

West Side Fellowship

Works of Service – Called to be an Apostle

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.
Romans 1v1*

As we have worked our way through the ministries in **Ephesians 4v11-13** as well as the ministries of helps and administration as mentioned in **1 Corinthians 12v28** we have seen that in each ministry, the foundation, the actions taken, always need to be built on a clear calling from the Lord. Not just as a one off, but a daily constant communion. For without listening to the Lord we can never claim to be a follower or servant for our directions and actions are based on presumption rather than instruction through listening and waiting on the Lord.

This week we are going to look at the ministry of an apostle, in many ways the pinnacle of Christian ministry. For when it comes to the church, the first apostle was Jesus himself (**Hebrews 3v1**). This is important because as we look at the ministry of an apostle we are seeing in many ways a copy of Christ's ministry. Not just in what he said and did, but the way he lived, his heart attitude and the way the Holy Spirit worked through him. In **Romans 1v1**, Paul is called to be an apostle, it is not just a calling to the ministry but to a life of complete servant hood such as Christ had. It is one of the attitudes that is attributed to Christ in **Philippians 2v5-11**. An attitude that will require us to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and die daily (**Matthew 16v24**). The apostles calling is a high calling for In many ways an apostle has to take up the role of a pastor, prophet, teacher and evangelist as part of his ministry because he is having to perform these roles, often alone and without support just as when we look at Christ, our true apostolic example. However, alongside these ministries there should be a visible working of the Holy Spirit working through the ministry with signs and wonders and miracles as the Holy Spirit leads (2 Corinthians 12v12), not as the apostle demands.

As with all ministry there needs to be a foundation built on a constant communion with the Father. We see in the life of Jesus that despite him being the Son of God, he still had a true servant heart that was willing to constantly go before the father in prayer to seek His will for the day. This was so normal in the life of Christ that when he was missing the first place the disciples knew to look for him was in a solitary place, for the foundation of his ministry was not found in the crowds but in the time he spent with his Father. It is this attitude that overflowed unto his disciples around him and that was seen in their lives by the teachers of the law (**Acts 4v13**). For apostleship is not a ministry that is learnt in a Bible school, it is a calling that comes through servant hood, a process that takes a life time. Let us not be fooled in any way, apostleship was not learnt from a book, the disciples learnt it by spending time with the Lord, day after day, week after week, month after month. The sad truth is that they spent more time with the Lord in three years than many Christians will spend with the Lord in thirty, if we are not willing to make the sacrifice in time spent with the Lord we will never be fit for this type of calling.

Just as we see in the life of Christ, a crucial attribute of the apostolic ministry is humility. This is especially true in a ministry that will see miracles, signs and wonders. In the age we live in it is normal for people to boast of their achievements. Sadly this has crept into the church, so that the Christians are wooed by impressive numbers and buildings, likes on Facebook, numbers of books sold and of course a silvery tongue to deliver the message. Yet in the life of the true apostle there is no place for boasting, indeed when Paul defends his ministry he says that he is not talking as the Lord would (**2 Corinthians 11v17**) and even says he must be out of his mind to talk this way (**2 Corinthians 11v23**). However, when Paul defends his ministry he does not defend it by the numbers saved or the churches planted or miracles performed. Instead he talks about the sacrifices and dangers he has faced for the Lord (**2 Corinthians 11v23-33**). In other words he starts by talking about what he has been willing to lose for the Lord and the sacrifices he has been willing to make to fulfil his calling and yet in all this we see that his strength is in the Lord, for anyone called to an apostolic ministry there will be great sacrifices to be made just as Christ was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. Let us not lose sight of the fact that we know that of the early apostles almost all finished up dying for the Lord. That willingness to die could almost be seen as a requirement of the calling. If we read the reinstatement of Peter in **John 21v18-19** we see that Jesus tells him quite plainly the cost of his calling and once he has explained the cost asks Peter to follow him, for God is not a God of deception; He tells us clearly the cost of discipleship. As Paul puts it:

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as men.

1 Corinthians 4v9

So as we start to look at the ministry of an apostle, let us be clear that it is not a ministry for the proud or power hungry, for those who want fame before men or riches and comfort. Rather it is for those who are willing to humble themselves and give up everything they have and are for the Lord; to risk it all in the service of the King. But also let us remember it is a ministry to be aspired to, just as we aspire to be like Christ. As it is a ministry that revolves around the power of the Holy Spirit working through the person rather than the apostles natural abilities, we need to understand that the only thing preventing us moving forwards is our willingness to step out in faith and pay the cost in the flesh.

As with all the ministries we have looked at over the weeks, it starts with a calling. Jesus called the his twelve apostles (**Mark 3v13-19**) and if you notice it wasn't just a calling with a title, it was a calling with a mission! The first part was to spend time with him, the second part was to go out and minister. It's at this point that people often miss the crucial part of the apostolic ministry; it is about going where the gospel has not gone before. If we think of Christ in his apostolic role (**Hebrews 3v1**), he brought the gospel into the world. He pioneered the gospel message with a ministry that was aimed at the heart rather than bringing a set of laws, and through that ministry, which included the full sacrifice of himself, brought the message of salvation to the lost sheep of Israel.

His disciples, the followers of Christ that he designated apostles continued that ministry, first with the planting of the church in Jerusalem, but then spreading out to take the gospel into the world. Later as we read about the apostle Paul, we see a man who is willing to give up everything to travel and take the gospel to places where it has not been preached before (**Romans 15v20**). At first you could think this is the same job as an evangelist, but with an apostolic ministry the apostle goes

into new areas, not just to take the gospel, but to plant new churches and this is why in many countries missionaries are called apostles. However, that is not always the best of descriptions as not everyone on missions is an apostle. An example from my own past was that I was involved in evangelism for a particular church plant, I was not the apostle, the one who had started the work in the new area was in many ways the apostle, I went as a helper just as we see that Paul had helpers.

One of the other things that we see with apostles is that they are working in areas, often long distances from any other church. In the Western world, when we think of a church plant, we will often think of taking a group of believers from a church and planting another church within a reasonably close distance so that the new church can be supported by the older church. For the apostle this is just not possible. They will usually be working in a new area, often a long way from any possible support. They are not going to be able to go out and steal a few people from other churches to start the work, instead they are going to have to start from scratch and on top of that may have to learn a new language before they can even start. Added to the burden is the need to survive in a foreign environment, this may require a tent making ministry to allow the person not only to fund themselves, but also to meet requirements to be in a country. And as if that was not enough there are also the dangers of taking the gospel to new areas. As Paul put it so well, there are a huge number of dangers to be faced (**2 Corinthians 11v26-29**) and even in my own experience I have seen that those dangers exist even today. The dangers of travel are very real. The first missionaries I knew who died on the field both died in travel accidents and I have lost count of the incidents I have been involved in while travelling in remote areas. On top of this as Paul mentions, is the danger that the local people or even the traditional church will turn on the apostle. Over the years many people taking the gospel to new areas, have taken it at the cost of their lives, and let us remember that this is the pattern the first apostles laid down. Most of the early apostles finished up as martyrs for their faith in different parts of the world. That is something in our risk averse lifestyle that we find hard to contemplate, that the Lord may call us to make the ultimate sacrifice, just as Christ made the ultimate sacrifice for us.

So as we think about this kind of ministry we see that it is not something that you just rush into. Many think of this kind of ministry through romantic rose tinted glasses, in the short term there is the novelty of the new way of life, but that novelty soon wears off. When visiting missions I have often been astounded as to just how much time and work it takes just to live in a new location, on one mission in Guinea Bissau, just collecting the water for the day took over an hour. That's not an hour of preaching, that's just carrying water. Having visitors just increased the amount of water to be moved. A simple trip to the shops to get supplies was a two day trip, so learning to go without became normal. At first there was the novelty factor, but when you have been moving water day after day for years the novelty wears off. Even the burden of paperwork can be huge; in Europe and more Westernised countries movement is easy, especially if we are just visiting. However, to live in many countries requires endless paperwork, days waiting in offices for a stamp from an official.

Finally, and one of the biggest issues, is separation from family. In remote areas a call home can be impossible, even in our modern age and even when possible, there is still the sense of distance. On my first visits to Poland phone calls home would have to be booked the day before at the local post office. It basically meant phoning home was impossible and so I would often be away for a month with no contact. In those times the enemy puts all sorts of thoughts in your mind as to the safety and health of your loved ones, it is a constant battle of faith to hand their safety over to the Lord. Even when there is contact the feeling of helplessness can be overwhelming. I remember the first

time I was able to make a call to Liz from Poland, I was so excited to speak to her only to find out that she had broken her toe, Daniel had been in hospital, the vacuum cleaner had caught fire and the central heating had broken and there I was helpless, two days drive away. Praise God he had provided for all the situations, but even after the call, it was still a battle to focus on the ministry at hand when all I wanted to do was be home to help out and I was only away for a month. Other sacrifices that are often made are the missing of family events, weddings and sadly funerals, these often unseen sacrifices are not easy and can lead to criticism from friends and family alike.

So when we think of apostles, those taking the gospel to new areas, we start to see that this is a tough calling, a calling that comes with a sacrificial cost, true worship (**Romans 12v1**). It's a ministry that requires a very close relationship with the Lord for there will often be no brothers or sisters to confer with or be encouraged by. It is going to require the ability, not just to seek the Lord for how to minister to others, but also a reliance on being fed daily by the Lord alone, spiritually and often physically. For just as we see with the early apostles, the strength of their life was that they had been with Jesus. This becomes even more crucial when working in a remote area, often facing struggles and frustrations for years at a time. Even more amazing to me is that when I look at someone like the apostle Paul, he would work in a new area, often for years facing struggles and rejection until a small church had been planted and then instead of sitting back and relaxing in the fruits of his labour, he would move on to the next area to face the same struggles all over again. When we read in **James 1v2-4** of the struggles that develop perseverance, those working in a true apostolic ministry will need it in large quantities.

This may at first seem to be a very negative view of the apostles ministry, but when we are called to something, God does not deceive us for if we will listen He will tell us the costs involved. However, there are huge blessings from following in the footsteps of Jesus. For as we follow Christ's example we experience the Father as Christ experienced Him. We see His provisions in ways that we would not experience elsewhere and grow in our understanding of what his life was like, seeing the world as he saw it. Our walk of faith goes from being a theory to becoming a testimony that we can share and look back on with amazement.

For the Lords calling with all it's struggles may lead to the death of our flesh, but it will bring true life to our souls. If we will allow the Lord to lead us, it will bring us into a new life that we never thought possible.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10v10

Over these last few weeks we have looked at different types of ministry, now the question we have to ask is what is the Lord calling us to do as individuals, as couples, as families? Do we truly know and if not why not?

The first steps to ministry are always the same, a servant heart out of love for God. A heart that makes a priority out of seeking the Father, not to tell Him what to do, but to humbly sit at His feet and listen, only then will we be able to hear clearly His call on our lives.