

## The Blessings and Challenges of Ministry

### Acts 13:42-52

Sermon Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on 7-1-2007

#### Introduction:

On vacation I was reading the magnificent book by Dwyer on the War Between the States. And it stirred my spirit to read of the courage and perseverance of some of the Christian leaders who were willing to receive not only the victories but also the setbacks from God's hand. That war produced many heroes who can be emulated. I don't know of a single spiritual success story that did not have its accompanying failures as well as incredible challenges that had to be overcome. Pastors often wish they could be a George Whitefield, but probably do not have what it takes to face the pain and challenges he faced. Successful parents, businessmen, soldiers and statesmen have also had to endure great challenges.

One of the most inspiring stories in Elijah's life is recorded in 1 Kings 18. I love this story. It is the confrontation on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Just prior to this, king Ahab wanted to kill Elijah because Elijah had prayed that there would be no rain. And boy was Ahab upset. He called Elijah the troubler of Israel, failing to admit that his own sins were what was really troubling Israel. And so, despite the risk of death, Elijah boldly confronts Ahab, commands Ahab (and I just marvel at this – he *commands* Ahab) to gather all of Israel together at Mount Carmel, gives a challenge to Ahab that will reveal who the true God is. And his boldness is just amazing. There must have been something about God's presence with Elijah that made king Ahab meekly obey him. So Ahab gathers the people and his 450 prophets of Baal. And you know the story. He tells the prophets of Baal to call down fire from heaven to consume their sacrifice. And nothing happens. Hour after hour goes by. Elijah even taunts them as they dance all morning, cutting themselves with knives, weeping and calling upon their false god. Elijah mocks them, saying, Maybe your god is on a journey, or maybe he is too busy, or maybe he is asleep. Shout louder. And they fail miserably. Then Elijah takes his turn. He builds an altar, pours buckets and buckets of water all over the altar and into the trenches around the altar. When he calls upon God, instantly fire from heaven consumes not only the sacrifice and the wood, but even the stones and the water in the trench. Now when you read a story like that, you would never expect the kind of depression and discouragement that Elijah experiences in chapter 19. Elijah's afraid, he is fleeing from Jezebel, and in verse 4 it says, **he... sat**

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**down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.** The reason I bring this up is to illustrate that even the greatest prophets had not only blessings, but also incredible challenges in ministry. If it could happen to them, it can certainly happen to us. And it is important that we face both the blessings of ministry and the challenges of ministry with faith as Paul does in this chapter. I think this is a good Scripture to challenge us whether we have formal or informal ministry.

## **I. The Blessings of Ministry**

### ***A. Seeing people hungry for the Word (v. 42)***

Let's look first at the blessings. We might wish that we could always see the kinds of blessings that Paul saw in verses 42-44. In verse 42 Paul sees people who have been made hungry for the Word. **So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.** Man! that would be encouraging! We long for that kind of hunger for the Word when we minister to our children. Pastors long for that kind of hunger when they minister to congregations. The Anders long to see a bit more hunger when they bring the Word to politicians and to the broader society. And there are others of you who long for your ministry of the Word to be received with hunger. It is easy to be enthusiastic in ministry when others have a whole hearted enthusiasm for what we are doing. And we praise God when that happens. But it would also be easy for us to begin to attribute this success to ourselves and to become proud. There are dangers to the times of blessing and there are dangers in the times of challenge. We've got to depend upon Christ even when things are going well. But this would have been a real sweet blessing for Paul— to see people hungry for the Word. I don't think there are very many things that make my heart more glad than to see this kind of zeal.

### ***B. Seeing them come to faith in the face of enormous opposition (v. 48)***

Probably the only thing that is *more* thrilling is to see a brand new convert or to see my child making profession of faith. And in the second sentence in verse 48 Paul summarizes the conversions that had been happening all through this time: **And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.** Lord willing, we will look at this verse more in depth next week. But when people come to faith despite enormous opposition, it is an exciting thing to see. It makes you weep. It makes all the difficulties seem

worthwhile. I think my ministry in   [country]   has been some of the most encouraging ministry that I have engaged in because God's Spirit is so powerfully at work in bringing people to faith, even in the face of enormous opposition. Later we will be seeing that we still need to persevere even when we don't have that kind of success. But what a blessing it is when God uses us as instruments in the salvation of other people. And I would encourage you to pray that God would give you that blessing. It's not just evangelists who win people to Christ. Sheep bear sheep.

### ***C. Seeing people finally "getting it" and able to walk in God's grace (v. 43)***

Another blessing is to see people finally "getting it" and learning how to appropriate God's grace for life, and not just for conversion. Verse 43 describes that: **Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.** Why would Paul have to persuade new believers to continue in the grace of God? Wouldn't that be the most natural thing to occur? But we should not discount the power of the flesh. Secondly, we should never pit divine sovereignty against human responsibility. What often happens is that new converts are brought into the church and that's all that happens. There is no discipleship; no persuasion to put off the flesh and to put on the grace of God. The whole focus of those churches is simply on getting new converts. And so you will have Christians who have been Christians for ten years who have never figured out how to overcome an addiction, anger, sexual impulses, a bad work ethic, poor communications skills or other issues. In fact, they have given up. They don't think that holiness is possible. And what makes matters worse is that some of the "Grace Movement" preachers often make it look like that is normal. These young Christians have genuinely started with grace in conversion, but they haven't been shown how to continue in grace – sanctification. And the fact that Paul had to persuade them shows that there must have been a bit of resistance. (After all, we still have the flesh resisting the Spirit.) People are fearful of getting out of their comfort zones. It's hard to give up a whole lifestyle that you are used to and begin to do everything new. Yet that is exactly what God has called us to do. He is making us a new creation; He is making all things new. And for us to enjoy that new life, we can't strive in our own flesh, because (as Jesus said) the flesh can only produce flesh. We must *continue* in grace just like we *started* in grace. This is something that many Christians forget. They think that Christianity is about *trying* harder.

In Galatians Paul addresses this church that was established in Acts 13. He didn't have a lot of time to ground these disciples in God's Word before he was run out of town. And then he gets distressing news that people have been teaching them the wrong thing. So he writes this letter. And in Galatians 3 he says, **O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect [or you could translate that, "being made mature"] by the flesh?** The rhetorical question should be answered, "No." And Paul doesn't believe in the false dilemma of having to choose between legalistic Christians and sinful Christians. No. He presents a third alternative – Spirit-empowered Christians. We start by grace and we must continue by grace. And grace includes the Spirit's empowering. And when people finally get it and they learn to actually live by grace day by day, it is so exciting for pastor.

I watched a movie years ago, and don't remember the name of it. It was about a man who had spent most of his life in prison. When he finally got free, he didn't know what to do. He was extremely fearful of his new freedoms and responsibilities and felt ill prepared to live in this new world. In fact, he wanted to go back to prison because the regimentation brought security. It was all that he had known for years. And someone helped this individual to learn how to live in his new freedoms, to take on the duties of a free man and to not hole up in his apartment. It showed another man who had committed suicide because he couldn't handle life out in the real world. But this guy was determined to make it. He had been persuaded that going back into prison was not a good thing; that he needed to continue in the life to which he had been freed. And I thought that was a great metaphor of what *should* happen to Christians. Instead of longing for the familiar, easy, secure life that they are used to in prison, they should be persuaded to learn to live as free men and women. And maybe some of you are called to that wonderful work of coming along side of an immature Christian and helping them enter into the joy, power and freedom that Christ has purchased for us.

And if there are some here who are used to living the status quo, and you just don't know what it means to walk in the supernatural, please talk to me. It is my delight to not only persuade people, but to help them to see the new power that they have in Christ. In the last few weeks some of you have experienced a new power as you took fasting seriously. And fasting may have seemed silly. What difference could that make? You weren't zapped

out of heaven. You didn't hear bells or angel voices. Nothing seemed different, but you persevered in fasting because you trusted God. And lo and behold, for some reason you experienced grace to conquer that you hadn't experienced before. It's because you were willing to be persuaded; you were willing to try the foolishness of God's weak ways that prove themselves to be brilliant and strong.

#### ***D. Seeing times of remarkable success (v. 44)***

Another blessing is when we experience remarkable times of success. What minister wouldn't love to have the outpouring of God's Spirit on our city that happened to Antioch? Verse 44 says, **On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.** One book I have says that this *has* to be "exaggeration."<sup>1</sup> After all, that was a fairly decent sized city. Another commentary says, "Luke abandons all realism of presentation for the sake of depicting Paul as a great orator and successful missionary."<sup>2</sup> In other words, he was lying to get his point across. It was a preachers fib or a fisherman's story. But you know, that is just not characteristic of Luke. Even secular scholars have noted the painstaking care with which Luke records history, speeches, numbers and small details. There is no reason to not take this literally. Almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God.

And there *have* been times in history when God's Spirit has brought conviction upon people so powerfully that entire regions have become Christians in a matter of weeks. This has happened a number of times in Asia, the Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea, Irian Jaya, Indonesia and other places. And I pray that that would happen here in Omaha. But let me give you an American example. You all know the revival under John Wesley and George Whitefield. Well, when Whitefield traveled around America preaching in the 1700's, he found himself preaching to tens of thousands every single day. He estimated one crowd at 30,000 people, and Benjamin Franklin calculated these crowds as well, and was just astonished. These were new towns that he was traveling to every day. It was just a remarkable moving of God's Spirit. Neither Whitefield nor Wesley had those kinds of crowds before the revival and they didn't have them after the revival stopped. Their *preaching* didn't change. It was just a sovereign moving of God's Spirit. And that is what happened in verse 44. Almost the entire city was responsive.

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<sup>1</sup> William M. Ramsay, *The Cities of Paul*, p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 413-414.

### ***E. Seeing God's Word being glorified (v. 48)***

Another blessing we long for is to see God's Word being glorified rather than to see preachers or people being glorified. Look at verse 48. **Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.** They weren't wrapped up in Paul or in his team. They were struck by God Himself. His Word had captivated their hearts. It's not a blessing when churches build movements around a personality or when those personalities make boatloads of money from the Gospel. It's not a blessing when people stream to churches for welfare handouts or for programs. But it is a blessing when God's Word is glorified. That's an indication of Reformation. That should be the goal of your life. And we might ask, "How do we glorify God's Word?" And I would say that you glorify it by 1) believing it, 2) practicing it, 3) acknowledging that it has a power to change people. It is after all sharper than any two edged sword, isn't it? 4) But ultimately we glorify the Word by making it the measure and standard for everything that we do. It's not glorifying God's Word when we do not see it as sufficient for life and practice. It is not glorifying God's Word when we look to psychology rather than the Bible as the standard for counseling. It is not glorifying God's Word when we exclude the Word from the public arena or from politics. And what a blessing it is when I see our young people taking God's Word seriously in their discussions of politics and economics and other things. It blesses my heart.

### ***F. Seeing God's Word being spread far and wide (v. 49)***

Verse 49 indicates that this sharing of the Word spread and prospered all throughout Galatia. **And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.** Every pastor has times when it seems as if little impact is being made and other times when it seems like God is blessing everything that you are doing. Our longing is not just for the power of God's Word to impact *our* congregation, but also for it to have full impact throughout Nebraska and Iowa, throughout America and throughout the world. And I was very thrilled when I looked at the website statistics two weeks ago and saw the way people are using materials from both Biblical Blueprints website and the church website. People have been accessing these Biblical materials in England, Canada, Russia, Belgium, New Zealand, Germany, Egypt, Columbia, Brazil, Australia, Sweden, Netherlands, Japan, South Africa, Christmas Island, and even 278 hits from the Seychelles Islands. Any ministry is going to be encouraged when they see the message spreading. But it is also cool to see the growth of God's Word generationally in our church. Just think what will happen when our kids teach their

grandkids.

### ***G. Seeing the joy that comes through the filling of the Holy Spirit (v. 52)***

The last blessing that I want to highlight is given in verse 52. **And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.** I want you to notice that this joy and filling of the Holy Spirit did not occur in a mood chamber with candles and quiet music. It didn't occur in an awe-inspiring gothic cathedral with stained glass windows. It occurred in a context of incredible stress as Paul and his team is kicked out of the region by the civil authorities, and huge opposition is raised against them by the Jews. In other words, God's blessings often come in the midst of challenges. But what a blessing it is to be able to have God's joy, His presence and His empowering when things get tough. If you have not experienced that blessing, cry out to God for it. He loves to give His joy. In John 15:11 Jesus said, **These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.** When your cup of joy is full, it means that you can't fit any more joy in, right? Well, if that is His promise, we ought to read His instructions in John 15 to see how we can have His joy remaining in us and how our joy can be full. The same is true of the filling of the Holy Spirit. God is not a reluctant giver. In Luke 11 Jesus compares the Father to a human parent who gives food and good things to His children. And He concludes in verse 13, **How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!** Seek God's blessings even in the midst of the challenges that you have been facing.

## **II. The Challenges of Ministry**

### ***A. There will always be despisers of truth (v. 41)***

Well, let's look at the challenges that Paul and his team had been facing. Verse 41 says, **Behold you despisers...** Paul could already sense that there were some of the people in the synagogue who did not like what they heard. They despised the truth. And it's a remarkable thing when you think about it. If (as Jesus said) **the truth shall make you free** (John 8:32), you would think that people would love the truth. Who wouldn't want to be free?! But throughout the Scripture you find the exact opposite. Revelation 22:15 describes unbelievers as those who are loving and practicing a lie. They love the lie. Lies make them comfortable in their sin and autonomy, whereas truth makes them uncomfortable. If they were to believe the truth, they would have to take up their cross and follow Christ. They would have

to die to self and live for God's glory. And so you find Hosea 4:1 saying, **the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth ... in the land..."**

Jeremiah 9:5 says, **Everyone ...will not speak the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies...**

Jeremiah 9:3 complains that **"They are not valiant for the truth on the earth."**

And those who have been involved in ministry for very long get discouraged when they see that this despising of the truth doesn't just happen in the world; it also happens in the church. After all, Paul was preaching in the synagogue wasn't he? That was the Jewish church. Sometimes this despising is camouflaged in polite ways, but whether you reject it and speak against it boldly (like happened here) or whether you (more politely) simply ignore it, suppress it or rationalize it, it is still a form of despising the truth. That is the challenge that can discourage parents and discourage elders. And yet God strews the blessings we looked at in the midst of those challenges. And it is important that we not allow these challenges to make us ungrateful for the good things that are happening.

### ***B. Envy (v. 45)***

Envy is another challenge that ministries have to face. Verse 45 says, **But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy.** We are not told why they were envious. Perhaps they had been trying to convert Gentiles to Judaism, and it bothered them that this team can get such a following in one day where they could not. Or it may be that the Gentiles were sitting in their pew, and it irritated them. Or it may be that they were losing control. But envy, as irrational as it may be, is a powerful tool of the devil to undo a ministry. People may get envious of a minister's status, his following, his salary or any number of other things. And it is the very nature of envy to try to destroy what it can't have. Envy says, "If I can't have it, I don't want you to have it." In the midst of incredible blessings, Satan tries to discourage with things like this. Don't let the envy of others rob you of your joy. Forget about them. Focus on the Lord.

### ***C. Contradiction of the truth (v. 45) and rejection of the truth (v. 46)***

The next challenge that we see is contradiction of Paul in verse 45 and then rejection of the truth in verse 46. So verse 45 speaks of **contradicting**. They were arguing against Paul. And in verse 46 Paul said, **It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first but since**



**you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.** That was a wise move. Don't focus all your time on the squeaky wheels who will hate you for your help anyway. Spend your time on those who hunger for the Word. Yet where do many pastors focus all of their time? On the squeaky wheels who complain and are never content. Did you know that there are entire websites devoted to destroying a person's ministry and reputation and doing everything they can to trash that person's good theology. There are websites whose whole goal is to destroy Doug Phillips, D James Kennedy, Peter Hammond and others. And these are websites put out by Christians. The vitriol that you see in them just doesn't make any sense. And if Doug Phillips and D James Kennedy were to try to respond, they wouldn't have any time for ministry. And so we need to realize that *people are quite capable of this*. Total depravity guarantees it. It sometimes produces even the most irrational opposition. And of course, we need to make sure that we don't fall into that kind of negativism ourselves.

#### ***D. Blasphemy (v. 45)***

The fourth challenge is listed in verse 45 as **blaspheming**. You might wonder how a Jew could blaspheme. The thought of blaspheming would make a Jew shudder. They would never knowingly blaspheme. They didn't even speak the name of God because they were fearful of accidentally taking the name of God in vain. But they didn't consider the horrible things they said about Jesus to be blasphemy. They simply didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. And it is often out of ignorance and emotional outburst that some people continue to blaspheme to this day. They insist that all miracles or manifestations of the Spirit are demonic. Jesus said that this is a dangerous thing to do. When the Pharisees said that Jesus cast out demons by the prince of the demons, Jesus said that they had committed the unpardonable sin. He said that any blasphemy against Him could be forgiven, but not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And if you are on the front lines trying to do good in the name of Jesus, you will eventually have people blaspheming God in their opposition to you. And that can hurt.

#### ***E. Slander (v. 45) and persecution from unexpected sources (v. 50)***

But these people weren't content to simply speak against Jesus. In verses 45 and 50 they also spoke against Paul. And some of the opposition came from the most unexpected sources. Who would have thought that the devout women of that city would have stooped to this? Yet verse 50 says, **But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief**

**men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.** The word for “devout” is used in Acts of worshipers of the true God – those who fear God. The Greek word *sebomai*, can be translated as devout, pious, holy or God-fearing. You wouldn’t have expected such opposition from a devout “believer,” yet it happens all the time. Just witness the devout Christians who fought against each other in the War Between the States. This hurts worse than opposition from pagans. Any time you are involved in front-line ministries, you can expect that Satan will stir up slander and persecution against you. By the way, the Greek word for “stir up” has to do with the emotions –enflaming the emotions. If you act out of emotion you can be inflamed like they were. Lynch mobs do things they later regret because their emotions were stirred up. It is so important that we let reason control our emotions.

George Whitefield was frequently slandered by both believers and unbelievers. One time he received a false accusation in the mail. Here was his simple reply: "I thank you heartily for your letter. As for what you and my other enemies are saying against me, I know worse things about myself than you will ever say about me. With love in Christ, George Whitefield." (Daily Bread, August 18, 1992)

I thought it was interesting that he didn’t bother to defend himself. In fact, he said, “I’m really worse than what you think I am.” But he was so secure in God’s grace and felt so blessed by God’s presence, that what other people said about him didn’t have that much impact. His attitude on all of these things was to keep ministering and not allow the challenges of ministry to get him down. And I would encourage you to do the same. Now I should say this: you will find that extremely difficult to do if you have an orphan spirit rather than a sonship spirit. So I would encourage those of you who struggle with needing the approval of others to get the chart that I have put together on the orphan versus the sonship spirit and begin to pray through and process through those issues. You are going to need that security in order to face these challenges.

### ***F. Termination of great ministry opportunities (v. 50)***

But what happened in verse 50 could have easily made Paul and Barnabas give up. They had a fantastic ministry going in that city. They would have loved to have stayed to see it come to maturity. The majority in the city were open to the Gospel, but the authorities were stirred up to completely stop what they were doing. And that can be a hard blow. Paul had this happen to him over and over again. It would be like a pastor being evicted from his church 15 or 20 times. He’d be tempted to give up,

wouldn't he? Jonathan Edwards was forced out of his church with the accusation that he had committed adultery. All that he had worked for there was gone in a flash of time. And he wasn't able to defend himself. The congregation took her side. He felt helpless. He had friends who told him, "Mr. Edwards, you've got to defend yourself." But he thought, "What can I say? It is simply my word against her word, and there are some who want to believe her." So he just handed it over to God. And God opened a ministry in another city. And eventually he was vindicated. Some time later the woman from the previous church fell under conviction of her sin and confessed to the elders that her accusation against Jonathan Edwards had been completely false. She was just angry at him for his meddling preaching. All those who engage in ministry can face similar blessings and challenges. And I want to end by quickly outlining three prayer requests that we can offer up on behalf of each other to make sure that we handle these things well.

### **III. Pray that your leaders and each one of us would**

#### ***A. Take advantage of divine appointments quickly (vv. 42ff)***

First, pray that we would take advantage of divine appointments quickly. When there was a response to the Gospel in verses 42 and following, Paul and Barnabas didn't waste a day. They jumped into the opportunities. And it's a good thing they did, because they didn't have much time in this province.

When opportunities to minister come our way, it's so easy for us to consider our comforts rather than God's glory. We might think, "Well, maybe it will be more convenient in a week or two. I've just got so many things to do right now. I've got some mail to deal with, a lawn to mow, etc, etc" And we let the ministry opportunity slide by. Maybe we are flying in an airplane, and the passenger beside us wants to talk, and you sense that they are hurting and might be open to the Gospel. But you really wanted to read the rest of that novel, so you buried your head in your book and let that opportunity slide by. And it's not as if God takes us away from our pleasures that frequently. He delights in delighting us. But when God does present a divine appointment, make sure that you take advantage of it.

#### ***B. Adjust ministry, but not quit ministry (v. 46,51)***

Second, when opposition arises, adjust your ministry, but don't quit. It was discouraging for Paul to receive such unwarranted opposition from the Jews in verse 45. But it didn't make him quit. He just adjusted his ministry

and focused on the Gentiles who were interested (vv. 46f). In verse 50 they are *physically* thrown out of the region. Paul realizes that God is sovereign over even that, so he once again adjusts his ministry to what *is* possible, and in verse 51 he went on to Iconium. And God gave a very fruitful ministry there. And to me, Paul and Barnabas are modeling how to not allow discouragement make us give up. One man said, “Discouragement is a negative emotion with more than one trick up its dark sleeve. It tricks you into mentally or emotionally dwelling in the very place you want to leave.” (Anonymous) And I thought, “Wow! That’s exactly right.” Discouragement makes us sit in the very place we don’t want to be or to leave the place that we want to be. Let me read that to you again. “Discouragement is a negative emotion with more than one trick up its dark sleeve. It tricks you into mentally or emotionally dwelling in the very place you want to leave.” In Paul’s situation, discouragement would tempt him to quit preaching, even though his preaching had much success. And Paul would not give in to it. He made adjustments, but he never stopped moving forward in the calling that God had given to him.

And yet how many times do we allow discouragements to make us totally give up on what we desire. Let me read you an example from a famous American. This article said,

Cable television tycoon Ted Turner has often been quoted as being critical of fundamentalist Christianity. Turner made some very revealing remarks at a banquet in Orlando, Fla., in 1990, where he was given an award by the American Humanist Association for his work on behalf of the environment.

“Turner said he had a strict Christian upbringing and at one time considered becoming a missionary. “I was saved seven or eight times,” the newspaper quoted him as saying. But he said he became disenchanted with Christianity after his sister died, despite his prayers. (Spokesman-Review, May 1, 1990. [www.christianglobe.com](http://www.christianglobe.com)).

He had allowed challenges to disillusion him. Have you quit praying or trusting God because your prayers have not been answered? You are doing the same thing that Ted Turner did. If Paul and the other apostles had done that, we would likely not be here as Christians today.

### ***C. Would be driven by God’s call upon our lives (v. 46-47)***

#### **1. Know your call (v. 46)**

The last thing I would urge you to pray for your leaders and for yourselves is that we would be driven by God’s call upon our lives. Well, if

you are going to do that, you've got to have three things in place. First of all, you need to know what God has called you to do. And then you need to do it, and stick to it. Paul's call in chapter 9 was so clear that it was life-changing. And a sense of God's call will enable you to persevere in the face of the most difficult challenges. Most Christians don't know what God has called them to do. They don't have any passions, burdens and divine drives. And by the way, that call isn't usually a call to what we typically think of as church ministry. More often than not the call is to glorify God in a job. There are some people who have multi-faceted callings. I think of Eric Liddel who was called to be a missionary to China. And his sister could not understand how he could go to the Olympics. She thought that was a conflict with his call. And I love that scene where he talks to her about that in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. If you've not seen that movie, you've got to. It is a very inspiring movie. But Eric felt called to use his gift for running as well. He said, "God made me to run, and He made me to run fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure." And there are some who feel that sense of God's pleasure upon them when they are engaged in the ordinary jobs. And to me, that is one of the blessings of the Reformed Worldview – that all of life is sacred, and God's calling to be a plumber is just as significant as God's call to a pastor. Some are called to be writers. I know some Christians who have a clear call upon their lives to be civil magistrates, and they have been doing a terrific job. Others are called to be the best wives and mom's that they can be, and to share in their husband's calling. And it gives them great satisfaction in knowing that God wants them there and His smile of approval and blessing is on that call. But calling was a key to overcoming discouragement for Paul, and it is an important key for each of us as well. One theologian said, "Dissatisfaction and discouragement are not caused by the absence of things, but the absence of vision." (Joseph Parker). So first, know your call.

## **2. Live out your calling even when that call includes a "he must suffer" (9:15) clause**

Second, live out your calling even when that call includes a "he must suffer" clause. In chapter 9:15 God told Ananias to go to Paul and give him a message. Jesus said, **Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.** If you know that every one of us has a "he or she must suffer" clause in our callings too, it will help us to not be disillusioned. It is the people who think that God

never wills any difficulties who end up disillusioned because it is guaranteed that they will have difficulties. It's interesting that Paul uses the term "calling" for slaves who didn't have a choice. And he indicated that if you can get your freedom, that's great. But even a slave can have a sense of God's call in his life. The point is that sometimes our calling is not to fun, but to a boring work. And yet the sense of calling can give our boring work a value that makes us satisfied. If some of you know that God has made you to do a given line of work, because that is where your giftings lie, but things just aren't working out, I would encourage you to read the Intervarsity Press book, *Take this Job and Love It*. It gives a whole new perspective on work. So live out your calling even when that calling has a "he must suffer" clause in it.

### **3. Even when that call seems impossible to achieve (v. 47)**

And lastly, live out your calling even when that call seems impossible to achieve. I love the story of Wilberforce that was been made into the movie, *Amazing Grace*. He had a strong sense of God's calling upon him to end slavery. And even though everyone told him that it was impossible, he persevered in serving God through many years of opposition. And he saw slavery ended before his death. And when we are talking slavery there, we are *not* talking about the indentured servitude that the Bible calls for as a penalty to pay for restitution. We are talking about a horrible institution; an unbiblical institution. And many people told Wilberforce that his vision to overthrow that unbiblical slavery was impossible to achieve. But he was driven by his calling, not by their nay-saying.

Paul knew what his life was to be about. He was to preach to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. And in an environment when it was unpopular to include Gentiles, Paul had to constantly reinforce his sense of calling with the Scriptures that spoke of God's will for the Gentiles. Verse 47: **For so the Lord has commanded us: "I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth."**

There are many people who still don't think that's possible. Their eschatology says its not possible. But you know what? Most callings are not possible in our own strength.

The calling that God put upon my life in 1979 is just as gripping to me now as it was back then. In addition to being involved in pastoral work, God had called me to be involved in bringing reformation to the church and transformation to culture. And in the intervening years I have seen many sweet blessings and successes. I have also seen many challenges designed by Satan to try to discourage me and make me give up. But my sense of calling

has given me the perseverance needed to keep at it and to trust God's timing. And I pray that your sense of calling would do the same for each of you. Amen.

Children of God, I charge you to live out your callings, thanking God for the blessings, and being willing to handle the challenges, but in all things trusting Him for the outcome. Do not give up, but persevere in the power and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.