

# The Ministry

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*“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.” (Mark 16. 20).*

Beloved, holy men were inspired and directed by the Lord the Holy Spirit to give us a full and particular account of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross, where He died for our sins and where He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. They spoke particularly, not only of His crucifixion, but of His death, His burial, and His resurrection from the dead, of His being the plague of death, and the destruction of the grave. We have a highly interesting account by the evangelists of His appearing after His resurrection to the women, to the two disciples going to Emmaus, and to the disciples assembled in an upper room.

As the great Head of the Church the Lord Jesus Christ gave to His ministers, whom He had appointed preachers of His gospel and founders of the gospel dispensation, their commission; that they were to stay at Jerusalem till they were endued with power from on high, till the day of Pentecost; that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem; that they were

to preach the gospel to every creature; and that "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." The Lord gave them their commission on the Mount of Olives, where we find the disciples and apostles assembled before Him. In giving the charge He lifts up His arms, blessing them, and saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." And in the very act of blessing them, He ascended up on high, led captivity captive, and entered the pearly gates of the celestial city. "He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." "He gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry."

Now in our text it is said of the apostles that they went forth according to the direction they had received from Him. "They went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."

I would illustrate the text in the following order:

- I. *The characters* that are said to go forth;
  - II. Their going forth everywhere;
  - III. The Lord working with them;
  - IV. *Confirming* the word with *signs following*.
- I. The *characters* who are said to go forth. "They went forth." These were His ministering servants. The Lord has established in His church a standing ministry of His word to the end of time. This is embodied in that precious promise He made to His ministering servants: "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." God's ministers, like the high priests under the law, by reason of death were not suffered to continue, only so long as to finish the work He had appointed for them. He with whom is the residue of the Spirit, raises up, fits, qualifies, and sends forth others to fill their places; as it is written: "How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?" Our Lord has established a standing ministry as long as His church remains in a militant state, not only for the gathering in of the number of His elect that are scattered abroad, but for the comforting, edifying, and building up of His people. It is His prerogative to make choice of them. He has promised a succession of them. He has promised to give His church pastors after His own heart, that shall feed them with knowledge and understanding. (Jer. 3.

15.) We look to Him for the fulfilment of this prayer: That the Lord would raise up and send forth more labourers into His vineyard; men to go forth everywhere to preach the glorious gospel of a free-grace salvation. We are looking up, then, to the great Head of the church for a succession of faithful, God-fearing, experimental ministers, thrust forth to labour among His people in word and doctrine.

We would here observe that no man can be said to be called, anointed, and sent out to go and preach the gospel, unless He is born again of the Spirit of God, and made a new creature in Christ Jesus. How can a man preach Christ Jesus for the comfort and edification of the family of God who has never felt the comfort and consolation of the gospel in his own soul? The ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ, having felt that comfort, are able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith they are themselves comforted of God. Hence the command of God by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins." (40. 1.)

Be it also observed that *not all* those to whom God is gracious, not all who are born of God and taught by His Spirit, are called and sent forth to preach the gospel. Even those good and gracious men who, like the apostles, had been witnesses of the sufferings and death of Christ, were not to go forth till they were endued with power from on high. When the day of Pentecost was come, they received that anointing which fitted and qualified them for the work. They were then sent forth; and they went forth preaching the word, the Lord working with them.

Here we would contrast two things. First, — The child of God is concerned to prove that he really does belong to the family of God; that he is one of His chosen, predestinated family. How, then, is he to prove this? By his being effectually called by grace. How many of God's children, in reference to their personal interest in the finished salvation of Jesus Christ, spend much time in examination of themselves by prayer, supplication, and attending the means of grace, that they may have the Spirit's witness, and the assurance of the Holy Ghost that they belong to the Lord. What a mercy it is to know our election of God! This can only be known by effectual calling.

Second, — To draw the contrast between calling and going forth to preach the gospel take notice that every man called of God to go forth to preach the gospel has an *especial call* to the work. Paul says, when referring to the subject, "To me, who am less than the least of all saints, *is this grace given*, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." The apostle had grace in Christ before the world was, as he was one in the covenant made with Christ, and was given to Christ. He means here that in time this grace was especially made manifest, when Christ revealed Himself to him. But he had also *special grace* given to him, to qualify, fit, anoint, and send him forth to preach the gospel.

"And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Many of God's ministers spend as much time, if not more, in earnest prayer, supplication, and wrestling with the Lord in reference to their call to the work of the ministry, than they do in reference to their call by grace. The minister in the pulpit before you, who has stood on Zion's walls more than fifty years, had more exercises and wrestlings with the Lord in reference to his being sent of God to preach the gospel than he had with respect to his effectual call by grace.

It is needful that a man who goes forth in his Master's service should have his master's commission, should know it, and should have His sanction and divine approbation. The apostles knew this, and they went forth. None could fit and qualify them but the great Head of the church, for that situation which the Lord had appointed for them. In accomplishing this, the Lord makes use of instruments. He lays the work of the ministry on the minds of such as He designs to send forth. Therefore with such there is a solemn groaning, sighing, and crying, a feeling of their unworthiness and insufficiency. They labour and do all they can to remove the impression. That God, however, who has begun the work, still stirs them up. They have no rest. His truth in them is like the word in Jeremiah, "as a burning fire shut up in my bones and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." Thus, being a child of God, he has no rest. The Lord lays it on the hearts of the brethren and sisters, who pray for him, and encourage him. He that spoke to the church at Antioch, as we read: "The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them," lays it on the minds of the

atonement is sealed home and confirmed; and Christ becomes exceeding precious to the child of God. Thus God confirms the word by signs following.

Where God's ministers speak, the Lord causes the arrow of conviction to pierce the heart and conscience. No sooner does the sinner really feel the wound than he falls down, like Saul of Tarsus, with the cry, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" What were the signs that followed the preaching of the gospel on the day of Pentecost? The Lord working with them, thousands were converted to God. When they went down to Antioch, the hand of the Lord was with them, and signs followed. Sinners were effectually called by divine grace. The Lord opens the ear. He gives the hearing ear, the seeing eye, and the understanding heart, as He did Lydia, so that she attended to the things spoken by Paul. The signs that followed Paul's preaching were that sinners were converted to God and effectually called by grace out of darkness into God's marvellous light. The Lord makes bare His arm in the gates of Zion, so that inquiring, seeking souls, with their faces Zionward, are encouraged. They are effectually called by God's grace, and born again of the Spirit: "Born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God."

We have great reason to be thankful that Zion is favoured with the gospel preached by His poor unworthy servants. We want to see more crying mightily to God to arise and build up Zion, that He would appear in his beauty and glory, and that His gospel may have abundant success.

"The Lord working with them, confirming the word with signs following."  
 What are the signs? I trust I am speaking to some this evening who, like myself, have been long bending their steps Zionward, who are far advanced in years. Our stay here will not be long. Then may we shine as lights in the world, so live that God may be honoured and glorified by our walk and conversation, remembering that we are not our own, but bought with a price, and therefore we should glorify God in our bodies and spirits which are His. We should shine as lights in the world, as a city set on a hill, that cannot be hid. "Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven." Such are some of the signs that follow the preaching of those whom the Lord has called to the work of the ministry. Amen.

the dear man of God preaches." He then goes on to show that Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom and righteousness; that He has wrought out and brought in an everlasting righteousness that will justify the sinner; that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to the believer; and that this righteousness that Jesus Christ wrought out, God the Father imputes to the sinner. He brings forth Scripture to confirm it; and the Holy Ghost seals it home that Christ has done this *for me*, a poor guilty sinner: "Who of God is made *unto us* wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Thus the Holy Spirit applies the word, the Lord works with them, His ministers confirming and sealing the word spoken by the man of God.

Christ is the only sacrifice. No blood would atone for sin but the blood of the dear Redeemer.

Not all the blood of beasts,

On Jewish altars slain,

Could give the guilty conscience peace,

Or wash away the stain.

His blood is of a nobler and richer name than that of bulls and goats.

Thus the minister preaches the precious blood of the incarnate God as the church's redemption; the church redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. The Holy Ghost seals it home to the poor guilty sinner. The words are: "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom." The atoning blood of the Lamb is the ransom: "By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." These are God's prisoners. They are delivered by the application of the blood of Jesus. The words of the minister are confirmed and sealed home. The child of God rejoices. These are the signs following.

When the man of God speaks of the efficacy of the blood of Christ, that it was not only the redemption price, but also a fountain to cleanse, as it is written: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness," the guilty sinner feels the efficacy of the blood of the dear Redeemer, which, applied by the Spirit, purges his conscience, and sins of a scarlet and crimson-like dye become white as wool. The

brethren that the Lord has designed them for the work of the ministry.

The Lord also leads those he designs for public usefulness more deeply and solemnly into gospel truth. When such are called upon to engage in prayer in public, the people find a savour, dew, and unction attending their prayers. When they enter into conversation, or give their thoughts on a portion of God's Word for godly edification, there is a savour and power that enters the minds of God's people, draws their affections, and knits their hearts toward them. This so draws their minds forth that they encourage them and bring them forward. Thus, sanctioned by the Lord, and encouraged by the church, they go forth and preach everywhere, the Lord working with them.

Now if any man thrusts himself forward, you may rest satisfied he will not be a blessing to the church of God. We read of Moses and of Gideon; how backward they were, and what excuse they made. So it is with others of the Lord's family. Their language is, "Send by the hand of him whom thou wilt send; but do not send *me*." They are fully impressed with the importance of the work, standing up before the living God to speak to the never dying souls of their fellow creatures. They come trembling; and the brethren and sisters, seeing this, pray for and encourage them; and they have the testimony of the Lord that their labour is not in vain. These "go forth" to preach the gospel, having the sanction of the great Head of the church and approbation of the brethren, who pour out their prayers and supplications to God. The Lord works with them.

II. The second branch of my subject is, "They went forth and preached everywhere." What did they preach? *Not themselves*. No, not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. Why did they preach Him? Because they were specially anointed to preach Him. And this was not the only reason. They had enjoyed the Lord in their own souls as their Saviour and their Redeemer, whose love had been sweetly shed abroad in their heart. They had been led to see that His righteousness alone would justify them. They had seen by faith His atoning sacrifice, to deliver them from guilt and condemnation, and His efficacious blood to cleanse from every stain. This has been made so precious and comforting to their souls, the Lord's power and ability to save so much felt, so powerfully impressed upon their hearts, that a necessity was laid upon them to

preach. "Woe is unto me," said the apostle, "if I preach not the gospel."

"They went forth and preached everywhere." We see the example in reference to Saul of Tarsus. When called by grace, he preached in the synagogue that Jesus is the Son of God, proving it from the records of heaven. Peter was anointed to preach the gospel; he went everywhere preaching the Word. When mentioning the circumstance of the healing of the lame man who sat at the gate called Beautiful asking for alms, and when before the rulers in the face of the greatest opposition, when asked by what power or name they had done this, Peter replied, "Be it known unto you, and to all the people, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him, doth this man stand here before you whole. . . Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." By the precious blood alone of Jesus can we be saved from our sins and all the damning consequences of them. They preached that Christ was exalted to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.

When the disciples were scattered abroad on account of the persecution that arose, Stephen went out and preached Jesus. Wherever he went, he preached a precious Christ in the heart, the hope of glory. "They ceased not to teach and to preach," to exalt the Redeemer in His everlasting gospel; the Lord by them confirming the word in the souls of the people.

Again, when Philip went down to Samaria, he preached Jesus Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot. "He opened his mouth and preached unto him Jesus." They "went forth;" and wherever they went they exalted the Lamb of God, the sin-atoning Lamb. They preached the Redeemer as the alone name whereby sinners can be saved; so that precious souls were comforted and satisfied. The Lord himself says, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."

The ministers of Christ are never so happy as when they are under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, exalting the Lamb of God, encouraging law-condemned sinners to look by faith to Jesus, to believe on Him, and encouraging souls to commit their cause into His hands. There is no safety or security anywhere but in Jesus. They went everywhere, and not only preached Jesus, but preached Him as the only name whereby

"Samuel, I have heard that you have begun to preach." Medley replied he had stood up sometimes to give a word of exhortation. The minister, who had been a long time in the work, said he would give him a word of advice. Medley said he would be glad of any advice from him. "Then my advice is this. Let the Bible guide you. Never attempt to preach to the Bible. Never try to make the Word of God say as you say. Go to the Lord, to a throne of grace, and what God gives from His Word, His blessing and approbation will be sure to follow." Thus God works with His ministers, confirming the word with signs following. To the law and the testimony. This is sound speech that cannot be condemned.

"The Lord confirming the word, with signs following." How is this done? Thus. The minister of God, in preaching His word, shows the sins and transgressions of His people, comes to their real state and condition as law-breakers, and shows the awful consequences of sin. The Lord works by him. The various portions of the Word the man of God brings forward are sealed home by the Spirit as a nail in a sure place. He describes the state and condition of a sinner; his weak, helpless, undone, lost state; the many vows and resolutions he has made and broken; so that he is brought to feel that if his salvation depended on his goodness, alas he never could be saved. He tells him from the Word of God that it is not works of righteousness he has done that will save him. He knows that if it depended upon his being saved by the law of works, he is utterly undone. Thus the word is confirmed. His mouth is stopped. He is brought in guilty before the Lord.

The invitations are, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "Whosoever will, let him come." "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." These blessed truths are sealed and brought home with power; and the sinner's heart is fixed and encouraged. Thus the Lord works with His ministers, confirming the word with signs following. This is the confirmation these *spiritually* heavy laden and thirsty souls want; this sealing testimony of the Holy Ghost.

What are the signs following? When the preacher declares we are altogether in ourselves unclean, our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, the child of God says, "I know that is true what



experience, but, when preaching, that the life and power may be felt in the souls of the people. Then, as Paul said to the Thessalonians, and which my soul longs to see and feel more of. "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power." We ministers preach the gospel in *word only* when we are dry, shut up, and straitened. Then, there is no going forth; all seems dry and barren. What is this for? To teach us our own insufficiency. We cry to the Lord for His power, His blessed influence, to work by and with us, that some good may be done. We want the power. "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

IV. "Confirming the word with *signs following*." That is the confirmation of the word in the souls of them that hear it. How is it confirmed? One portion of the Word says, "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." What is this law? The Word of God, the blessed Bible. "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple." If any man stands up to speak contrary to this, there is no light in him. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." He is to minister as of the ability that God gives, not as man gives.

Take examples from the good ministers in the days of old, who proved all they said from the Word of God. The Bereans of old "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so; whether they were in accordance with the Word of God. When this is done, the Lord is working by them; what they do is according to the law and the testimony. God's ministers have their sermons from the Word of God.

We sometimes sing hymns composed by Mr. Medley. We had in our church 40 years ago, a dear saint of the most high God, who heard Samuel Medley, who mentioned the following anecdote. A number of ministers were assembled for instruction, and Medley was present. An old minister who sat opposite to him in the room kept his eyes fixed upon him. At last, walking towards him, he took hold of his button, and said,

sinner could be saved; the only way whereby God can be just, and the justifier of sinners. "I am," says Jesus, "the way, the truth, and the life." No man can come to the Father or to heaven but by and through the rent veil of the Redeemer's flesh. This is the only way by which we draw nigh to God.

The minister who preaches Jesus exalts Him as the living way. He takes the stones out of the way, and lifts up the Lord as an ensign to the people, as the only way by which we draw nigh to God, the only way whereby we can be saved from sin, the only way of worship the Lord owns and blesses, and the only way to the realms of everlasting bliss and blessedness. There is no other way but this. The apostles were valiant for this truth. They maintained at all hazards that there was no way of access to the Father but by Jesus Christ. They went forth and preached this everywhere. The apostle is very explicit about this, He says, "For I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." He was determined to bring forward no other. He tells us this is the only foundation: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ," and he instructs others to build upon Jesus Christ, who is the sure foundation stone.

"They went forth, preaching everywhere," razing all false foundations, removing all false refuges of lies, and preaching Jesus Christ as the only ground and foundation of a sinner's hope. God's ministers, going forth preaching Jesus, can never lay the sinner too low, nor ever lift the Redeemer too high. This is sound speech that cannot be condemned: "Lord, lay me in the dust of self-abasement, poor, sinful, filthy and worthless. But when Jesus is preached, let Him be exalted and lifted up in His glorious Person as the incarnate God. Let Him be exalted in his covenant engagements, on the ground of His obedience, as the Lamb for His great atoning sacrifice, in the power of His resurrection, in the glory of His ascension to heaven, and in His prevailing intercession for the souls of His living family."

When Jesus is thus preached by His ministers, the Lord works by them. The word applied by the Holy Spirit produces feelings in the soul similar to this: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." Have you ever felt thus? "He is the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely." "Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all!" This is the language of the soul that goes forth preaching Christ. Paul says. "Some

indeed preach Christ of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other of love, knowing I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, and will rejoice." What benefit or profit is there to a living soul if a minister comes preaching, if Christ is not the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of our preaching? However eloquent the language and beautiful the style, God's family is not comforted; the church is not edified.

III. The third part of the subject is "*the Lord working*" by or with them. If the Lord does not work by His ministers, their preaching will be in vain.

Before I come to dwell particularly on this point, it will be needful to make an observation lest the language of the apostle Paul might be taken in a wrong sense. I will put two passages together. "The Lord working with them." Paul says, "We then, as workers together with God, beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." From this portion some would tell us that we are co-workers with God in salvation matters. This will not do as it respects the work of salvation. Christ finished that work upon the cross. His own arm brought salvation, and of the people there were none with Him. Salvation belongeth to the Lord. The Lord is the Saviour of souls. He provided the way for us to heaven, and saved us from the wrath to come. What, then, is intended by "everywhere they went forth, the Lord working with them," and "they working with the Lord"? Not that we are co-workers with God in salvation matters. In the salvation of the soul the Lord Jesus is all in all. How, then, does the Lord work with them, and they work with the Lord?

"The Lord working with them." God's ministers, the Lord's servants, do not want to move in the ministry of the word without consulting their blessed Lord and Master. They want His divine approbation, His direction, His instruction; and as He works with them, so they work in their preaching. Say you, "How so?" A sent minister of God, whether itinerating or settled over a people, enters into his closet, not to get his sermon from books. The apostles, in speaking upon this, said, "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word."

The speaker before you has fallen down before his Lord and master many times for a portion of the Word to be impressed on his mind. He has given himself to prayer for a portion of God's Word to be laid upon his mind, and that the Holy Spirit would bring some particular portion with savour and unction to his heart. Thus, then, the Lord, working with him, takes forth His heavenly treasure, puts it into the earthen vessel, and brings forth desires out of the man's heart Godward, for the comfort and edifying of the household of faith. He, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is led to bring forth those precious truths which he feels savoury in his own soul, and which he has experienced. Thus he commends the glorious truths of the gospel. "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits." The time comes for the labourer to go forth from his closet. A door is open, he ascends the pulpit, trembling at the idea of standing up before the people of his Lord and Master without His presence. His language is, "O Lord, I am going forth to preach Thy gospel. Thou hast said in Thy Word, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.' Lord, be with me. Lord, be with me. Make my heart to indite a good matter, and my tongue the pen of a ready writer. Enlarge my heart, give a door of utterance, clothe Thy word with power, that it may reach the hearts and consciences of Thy people, and that sinners may be converted unto Thee."

The Lord, thus working with them, confirms His word by the signs that follow. Paul was very sensible of the inability of the means of grace without the Lord's presence. Paul may plant, and Apollos may water in vain, unless God give the increase. In vain is Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or anything that man can do. It is by the Lord, and the Lord alone, working with His ministers in the preaching of the blessed gospel that sinners are converted and saints comforted. It is not by the minister's might and power, but by the might and power of the Lord. The Lord works with them. They have this treasure in their earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of them.

The Lord works by the ministry of the word, in enabling the man to preach the truth, and so to divide the word that each has his portion in due season. A portion is given to seven and also to eight. The lambs of the household, as well as the sheep, in the church of God, are edified, comforted, and built up. The minister not only wants to have it in his own knowledge and