

## Full Time Ministry

### Colossians 1.24-29

Full time ministry is an ideal that we toss around from time to time in our church. But what is full time ministry?

That is a question that actually has two answers. The first and most important answer is that it means loving and serving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. That is full time, and it is ministry.

Every Christian is in full time ministry.

Let me repeat to you a conversation people have had with me on numerous occasions. It goes like this: 'If only I were independently wealthy, I could serve the Lord full time. I feel like I'm wasting part of my life working as a mechanic (or whatever occupation you want to substitute), when I could be out telling people about the Lord.'

Have you ever had a thought like that? Can I challenge that way of thinking?

It is not a waste to be a mechanic, or a hair dresser, or a teacher, or whatever station God has placed you in. A mechanic 'ministers' by keeping people's cars running properly – a very meaningful ministry. Beyond that, the mechanic is a 'missionary' in his workplace. And, to take it to one more level, the income the mechanic earns is a ministry to his or her family and to the church.

We also must consider that the mechanic role accounts for as little as 25% of a typical week. There are 168 hours in a week. If you work 38, you still have 130! Plenty of time to be in a Bible study group or to teach a Sunday school class or to share the gospel with someone.

Full time ministry is something every Christian is called to.

But there is another way we understand that terminology. We also use it to refer to a pastor or missionary who serves God and His people as a career. In this sense, I am in full time ministry – and have been for nearly 30 years. I earn my living by the gospel.

That doesn't make me better than other Christians. It is just the role God has called me to. And because God has called me, I would be disobeying Him if I did something else.

As a church, we are seeking God's direction to the man He has called to be the pastor. We have \$300,000 in the bank to draw upon so that our pastor will be able to make his living by the gospel. That pay is not charity – it is well deserved and, if anything, below what he'd make in a comparable career. That is just one reason why we should esteem our pastor highly, and with gratitude. He is literally God's gift to the church.

In our text today, Paul speaks personally about what makes him tick as a full time minister. This is a timely text for us.

Sermon in a Sentence: **Ministry is always full of sacrifice and satisfaction.**

Colossians tells us how our life must be managed. Thus far we have learnt that it must be managed positively – praising God for others even as we pray for them. It also must be managed deeply – we are never done growing – we must work to keep our roots growing deeper in God and in His Word. We then learned to appreciate God in Christ – the second person of the Trinity, our creator, redeemer and reconciler.

Today we learn to appreciate our pastor. I am preaching this with application to our attitude toward the man who will be the pastor at Cornerstone. May he be blessed with a congregation that appreciates and supports him . . . so that his work is a blessing, not a burden.

Colossians 1:24-29 (ESV)

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Ministry is always full of sacrifice and satisfaction. Notice four full marks of Paul's sacrificial and satisfying ministry.

## 1. A Joyful identity (v 24)

Colossians 1:24 (ESV)

<sup>24</sup> Now I **rejoice** in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in **Christ's** afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the **church**,

Paul's joyful identity was with Christ. He counted his sufferings to be more of a privilege than a pain – a continuation of the suffering Christ Himself endured.

But how was Paul suffering? At the moment he wrote this letter, he was suffering unjust imprisonment in Rome. He couldn't come and go as he liked. He couldn't earn an income. He had to rely on the good graces of his captors, and of his visiting friends. But as bad as this imprisonment was, it was an improvement on other experiences he had had – like being stoned, and beaten, and whipped, and shipwrecked, and even bitten by a snake. An objective observer would surely conclude that Paul was cursed.

Yet Paul says he's blessed; he rejoices. Why? Because his sufferings are for a great purpose, and are with a great person.

### A. Great Purpose

The great purpose Paul joyfully identifies with is the church. Twice in verse 24 he says his sufferings are 'for your sake' or 'for the sake of . . . the church'.

How was Paul's suffering a benefit to the church? Firstly, it was a benefit because it proved the sufficiency of God's grace – Paul lived by what he preached. Can you imagine how his perseverance in the face of persecution would inspire the church when persecution came knocking at their door? Since Paul stood joyously even in the face of death, so could they.

Secondly, it made Paul a better Christian, and, therefore, a better minister.

Paul identified with a great purpose. More than this, he identified with a . . .

## B. Great Person

It is ironic that the crucifixion of Jesus fully satisfied the wrath of God against sin, but not the wrath of man against saints. When Paul says in verse 24 that he is 'filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions', he is not suggesting that there was something lacking in the atonement. Jesus paid it all as far as God is concerned. Rather, Paul is talking about the wrath of humanity towards Christ – which was far from satisfied.

Paul himself was once on the other side, an enemy of Christ. He arrested Christians, beat Christians, and approved of the execution of Christians. So much so that when Jesus intercepted him on the road to Damascus, He confronted Paul, 'Why are you persecuting Me?'

Being converted by Christ in that moment, Paul switched to the right side – joyfully identifying with this great person, Jesus Christ. He suffers for this identity . . . and he is glad.

Fast forward to Erskine Park in Australia. Does this church want a pastor who joyfully identifies with Jesus Christ? Let me tell you, that identity is no more popular or accepted today than it was in Paul's day. There is a price to pay for identifying with Christ.

But it is a price that also pays dividends for the church. So let's not take for granted the sacrifices of a pastor, but be inspired by his endurance in identifying with a great purpose – the church – and with a great person – Christ.

That's full time ministry. A ministry that is always full of sacrifice and satisfaction.

The second full mark is in verses 25-27.

## 2. A Meaningful obligation (vv 25-27)

Colossians 1:25-27 (ESV)

<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the **stewardship from God** that was given to me for you, to make the **word of God** fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**.

Paul calls the ministry a stewardship. What does he mean?

John MacArthur explains: *A steward was a slave who managed his master's household, supervising the other servants, dispensing resources, and handling business and financial affairs.*

*Paul viewed his ministry as a stewardship from the Lord (and for the church). The church is God's household (1 Tim. 3:16), and Paul was given the task of caring for, feeding, and leading the churches, for which he was accountable to God (cf. Heb. 13:17).<sup>1</sup>*

So stewardship is slavery; and slavery is not an honourable career that university graduates aspire to. Ask any kid what he or she wants to be when they grow up and none of them will say a slave.

Slaves don't volunteer; they are conscripted. Pastors are conscripted – we say they are called; Paul says the stewardship was 'from the Lord' – this means the same thing. But what was Paul, and what are pastors, conscripted to do? To make fully known the Word of God.

That expression can be understood two ways. Sometimes the Word of God is a reference to the written Word – what we call the Bible. When the psalmist says, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee', he is talking about the written Word. When the writer of Hebrews talks about the Word being like a two edged sword discerning the thoughts and intents of our heart, it is the written Word that is in view.

But sometimes the expression 'Word of God' is about the living Word – who is Jesus. John starts his gospel in this sense: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.'

To be sure, there is total compatibility between the Living Word and the Written Word – in fact, we could say the Written Word comes from the Living Word. In both cases, it is God who is revealed to man.

In verse 25, Paul uses the expression 'Word of God'. He then specifies in verse 26 that this was something that was a mystery to people in the Old Testament, but is now revealed. And what is that hidden secret? The Living Word of God! Verse 27 states it plainly: Christ in you, the hope of glory.

In the Old Testament times, there were prophecies about a coming Messiah, but the nature of the incarnation could not be understood – it was a mystery. Similarly, there were prophecies about atonement, but the cross could not be understood – it was a mystery. And what about the resurrection? Another mystery.

But there is more, and that is what Paul has in view in these verses – the mystery that is now fully revealed that the Living Word is for Gentiles as much as for Jews. Talk about astounding and revolutionary!

Now the easy thing for Paul would have been to preach only to Jews. That is what 'political correctness' would demand. But the Word of God must be fully known – proclaimed to all people, including Gentiles. This was Paul's meaningful obligation.

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, J. J. (1997, c1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) (Col 1:25). Nashville: Word Pub.

I wonder . . . what preaching is ‘politically incorrect’ today? We could talk about homosexuality. We could talk about abortion. We could talk about a six day creation. But the chief offense is still Jesus Christ – crucified, risen and coming again. The King of kings and Lord of lords. The only One who saves us from our vile sinfulness.

Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Cornerstone Baptist Church wants a pastor who embraces this meaningful obligation: to make Christ fully known to all people – regardless of race, social status, or creed.

Ministry is always full of sacrifice and satisfaction. We have seen a joyful identity and a meaningful obligation. The third full mark is . . .

### 3. A Helpful ambition (v 28)

Colossians 1:28 (ESV)

<sup>28</sup>Him we proclaim, **warning everyone** and **teaching everyone** with **all wisdom**, that we may present **everyone mature** in Christ.

In this verse we turn from the Living Word to the Written Word. It was Paul’s duty then, and a pastor’s duty now, to teach and preach the whole counsel of God . . . so that God’s people might be mature. What an ambition!

What Paul is talking about is hard work. How do you think he came by the ‘all wisdom’ to warn and teach with? He came by it through long hours studying the Word of God.

In my personal devotions, I am reading Paul’s epistles. I finished Romans and started 1 Corinthians this week. What has impressed me is how frequently Paul quotes from the Old Testament. He was an expert in the Bible . . . and also an expert in humanity . . . and he constantly brought the Bible to bear on the needs of the people.

This is what pastors do. They must study long hours so that they might be prepared to warn people and teach people with the Word of God – not merely with their own opinions or popular philosophies.

Never take for granted the preparation of a preacher. In Acts 6, deacons were enlisted so that the pastors could devote themselves to prayer and the Word of God. This must be the priority for the pastor – because his work is a supernatural work.

How else do you think it is possible for Paul’s helpful ambition to be achieved? Do you see his goal in verse 28? ‘Everyone mature in Christ.’ That is humanly impossible! It doesn’t matter whether we are talking about Jews or Gentiles, none of us naturally mature in Christ.

And so the pastor – like Paul – is never done studying and warning and teaching and proclaiming.

Let me pause here and ask the question, how can we help the pastor? Firstly, pray for him. Secondly, come with an eagerness to learn from him. Thirdly, look for ways you can relieve him so that he can pray, study, preach and teach more.

I have a pastor friend who is going through a rough time with his congregation at the moment. He is preaching verse by verse through a book of the Bible, but his deacons are complaining that they only want to hear about salvation every Sunday. All the rest is too hard to understand, they say.

Those deacons have it wrong. A pastor's helpful ambition is to present everyone mature – and for that the deeper teachings of the Bible are required.

Do you want to encourage your pastor? Get involved in growing. Come to church. Join a Bible study group. Read and study and memorise the Scripture in your quiet time.

And every once in a while, thank him for teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God.

Ministry is always full of sacrifice and satisfaction. Seeing people saved and maturing is immensely satisfying . . . but as I've already said, it is also impossible. That is why this last point is essential. A full ministry is not only about joyful identity, meaningful obligation and helpful ambition . . . it is about . . .

#### 4. A Powerful enablement (v 29)

Colossians 1:29 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup>For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that **he powerfully works within me.**

Yes, Paul's ministry was toil and a struggle . . . but it was possible because Christ gives the energy and Christ works powerfully.

This is what is most satisfying of all. To be used of God as simply a channel – and He gets all the glory.

Ministry is always full of sacrifice and satisfaction.

Is it possible that God is conscripting you for ministry? In a sense, we are all full time ministers – and so we all need to be identifying with Christ and His church, obligating ourselves to make Christ known in witness, having the ambition to help one another mature and depending on Christ's powerful enablement.

That is the duty of all Christians. Are you doing it? Are you a minister?

But in the other sense, perhaps God is calling you to be a pastor or a missionary. If so, do not resist His call.

And for all of us, let's appreciate and support the pastor God calls to serve this church.

Hebrews 13:7, 17 (NKJV)

<sup>7</sup>Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct. <sup>17</sup>Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.