

WHAT MAKES A MINISTER?

When God was revealing to me my call to preach, my Bible kept falling open to one of three places: Colossians 1:23, 25 and Ephesians 3:7. In these three verses, three words arrested my attention: "...made a minister..." In Colossians 1:23, God tells us we ministers have an obligation to preach the Gospel to every creature. In Colossians 1:25, Paul is telling us that ministers are given a dispensation, or time perimeters, in which to dispense the Word of God. In Ephesians 3:7, Paul says he was made a minister according to the gift of grace. If you examine the Greek word translated "minister" you will discover it is the word "diakonos." It is from the same root system that gives us the word "diakoneo" which we translate "deacon." The Greek dictionaries give us the meaning of minister as: "one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master, he is a servant, he is an attendant, he is one who runs errands, he is the servant of a king, a waiter." I like the way Dr. A. T. Robertson defines it; he says it means, "to kick up dust, as one running an errand."

Although these were the verses that God used to call me to preach, I am happy to say that anyone can fulfill the call to be a minister according to the wide spectrum of meanings behind this word "minister." My prayer as I write these words is that God will use what we say here to call someone else into His glorious service. In a sense, everyone who is a Christian is called to minister in some way or fashion. Last Thursday my wife and I were talking to a preacher and his wife at the youth camp where I preached in California. Over forty years ago I preached for her father at Central Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana when she was just a little girl. She was telling me her father had said from the pulpit on several occasions while she was growing up that everyone should have a ministry. While in the fifth grade, she and some of her friends banded together and decided to have a ministry of praying during the invitation for sinners to be saved and people to get right with God. Karen (the preacher's daughter) said she would look out in the auditorium and spot visitors and when she did, she would pray for them during the invitation. One day she spotted Keith Gomez, a man that could quite literally qualify as a "ragin' Cajun." While this little fifth grader prayed, God worked on Keith's heart. Keith walked the aisle that day and gave his heart to Christ. Today Keith Gomez pastors a large growing church and is president of a thriving Bible college outside of Chicago. Karen Smith (now

Caviness) had an amazing ministry that I have never thought of. God is great at giving us missions and ministry that have never been thought of by others. Ephesians 3:20 tells us, *"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."* Let me encourage you to ask God today (if you have not already) to give you a ministry.

Let's take the verses surrounding two of the places where Paul declares he was made a minister and see what made him and perhaps what may make us one of God's choice ministers. Let us be motivated by Christ who is:

1. The Source of All Power

Colossians 1:19 tells us, *"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell."* The Gnostics of Colossae at this time were teaching that divine powers and attributes were divided among the various emanations. Paul was countering this heretical teaching that all of the fullness of deity is not spread out in small doses to a group of spirits, but fully and completely dwells in Christ alone. The word "fulness" is the Greek word "pleroma" which means that Christ is not a chief manifestation of the Divine nature; it means as, J. B. Lightfoot says, *"He exhausts the Godhead manifested. In Him resides the totality of the Divine powers and attributes."*

Colossians 1:17 says, *"And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."* Dr. D. Lee Chestnut in commenting on the atom says, *"What holds the nucleus together? Why doesn't it fly apart? And therefore why do not all atoms fly apart? The fact that we live in a world in which practically every object is a potential nuclear explosive, without being blown to bits, is due to the extreme difficulties that attend the starting of a nuclear reaction. You grasp what this implies? It implies that all nuclei have no right to be alive at all. Indeed, they should never have been created, and if created, they should have blown up instantly. Yet here they all are...Some inflexible inhibition is holding them relentlessly together. The nature of the inhibition is also a secret...one thus far reserved by Nature for herself."* The word of God gives us insight concerning the One holding all of this together, from the sun in the sky to the smallest atom; it is Christ who is *"...upholding all things by the word of his power..."* (Hebrews 1:3b).

Jesus said, *"...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"* (Matthew 28:18). Then two verses later our Lord says, *"...and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen"* (Matthew 28:20). So we may say

we are made ministers *"...according to the power that worketh in us..."* (Ephesians 3:20b) or as Paul said in Colossians 1:29, *"Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."* The same power that was on hand in the creation, maintaining the universe and the same power that brought Christ up from the grave is the same power working in the believer! Let us also consider what makes us a minister:

2. The Supernatural Blood

Colossians 1:20-22 tells us that although we were once alienated and enemies of God, He has now, through the blood of His cross, not only reconciled us to Himself, but made us *"...holy, unbalmeable and unreprouvable in his sight."*

We can take no glory in what or who we are. Everything we are is because of His cross! We are commanded to take up our cross and follow Him, but we need to be informed that it is His cross alone that affords us the opportunity to serve Him. I lift my cross to follow Him because He provides the power through His precious blood. We also see that we are made a minister by:

3. The Subsequent Suffering

Colossians 1:24 says, *"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."* This verse cannot possibly mean that we may add anything whatsoever to the finished work of Christ on the cross. I love the way Cannon Guy H. King paraphrases this verse, *"Fulfill what yet remains of the appointed tale of afflictions that I must suffer for Christ's sake, and for the advancement of His church."* In other words, if we follow the Lord we will share his reproach. Jesus said, *"Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you..."* (John 15:20). Soon after Paul was saved, his discipler, Ananias was told, *"For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake"* (Acts 9:16). We observe that Paul picked up the mantle of suffering of Christ in II Corinthians 11:23-28. Soon before Paul was executed and died as a martyr he summed up this truth about ministry, *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (II Timothy 3:12). He not only made a statement to be applied to other Christians, he personally became a partaker of those afflictions

as he testified, *"From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus"* (Galatians 6:17).

Finally, we are made a minister by:

4. The Secret Revealed

Colossians 1:25-28 tells us that we have been given the secret message of God that had been hidden from ages past and is now revealed to us. In three magnificent monosyllables, the truth of the ages is revealed: *"...Christ in you..."* (Colossians 1:27c). This gift required Christ's death, burial and resurrection. When you receive Christ, you are given the gift of the abiding presence of God in you, which is not only a bit of heaven on earth (John 15:4), but the very promise of *"...the hope of glory..."* (Colossians 1:27c). This is one secret that God desires us to tell. What a message we have; let's let the secret out! For this primary purpose God has made us ministers! *"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God"* (I Corinthians 4:1). *"Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life"* (II Corinthians 3:6).

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a large, decorative initial "J" and a long, sweeping horizontal line at the end.