

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Nature of Kingdom Work, Part 2

### Unacceptable Service

Let me share with you a rather shocking verse.

Matthew 7:22-23, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

This is the actual experience some will have. What makes this so shocking is that the people coming before Christ in this passage obviously were self-deceived. They thought they were serving Christ and doing the things that Christ wanted them to do. And yet because they ultimately were serving themselves, far from commendation, they received condemnation.

You say, “This passage is speaking about ones who aren’t saved and they thought that their good works would save them. They never really trusted Christ!”

That's true! And yet we read a similar passage in 1 Corinthians 3 which clearly is talking about the believer. Speaking about the work of the kingdom of God, Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15, “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

Aside from the fact that the people in this text in the end are saved, 1 Corinthians 3 is much like Matthew 7. You have would-be servants of Christ laboring in His Kingdom. Discovering in the end that their work was in vain — this means, it was worthless. It had no lasting effect. Their life was a complete and total waste as a child of God! Christ said this:

John 6:27, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto

everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.”

Family of God let me ask you. On the last day, will your work be burned up/consumed? Will you be guilty of Paul's greatest fear as a Christian — that he might be running, or had run in vain (Galatians 2:2)? Will you have worked for the food which perishes?

You say, “I don't know! What constitutes Kingdom Work? What is the work that will last for eternity?”

The passage at which we are looking answers these questions. As the epilogue to Hannah and Elkanah's Sacrifice of Devotion (1 Samuel 1:1-2:10), it gives us a snapshot of the nature of acceptable kingdom work! Previously we saw that kingdom work must not be double-minded and it is not limited by age.<sup>1</sup> Now we will look at two more characteristics of the work of God's kingdom

## God Centered

1 Samuel 2:11, “And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. **And the child did minister unto the LORD** before Eli the priest.”

When it came to ministering in the kingdom of God, this text makes it clear; Samuel was in the service of the Lord. Now this may seem obvious when it comes to kingdom work, but based on redemptive history, it isn't. The history of God's people has shown that the distinction between servant of God and servant of man has frequently been blurred.

The prophet Micaiah was a minister at a time when most who held the office of prophet had long since abandoned their calling in order to serve man. Ahab was on the throne in Israel; Jehoshaphat sat over Judah. At this time, the Arameans held a territory which once was in the hands of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

And so Ahab invited Jehoshaphat to join forces and retake the land. Yet Jehoshaphat wanted to know what God thought about Ahab's plans. Accordingly Ahab called his prophets who unanimously said, “Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king” (1 Kings 22:6).

Now Jehoshaphat had been in leadership long enough to know when he was being snowed, and so he asked if there were any other prophets. And sure enough there was one; Micaiah. Micaiah was summoned. He brought the harsh news that Ahab would be killed in the battle. And so as “payment” Micaiah was imprisoned by Ahab with the threat of death if the king returned from battle.<sup>3</sup>

Brothers and sisters, do you know what stands out about this account? Two things: The universal focus of the prophetic office in Israel at this time clearly was the service not of God, but of the king. That is why when Micaiah was summoned, the messenger did not blush to say, “Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one assent; let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good” (1 Chronicles 18:12b).

How obvious that the purpose of the prophetic office in Israel that day was the service of the king's plan! The simple conviction on the part of Micaiah was that he was a servant not of a king, a nation, or a people BUT of God. That is why Micaiah responded to the messenger's appeal for compromise said, “As the

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<sup>1</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 2:11

<sup>2</sup> Compare 1 Kings 22:3

<sup>3</sup> Compare 1 Kings 22:27

LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak” (2 Chronicles 18:13).

Such also was the atmosphere in which Samuel began serving the Lord as a four year-old boy! The formerly faithful Eli had compromised in his advanced years. His boys, Hophni and Phinehas, were complete apostates — as we'll soon see — doling out favors to advance their own cause. And the worship that was offered by the people was akin to the pagan rituals surrounding Israel.

And yet God gave to a nation this child who even as a youth was poignantly aware that he was not a servant of man. Like Micaiah who proceeded him, Samuel was God's man — or as our text reads, he was appointed as a minister “to the Lord!”

Brothers and sisters I would suggest to you that what the world needs now — what the church needs now — are men and women such as Samuel who in all their activities are living to advance the glory of God. Men and women who endeavor to honor Christ. Men and women who are servants of the Lord! This is what constitutes faithfulness when it comes to Kingdom Work!

And yet if there is any error into which the church has fallen today, it is that man has become big and God has become small. We are like the ten spies who were so impressed with the size of the inhabitants of Canaan that they essentially said, “God is too small to deliver us.” We are like the nation of Israel under Saul who stood in the hills, quaking in their boots, because Goliath obviously was bigger than their God. We are like the false worshippers in the days of Malachi who gave greater respect to an earthly leader than they did God.<sup>4</sup>

We are like those at the time of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 34:2, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; **Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves!** Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?”

Truly we have become a nation of man-pleasers and self-worshippers who clearly are in the business of serving man! And yet let us be forewarned! According to Proverbs 29:25, “The fear [or the “reverence”] of man brings a snare.”

Do you know what a snare is?

It is a trap used for catching animals by virtue of deception. A wire or rope is encircled and attached to a lever which is triggered either by pressure or movement. And yet the trap is worthless unless the line is buried and then baited with some food. When the unsuspecting animal ventures near the snare he sees an easy meal. Yet what he receives is death.

Such is the fear of man. It brings with it the promise of popularity, relevance, acceptance, happiness, and fulfillment. But it ultimately ends in ruin. As Paul said, “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:13).

The fear of man is epidemic in Christianity. Today in the church, we are more afraid of worldliness, Islam, disasters, the future, hell, disapproval, irrelevance, boredom, etc., than we are God. And that is

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Malachi 1:8

why so much time, energy, and money has gone into battling these “foes” in the church.

Today we've got seminars on everything. For a very small fee, you too can learn the secret to success when it comes to these issues. Is it therefore any wonder that the message of the body of Christ in the last days is predicted as being peace and safety?<sup>5</sup>

When the church senses even a minimal victory over the concerns of life, its message always has been, “Peace! Safety!” Such therefore is the message of man-fearers!

Today in the church we blush when we consider the radical service of Samuel — the minister of the Lord. When Saul chose to honor man rather than God and therefore spared Agag — the Amalekite King — “Samuel said Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal” (1 Samuel 15:32-33).

When we get to this passage in our study we will see that Agag is the personification of compromise and self-worship. He does what is right in his own eyes. He lives to be noticed by man and please man.

Accordingly I ask you this: Will you be a minister of the Lord this day and hack Agag to pieces? Will you refuse to honor man? Or will you with Saul continue in the service of self and seek to ally yourself with that which God opposes?

As a Minister of the Lord, there is no option!

With Samuel, we have been called and commissioned to be a Minister of the Lord!

## **Involves People**

1 Samuel 2:11, “And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. **And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest.**”

While the object of our ministry must be God, nevertheless our ministry also includes people. Though Samuel was a minister of the Lord, nevertheless this book records Samuel's interactions with Eli, interactions which clearly demonstrated a love-relationship in which Samuel sought to be a blessing to Eli.

We pick the story up a couple of years later in 1 Samuel 3.

By this time, Samuel is old enough to receive the prophetic call, and he does.<sup>6</sup> And what a dreadful first sermon with which to be entrusted — a message of judgment<sup>7</sup> against the man who raised you, taught you, and mentored you in the things of the Lord.

And yet when it came time to reveal the message notice the affection that existed between Samuel and Eli. First Samuel obviously was moved by such a harsh message that he didn't in the beginning have the

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<sup>5</sup> Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:3

<sup>6</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 3:10-11

<sup>7</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 3:12

heart to tell Eli.<sup>8</sup> One must not conclude that Samuel is compromising here for nowhere was he told to speak God's message of judgment to Eli! In fact it is just the opposite. If he hated Eli, what greater opportunity would there have been for him to gloat?

Eli called Samuel, "My son."<sup>9</sup>

As an adult, Samuel spent his time "judging" Israel.<sup>10</sup> This does not speak of judgmentalism, but of actively involving himself in the lives of God's people. And later, after rebuking God's people for asking for a king and receiving the petition on the part of the people that he pray for them Samuel said this:

1 Samuel 12:23-24, "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you."

Truly, Samuel was a minister of the Lord; yet he also had a passion for the people of God. Thus when we read that he "served before Eli" we recognize a love-relationship between the two characterized by give and take.

From this we conclude that part and parcel of Kingdom Work is people!

We are called to minister to the Lord, yet we do so before people. This implies a give and take relationship. And this only stands to reason. As the heart of God is the saving of a people unto to Himself that we might enjoy a love-relationship with God in time and eternity it follows that if you are a servant of God, upon you rests the commission to build up and encourage God's people!

Paul wrote of the Romans these words:

Romans 1:11, "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established."

Galatians 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

1 Corinthians 12:7, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."

Christ said it beautifully as He wedded the calling to serve God by serving man.

Matthew 25:40, "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, **Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.**"

Truly, Kingdom Work always has as its focus people!

This is such an important reminder and exhortation for us! We live in a day of mixed priorities.

I'll never forget the advice that I got from a pastor friend of mine when I entered the ministry. He said "In

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<sup>8</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 3:15

<sup>9</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 3:16

<sup>10</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 7:15-17

all that you do in ministry, be careful not to fund programs with people.”

It is very easy to think that “The Ministry” — which would include home, work, church, etc — is about nickels, noses, programs, correct theology, work being done decently and in order, and reaching the masses for Christ. It is so easy to use people and consume people in order to further the cause. It is easy to make the cause more important than the individual.

Listen! In all of our labor — be it good or bad — we will go astray if we forget that the Kingdom of God — the overarching cause — is defined as God's rule over His children! It is His developing a relationship with His children! It is His relationship with His bride! It is God reigning over His people!

Don't miss this! People are our calling!

1 Timothy 3:2 states that the mark of a godly man is that he is hospitable. This literally means that the man of God will be a lover of strangers. Thus, when the sun has set and our lives are over, that which will remain and abide forever are the people we have loved, ministered to, encouraged, and built up.

Accordingly, the final deposit that Paul left the church before he died was NOT a theological treatise like Romans — as important as this book was and is — BUT a list of instructions as it pertained to seventeen people.

Christ's focus in life was not correcting the Pharisees, BUT saving the “lost sheep of Israel.”<sup>11</sup>

John's greatest joy was, “hearing of my children walking in the truth” (3 John 4).

Paul's “hope... joy... and crown of exultation” (1 Thessalonians 2:19) was God's people standing complete before Christ on the Day of Judgment.

The shepherds of Israel were indicted NOT because their theology was imperfect BUT because they neglected the people that God entrusted to their care.<sup>12</sup>

Samuel was indeed a minister of the Lord; however that ministry was worked out before and to Eli!

And that is why when I consider my own ministry in the light of this text, I find myself humbled. We are a church of consumers who think that life is about us — don't we?

Let me ask you these questions. How many times have you balked over someone's failure to see or meet your needs? How many times have you been offended when nobody noticed? How often have you looked at the church as an institution that exists for your benefit? Have you ever caught yourself thinking this: Work/School/Church/Parenting wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for the people?

Family of God, let us listen very carefully here! In the words of Romans 14, “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking” — it is not about consuming, getting and being fulfilled and having ones needs met — rather, as the text goes on, it is about a right relationship with God!

And get this, God placed you on the earth to encourage the body of Christ unto that end!

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<sup>11</sup> Compare Matthew 15:24 and also the Sunday School lesson on the Ninth Commandment.

<sup>12</sup> Compare Ezekiel 34:1-8

So show me a Christian who cares only about theology, order, the next spiritual high, what they can get and I'll show you someone who is dead even while they live! Truly we must take seriously our calling and participate in Kingdom work by laboring to build up the body of Christ!

And yet of all the things we do in the name of Christ, have we ever missed the boat here. Let me be brutally honest by way of exhortation. In the years I've been in the ministry, I never have beheld division in the world like I have seen on the part of the body of Christ. It is shocking! I've seen families ripped apart because a sibling has walked away from the faith. I've seen people who name Christ filled with hatred toward one another. I've seen ugly divorces.

I've witnessed a church split or two. I've seen shunning. I've noticed the politicking. I've heard the gossip that would make a worldling blush. And I've heard people invoke the name of Christ in all these actions. And brothers and sisters it has forced me to ask and answer the question: Why is there so much division in the church whose only mark of validity to the world is love?<sup>13</sup>

The answer that I have arrived at is not profound. It is quite convicting. It is the point we are examining this morning. The reason why the church so often is divided is because we have failed to realize that truth, theological accuracy, personal convictions and holiness are all tools to a greater end: the building up of the body of Christ! Paul stated it this way: “knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies” (1 Corinthians 8:1 NASB95).

Truly, our calling is to minister to Christ, but from our text we have learned that it will be done in the realm of the building up God's people. And thus where the end is not met, we must allow love to cover a multitude of sin.<sup>14</sup>

Brothers and sisters I truly believe that this is the litmus test when it comes to “the quality of each man's work” as spoken by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:13. Insofar as our labor encourages the growth of the body in the Lord, we are building upon the foundation of Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones. When our labor neglects the body of Christ — no matter how “holy” it may seem or the arguments that we win for Christ and the lofty places that we tear down<sup>15</sup> — we are constructing houses of wood, hay and stubble.

Accordingly, let us refocus and so let us live to honor God by building up the body of Christ! This is what kingdom work is all about!

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<sup>13</sup> Compare John 13:35

<sup>14</sup> Compare 1 Peter 4:8

<sup>15</sup> Compare 2 Corinthians 10:5

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 28, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.