

MINISTRY: EXERCISING YOUR GIFTS

ACTS 2:1-47

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

M.I. MINISTRY ENABLES EACH INDIVIDUAL TO FIND THEIR PLACE IN MINISTRY SO THAT THE CHURCH AS A BODY CAN FULFILL ALL ITS FIVE PURPOSES.

I. MINISTRY FROM WITHIN (Vs. 1-13)

THERE ARE TOO MANY EXCUSES WHY PEOPLE DON'T GET INVOLVED IN MINISTRY. THE FACT IS EACH ONE OF US HAS RECEIVED GIFTS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT. IT IS NOT ABOUT US. IT IS ABOUT GOD.

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- A. WORSHIP (V. 43)
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We have come to the last week in our series discussing our purpose in life. We have been asking, "What on earth am I here for? And further, why does Devon Church exist?"

So far we have discussed worship as our love response to God's initiative of love for us. We said that if we were found to be good, we would want to share Him with others and we called this evangelism. We also said that we should be growing and maturing day by day. This is what the Bible calls discipleship. Last week we said that as we mature, we should be less self-centered and should become more involved in meeting the physical, emotional, spiritual and material needs of one another. We said this is what true fellowship is all about.

This morning we are going to take a look at ministry. It seems to me that as we fulfill this purpose in the context of the church body, we enable the church to fulfill its mission in all other areas. Ministry has to do with finding our place in the ministration of the church. Each of us has been given a spiritual gift by God when we became believers. In addition to that, God created each of us with unique personalities, gifts, abilities, resources, and experiences.

He expects us to take a serious inventory of these gifts and find a place to minister in the church. We as leaders have committed ourselves to assisting each one here to find his or her place in ministry. Ministry should be exciting and if we are properly placed in ministry, we should also be energized.

I always thought my gift was teaching, and I am energized as I study each week for Sunday morning. But I do have to admit that I am always nervous every Sunday when it comes time to preach the sermon. Perhaps it is because of the start I got in ministry. You see, not all people are excited about ministry. Let me give you an example.

You remember the church that I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?) It was so tough that I was almost afraid to get up and preach each week. After I was there about a month, I had to make an announcement that there would be a board meeting directly after the Sunday morning worship service. Several people came to the meeting that were not board members, so I said to them, "You must have misunderstood the announcement this is not a congregational meeting, this is a board meeting." One guy answered, "We know. If there are any people more bored by your sermon this morning, we would like to meet them." Now you know why am a little anxious about preaching each Sunday morning.

But as you know people have all sorts of excuses for not participating in ministry. Since ministry affects every one of the purposes we already discussed, I think it would be safe to say that one of the signs of a mature church would be that most of the congregation has found their place in ministry and are actively involved in it. I think it will become evident as we study this passage. However, let me quickly demonstrate this point. There are few gifts that focus on ministry to unbelievers. Further, we said that one of our purposes was evangelism. The gifts of apostle, evangelist, miracles, and healings can all be used in leading people to Christ. The gifts of teaching, exhortation, words of knowledge, words of wisdom, prophesy, and others can be used in discipleship. These gifts can help people grow. Gifts showing mercy, healing, wisdom, knowledge, service, help and giving to others can be used in fulfilling the Bible's definition of fellowship. Since worship is our response to God's love initiative towards us, and our lives are to be holy and living sacrifices, we can use all the gifts in worship.

What I am trying to say is this: **FULFILLING THE PURPOSE OF MINISTRY ENABLES INDIVIDUALS TO FIND THEIR PLACE IN MINISTRY SO THAT THE**

CHURCH AS A BODY CAN FULFILL ALL FIVE PURPOSES.

Ministry can simply be defined as using our Spiritual gifts to continue the work Jesus started while He was here on earth. Jesus continually worshipped God by submitting His will to the Father's. It was Jesus' constant desire to demonstrate His love for the Father by submission. Jesus had a passion to reach the lost and His life and death were dedicated to evangelizing these lost. He invested three years in discipling the 12 Apostles and several other close followers; He was committed to their spiritual growth. He fellow-shipped by healing the sick, feeding the poor, and setting captives free. Jesus dedicated His life to ministry.

I. MINISTRY FROM WITHIN (Vs. 1-13)

THERE ARE TOO MANY EXCUSES WHY PEOPLE DON'T GET INVOLVED IN MINISTRY. THE FACT IS EACH ONE OF US HAS RECEIVED GIFTS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT. IT IS NOT ABOUT US. IT IS ABOUT GOD.

Even though Jesus was God in the flesh, He drew on the same power available to you and me to accomplish all He was called to do. He drew on the power of God The Holy Spirit. Verses 1-13 describe this ministry from within. Here is what I want us to understand about ministry: **THERE ARE TOO MANY EXCUSES WHY PEOPLE DON'T GET INVOLVED IN MINISTRY. THE FACT IS EACH ONE OF US HAS RECEIVED GIFTS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT. IT IS NOT ABOUT US. IT IS ABOUT GOD.**

A. PREPARING OURSELVES FOR MINISTRY (V. 1)

Let us examine how we can be preparing for ministry in verse 1. Fifty days have passed since Jesus died and rose from the dead. If you were here when we discussed the purpose of evangelism, you will remember that Jesus instructed the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they received power to be His witnesses the world over.

If you were to go back and read through Chapter 1 of Acts, you would notice that the 11

remaining disciples, a group known as "the women" and Mary, the mother of Jesus met in an upper room for constant prayer. It lists the number of believers at about 120. They were waiting for Jesus to fulfill His promise. They devoted themselves to constant prayer and study.

We all want to know God's will, and we all want to hear God speak to us.

However, if you are like me, we could not say that we have devoted ourselves to prayer. I pray a lot, but mostly they are often helter-skelter prayers and I pray in a hurry. I have an idea what I would like to see happen, and ask God to bless it, and most of the time I do ask for good things. Seldom do I carve out some serious time to come before God, quiet myself, and wait for Him to speak. If I were really interested in hearing from God, I should be quieter and more deliberate about listening.

If we are making excuses why we do not minister, then we are not looking to the right power source. Let me challenge us here this morning. Dedicate yourself to asking God to let you know where He wants you in ministry. Agree with God that whatever it is, you will commit yourself to go ahead and obey, no matter how scared you are. Humble yourself to the point that it has nothing to do with you and everything to do with God's Holy Spirit.

B. RECEIVING POWER FOR MINISTRY (Vs. 2-3)

The early churches prepared themselves for ministry by humbling themselves in prayer. Verses 2-3 describe their receiving power for ministry. The text says that the event came as a surprise. Suddenly, the whole house was filled with the sound like that of a violent wind and something that looked like tongues of fire appeared to be settling on each of them. The language indicates that something supernatural was happening. However, the event seemed to involve their senses, they saw something, and they heard something. There is no human language that is sufficient to describe the event, but they tried.

Let us try to picture us in this upper room. We hear this hurricane type sound fill the house and then we see some sort of fiery substance split apart and come to rest on one another's heads. Later we will see that hearing and speaking are involved. Look at the source of the phenomena in verse 2. The source is heaven. God gave them the gift that Jesus promised and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

When you and I gave our lives to Jesus in faith, not only did we receive salvation, we received the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit, we all received a supernatural gift. You see, whatever excuse we use not to be actively involved in ministry has the wrong focus. We have received heavenly power to minister. I would like each of us to take a moment and ask ourselves why we are not actively using our spiritual gifts? I know a lot of people do a lot of good things in the church however, that may be from a human focus as well. We may find a task we enjoy doing and convince ourselves that we are fine because we are serving the church. However, since we have all received heavenly gifts the question should be, "Am I serving where God wants me and where He has gifted me?"

C. THE EFFECTS OF SURRENDERING TO MINISTRY (Vs. 4-13)

When you decide to surrender to God's leading, you better hold on to your hat because life starts to get crazy and exciting. In verses 4-13, look at the effects of surrendering to ministry. There is no doubt about success. The key is to ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit, then surrender, obey and hold on for dear life.

Immediately all these believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and they started talking in tongues. Now in the New Testament there are a few different types of tongues. But here it is clear that they were speaking in foreign languages.

It says that Jews from all over the world were gathered in Jerusalem and each one heard

a clear presentation of the gospel in his or her own native tongue. If you were to take time and examine the list you would notice that the territories extend from as far East as Iran to as far west as Rome, from as far North as Europe and as far south as Africa. In Luke's mind, the whole world was there. The believers, about 120 of them were speaking in tongues and all of them heard the gospel in their own native language.

As the believers were speaking, the Holy Spirit was working on the hearts of the hearers. They heard the wonders and message of God in a personally meaningful way. Do you get the significance? We must present the Gospel and the Good News of salvation, but we must pray that the Holy Spirit take away the spiritual blindness of those we are ministering to. We exercise our gifts of ministry in humility. It is up to the Holy Spirit to make the ministry effective.

These believers were so powerful, that it frightened the hearers. In fact, some said, "They're drunk!" Let me just take time to recap this section. There really is no excuse to step out of our comfort zones and do ministry. Many Christians are taking up pew space, rotting away, doing nothing with their spiritual gifts. Is that something we want to face Jesus with on the last day? God has taken away all our excuses, He has gifted us, He has empowered us, He provides opportunities for us, and He is the one that ministry is all about. I am afraid that this is the sad reality. **THERE ARE TOO MANY EXCUSES WHY PEOPLE DON'T GET INVOLVED IN MINISTRY. THE FACT IS, EACH OF US HAS RECEIVED GIFTS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT AND IT IS NOT ABOUT US, IT IS ALL ABOUT GOD.**

II. MINISTRY TO UNBELIEVERS (Vs. 14-42)

SINCE WE KNOW THAT GOD HAS A HEART FOR THE LOST, IT SHOULD BE NO SURPRISE THAT THERE ARE SEVERAL SPIRITUAL GIFTS THAT PERTAIN TO WINNING PEOPLE TO CHRIST.

Look, my intent is not to make anyone feel guilty about this. It is my intent to encourage all of us to get off our fannies and start living up to our calling in Christ.

As we said before, we have the responsibility of ministry to unbelievers as described in verses 14-42. In other words, **SINCE WE KNOW THAT GOD HAS A HEART FOR THE LOST, IT SHOULD BE NO SURPRISE THAT THERE ARE SEVERAL SPIRITUAL GIFTS THAT PERTAIN TO WINNING PEOPLE TO CHRIST.**

A. AN EVANGELIST (Vs. 14-15)

From uneducated, impulsive, sometimes cowardly fisherman, we meet a powerful evangelist in verses 14-15. Peter is no longer timid since he has been filled with the Holy Spirit, and steps up to the forefront and gets the attention of the crowd. Peter did not attend university, or take Bible and rhetoric classes in those 40 days. It is the same Peter who said and did stupid things when he was with Jesus, with one exception. Peter has now been filled with and gifted by God's Holy Spirit. If Peter were drunk, then the liquor would have been speaking but he is not drunk he is filled with the Holy Spirit; it is God speaking to him.

I think this is a very important point as we decide to minister. If we are being driven by anything except the Holy Spirit, then no matter how noble the task, and no matter how much "good" we do, it does not count. Ultimately any ministry done that is not driven by the Holy Spirit, is from the evil one. I do not think that I can possibly overstate this. We talked about this last week. People do things for all sorts of reasons but it is critical that we be driven and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Doing "good" for wrong reasons is not doing "good". On the other hand, not doing what the Holy Spirit encourages us to do and driving us to do, is just as evil. When Peter said he would stick with Jesus to the end, that was a noble gesture, but not God inspired. Peter could not live up to that promise. But here, empowered by God's Holy

Spirit, Peter cannot fail. Peter has been given the gift of evangelism.

B. AN EVANGELISTIC MESSAGE (Vs. 16-36)

In verses 16-36 he preaches a powerful evangelistic message. In this message, Peter lays out the basics of the gospel. We were created to be in a love relationship with God. However, all of us, because of our natural bent towards sin and because of our actual rebellion against God, that relationship was severed. This is what the Bible calls spiritual death. We are physically alive, but separated from God. Any attempt to fix that problem through religion or doing good works is futile in fact we would be working against God. God Himself fixed the sin problem through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The only way to be in a right relationship with God is to acknowledge Jesus as the promised Messiah and place our faith in Him as Lord. Surrendering our lives to Jesus is the only way to be reconciled with God. There is NO other way. Whatever gift we use, the glory must go directly to God. The message of grace we preach to unbelievers, and continually to ourselves is, that we are unworthy. We continue to sin. The only answer to our problems is Jesus. The message was powerful. Jesus, the one all of us has crucified by our sins and rebellion, is both Lord and Messiah. The message was powerful then and the message is just as powerful today.

People are chasing after all sorts of things today. It is cruel not to tell unbelievers about Jesus, after all our purpose as individuals and as a church is to evangelize the lost. That is an awesome privilege and responsibility.

C. AN EVANGELISTIC RESPONSE (Vs. 37-42)

But what a rush when you see an evangelistic response such as in verses 37-42. It says that Peter's words convicted them deeply and they asked him what to do. Now keep in mind, the voice was Peter's but the message was God's. These people were responding to God, not

Peter. Peter told them to repent and they needed to change their minds as to who Jesus was. They had to turn away from sin and turn to God. He told them to be baptized as an outward sign of their commitment. I do not often get to preach about baptism but here is a good chance. It is faith in Jesus Christ that saves us. But Peter attaches baptism to this equation. Baptism is the public confession that Jesus is Lord. Let me clarify a few things here. Faith in Jesus Christ and that alone is what saves a person. Many people point to the thief on the cross as an example of a person who went to heaven without baptism -- and that is true. However, I would also like to point out that there is no such thing in the New Testament as a believer who is not baptized. It is unheard of. The New Testament Church could not think of a person who accepted Christ refusing baptism. They did not have fancy classes or examinations. They did not wait to reach some spiritual level. Immediately, when someone accepted Christ, they were baptized. I want to strongly encourage you this morning, if you are not baptized, see me right away so we can help you to publicly claim Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you are not yet saved, please do not put this off another day. The time is now! Believe and be baptized!

Please don't miss this neat phrase in verse 38. "They received the Holy Spirit in the salvation experience". Each person who comes to faith in Jesus receives the Holy Spirit. Also, don't miss this. They prayed for 50 days. Peter preached for 3 minutes, and, 3,000 people were saved. We pray for 3 minutes, talk for 50 days, and very few people get saved. To be an effective evangelist, or to exercise any spiritual gift requires humility, submission to God, and prayer that waits for and listens to God. We are definitely called to minister through evangelism. **SINCE WE KNOW THAT GOD HAS A HEART FOR THE LOST, IT SHOULD BE NO SURPRISE THAT THERE ARE SEVERAL SPIRITUAL GIFTS THAT PERTAIN TO WINNING PEOPLE TO CHRIST.**

III. MINISTRY TO BELIEVERS (Vs. 43-47)

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Now this 120-person church has turned into a 3,120-person church. What is supposed to happen now? As verses 43-47 illustrate, ministry to believers has to happen. **EVEN THOUGH WE AS INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS SHOULD BE LIVING OUT ALL FIVE PURPOSES IN OUR LIVES, GOD HAS SPECIALLY GIFTED EACH OF US IN MANY DIFFERENT AREAS SO THAT WE CAN EFFECTIVELY MINISTER TO ONE ANOTHER.** Just go back and quickly look at verse 42. People say they don't have to go to church to be a Christian. That may be partially true, but it was common practice to join together with other believers and to grow through discipleship. Further, our spiritual gifts are to be used in the context of community. Just like an un-baptized Christian was unheard of in the early church, it would be unheard of for a new believer not to come in and join the church. Ministry happened in the context of the church.

A. WORSHIP (V. 43)

We saw that the early church took the purpose of evangelism very seriously. Look at verse 43. They took worship seriously as well and a deep sense of awe came over them. God was working through the apostles. Many miraculous signs and wonders took place at the apostles' hands. Awe, reverence, and fear are the proper responses to God. I do not think we focus on that enough. Do you think people would continue not to take service and ministry seriously if they realized how powerful and awesome God is? Do you think we would take sin lightly if we had a proper perspective of how holy and how powerful and how dangerous God is? This early church stood in awe of God. Knowing how awesome God is solves another problem

it takes away all our excuses for not taking ministry seriously because God is the one who ministers. We, like Peter, are merely the vessels.

As we worship here on Sunday mornings, we should catch a sense of how powerful and how holy God is. We should respond by listening for His voice, and then have hearts to obey. Ministry, using our spiritual gifts, is our worshipful response to God.

B. FELLOWSHIP (Vs. 44-45)

The early church fellow-shipped as described in verses 44-45. They came together to meet the spiritual, emotional, physical and material needs of one another. They shared their lives, their spiritual gifts, and their resources with one another and they were intimately involved in one another's lives.

C. DISCIPLESHIP (Vs. 46-47)

In addition to evangelism, worship, and fellowship, ministry took place in the context of discipleship as described in verses 46-47. In verse 42 we saw that the early church devoted itself to the disciples' teachings. Look at the context in verse 46. They worshipped together in the temple, and they also met in each other's homes. They shared their lives with one another in the context of small group meetings.

This church knew and understood their purpose. They worshipped, they evangelized, they discipled, they fellow-shipped, and they ministered. Look how they are described. They were filled with great joy and generosity all the while they praised God.

And please do not miss what can happen even here at Devon Church if we remain faithful to our purposes. Everyone was filled with awe as great things were accomplished as described in verse 43, but in verse 47 it states that, "God added to their group those who were being saved." And that starts the cycle all over again. New believers have to be discipled and

likewise, have to find their place in ministry. God has gifted us to minister to one another.

EVEN THOUGH WE AS INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS SHOULD BE LIVING OUT THE FIVE PURPOSES IN OUR LIVES, GOD HAS SPECIALLY GIFTED EACH OF US IN MANY DIFFERENT AREAS SO THAT WE CAN EFFECTIVELY MINISTER TO ONE ANOTHER.

Here we are at the end of our 5-week series in which we have tried to answer the question, "What on earth am I here for?" We as believers and we as the church, the body of Christ are here to worship, evangelize, disciple, fellowship, and to minister.

FULFILLING THE PURPOSE OF MINISTRY ENABLES INDIVIDUALS TO FIND THEIR PLACE IN MINISTRY SO THAT THE CHURCH AS A BODY CAN FULFILL ALL OF ITS FIVE PURPOSES.

For whatever reason, people find all sorts of excuses not to step out in faith and use their gifts in ministry. But the saddest one is that people are so focused on their own talents and abilities that they forget that God the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers.

I want those of you who continually tell yourselves, "I can't do this," to listen carefully to this story by Earl Palmer.

"The Amazon River is the largest river in the world. The mouth is 90 miles across. There is enough water to exceed the combined flow of the Yangtze, Mississippi, and Nile Rivers. So much water comes from the Amazon that they can detect its currents 200 miles out in the Atlantic Ocean. One irony of ancient navigation is that sailors in ancient times died for lack of water ... caught in windless waters of the South Atlantic. They were adrift, helpless, dying of thirst. Sometimes other ships from South America who knew the area would come alongside and call out, 'What is your problem?' And they would exclaim, 'Can you spare us some water? Our sailors are dying of thirst!' And from the other ship would come the cry, 'Just lower your buckets. You are in the mouth of the mighty Amazon River.'" The irony of ancient Israel and the tragedy around us today is that God, the fountain of living water, is right here and people don't recognize Him!"

I do not know what's holding us back, as individuals or as a church, but I do know that God has richly gifted us to do ministry and fulfill all His purposes concerning us, His church. We have been empowered by God's Holy Spirit to worship, ... to evangelize, ... to discipleship, ... to fellowship, ... we have been chosen and gifted by God to be ministers.