coming is something that wasn't just happening once and once only, but was happening continually.

And if we think of what the ministry of God's word is like today, that is equally true. We preach the word, but it is God that causes the work of grace to carry on in your heart and mine to the praise of his glory.

Now, what this means is that there are two ministries that we need in the church today, and that is the ministry of preaching the gospel coupled with the ministry of teaching the word of God.

[18:58] Now, in the epistle to the Ephesian, the apostle talks about the gifts of the ascended Lord to the church.

He who descended is he who also ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.

Now, where does he get this idea from? This idea that Christ ascended on high and gave these ministries into the church.

It's based, if you will, on Psalm 68, 18. You did ascend the high mount, leaving captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

Now, what's that verse all about? That verse is a prophecy of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who in his humanity is the evangelist, the pastor, the teacher.

[20 : 18] And all of this is being done for a particular reason. Ask yourself this, is the law of Jesus Christ here in this church tonight?

And the answer is yes, he is. Then his ministry as evangelist, pastor, and teacher is also here. And Paul gives you a reason for it. Ephesians 4, 12 to 13. to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Now, this is indeed what is being achieved through the ministry of the Word at Corinth under his ministry as apostle, and Apollos in his ministry as teacher.

The two are necessary, the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of God's Word. And indeed, there never was an age that was more necessary than the teaching of God's Word.

[21 : 37] If you're in any doubt about that, listen to some of the question programs that are here on television. Listen to the biblical questions that are asked, and you will find an appalling degree of ignorance that is there.

We need the ministry of teaching the Word of God. So, move on. The reward of the servants, verses 7 and 8.

So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. Now, what he appears to be saying here is this, that everyone who preaches or teaches the Word of God should receive his own wages, his reward, his recompense.

verses 7 and 8. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor.

[22 : 55] The Greek word is mistos, which means pay, wages, reward, or recompense. The laborer, we are told, is worthy of his hire.

So, when it comes to 1 Corinthians, we find that Paul is arguing that the laborer should be paid. Later on, in chapter 9 and verse 14, he says this, in the same way the Lord has commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

Now, that statement is made on the basis of Old Testament practice. Because in the previous verse, he says this, do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?

So, the idea is that the laborer is worthy to be paid, and the laborer is worthy of his hire.

[24 : 16] But what is it that he's actually saying? Is he developing that thought here? No, he's not. Verse 9, we are God's fellow workers.

That's Apollos and Paul. You are God's cultivated field, God's building. So, if he was talking about the fact that the laborer is worthy of his hire, it's not a thought that he's followed through.

What he is saying is that what he hopes the Corinthians have become as a result of their preaching and teaching is his reward.

What does he mean? He describes the Corinthians in a very odd way. He calls them a cultivated field.

This is the result of what they have become as a result of the ministry of the Word of God. They are no longer a rough uncultivated piece of ground.

[25 : 30] They have become a fine cultivated field. And when we follow this through in the New Testament, this is the only place where this noun occurs.

But then he goes on. He goes on to say, there's another metaphor here. God's building. building. Oikodome, which means upbuilding, strengthening, encouragement, building, or structure.

This is something else that they've become.

Not just a field that has been cultivated and is fruitful, but God's building. And so in verse 16, he says, do you not know that you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells in you?

What does this mean? God's temple. Now, I hope you're listening to this, because in Greek, there are two words for temple.

[26 : 43] The first of them is herion, and that word means the temple and its precincts, its outer courts. That's not the word that's used here.

The word that's used here is neos, neos, which means the holy of holies. This, says Paul, is what you have become through the ministry of the word.

Your body is the holy of holies, so that to you has been given a privilege of entering into the presence of God, which once only come the way of the high priest once a year.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells in you? The Corinthians, thus redeemed and sanctified, have become his reward.

He doesn't say it just to the Corinthians. He says it to the Thessalonians in chapter 1 Thessalonians 2, 19 to 20. What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

[28 : 14] Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. So, this is what he wants them to do.

He wants them to think positively as to who the servants of the Lord are, what they are intending to achieve, and what they have achieved in the Corinthian people.

Your body is the temple where the Spirit of God dwells. If that is the case, if they are to look at this positively, what does it mean?

What does it mean for us when we consider the ministry of God's servants in this place? I'm not talking about me. I'm talking gently. Dr.

Scroggie, when he went to the Charlotte Chapel in 1917, he said this, if you want power in the pulpit, I need prayer in the pew.

[29 : 31] Now, we can update all of that because we're almost a hundred years on from that. And we can address the question of if we want revival in the church, we need prayer not just in the pew, but from the heart.

If we want to see a great move of God in the sense of people being converted and turning to the faith, we need prayer.

from the heart. Why is that? Because God's servants, like anyone else, are only human. I planted a polished water, but God gave the growth.

amen. Blessed to us these considerations. We sing the final hymn, ye servants of God, your master proclaim.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.