

Called to Minister

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Bible Text: John 15:13; 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:6

Preached On: Sunday, March 4, 2018

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You know, this morning, I don't believe it's too much of a stretch to say that if Jesus is alive, so should our faith be. In other words, if he is risen from the dead and he is alive, should not our faith, should not our life be raised from the dead and equally alive as he is alive? And yet too many times, we unfortunately walk around like dead men saying that we serve a risen Savior; we walk around making dead decisions and going down dead paths yet claiming we have a Savior that has "risen from the dead." We have an opportunity today to declare that we are not dead. We are alive. We have that privilege. We have that opportunity and in just a few moments, we're going to receive a step-by-step manual instruction guide on how to make that happen.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, this morning, we celebrate, we declare, we have sung, that you are alive; that the tomb is empty. And yet we confess we too often walk around as dead people, hanging our heads in a dead life, in a dead march, with a dead destination. Lord, help us to see today through your word that because of Christ Jesus, because of an empty tomb, that we are no longer dead; that we are alive and we have been called to be life in the midst of a dead and dying world. Help us, O God, today to see what your life lived through us is to look like. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to two very specific places, both in the New Testament, the Gospel of John 15 and 2 Corinthians 4. Now, I'm going to go ahead and share with you from the beginning: we're only going to be in John 15 for just a brief moment, in fact, we're going to somewhat use it like a diving board to dive off into 2 Corinthians 4. That's where we're going to spend the majority of our time today.

Now, if you're a first time guest or visitor with us, over the last few months we've been kind of walking through a journey together as a family of faith and we've been asking a very strategic question. The question is this: what does a disciple of Jesus Christ actually look like? What is someone who claims to be born again, claims to be a new creation in Christ, how is that lived out? And one of the things that we've talked about is that Jesus Christ has to be the center of everything; that we are rooted, we are grounded in his word; we have communication and direction through prayer; we fellowship and hold each other accountable as the body of Christ; and we reach out to a lost and dying world with the

Gospel of Jesus Christ. We've spoken about all those different aspects but today, we're going to kind of put the rubber to the road. We're going to look at the real nuts and bolts practical aspect of what does it look like to be a believer in Jesus Christ not just in here but out there, and we're going to talk about a word that we hear all the time, the word is ministry. We hear about ministers and ministries and doing ministry and we're going to talk today, what does that actually look like? We're going to address this subject matter: what does it mean to be called to ministry?

Now I want to begin over in John 15 with a very simple statement that Jesus makes. This is the night before his crucifixion. He has just washed the disciples' feet. He has told them the Holy Spirit is going to come upon them and they're going to be the change agents of the world. They're going to see the world turned upside down and in the midst of communicating there in verse 13 of John 15, Jesus makes this statement,

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

And what Jesus is doing here, he's kind of bridging the gap between this picture of washing their feet and the ministry that we see the early church in the book of Acts and he's saying that no greater love, in fact there is no greater thing that you can do than to lay down your life for your friends. What Jesus is sharing with us is this picture of ministry; that when we give of ourselves and when we live for others rather than ourselves.

Today, again, I want to thank our children's ministry who have come alongside of us in this journey, who have given us a wonderful image of assisting and helping and serving someone else for the sake of sharing the Gospel that they so desperately need to hear.

That being said, I want you to turn over to 2 Corinthians 4. I want to fast forward a couple of decades. Jesus has made this declaration that we're to lay down our life for our friends. He has given them the illustration with the washing of their feet. The power of the Holy Spirit has come upon them at Pentecost and I want us to see what does this look like. I mean, what does this look like not just on Sunday when we celebrate as the body of faith, what does this look like Monday through Saturday.

As you turn to 2 Corinthians, obviously this is communication the Lord is giving to the church at Corinth and I think oftentimes we fall in this trap of saying, "Well, that was way back then. It's been 2,000 years. How can we relate to these folks?" Let me share with you how you can. The church at Corinth, the community in Corinth was very secular and carnal. Is not our culture very secular and carnal? The community in Corinth was very technologically advanced. Do we not have the advantages of technology in our culture? We do. This was a very wealthy educated community. Do you see the similarities? So oftentimes we say, "Well, but how can we relate? How can we look at what they did and emulate it in our lives? It's such a different world." It's not a different world, we've just got different toys. That's the only difference. So the communication that

is given to these individuals need not be seen today as, "Well, that was for them." This needs to be seen as, "Well, that is for us."

Beginning in verse 1 of 2 Corinthians 4, it says,

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now this passage begins by talking about that we have this ministry and if we're going to talk about ministry, if we're going to talk about what does it look like to minister to a lost and dying world, what a wonderful passage. How did these folks do it in a culture very similar to ours today?

Well, I think the first question we have to ask ourselves is: who is it that is to minister? And when we ask this question, well, who is to be a minister, who is it that is to serve in this capacity, I think we understand that there is a plurality here because the word used is "we." It says that we have this ministry. I mean, I didn't major in English in college but that typically means more than one and it means you and me together. That's what "we" means. The question we have to ask is: who is the "we"? I mean, who is he talking about? And we naturally gravitate toward Ephesians 4 where it says, "And he has called some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some pastors, some teachers." We love that passage talking about all the offices of the church, so to speak, but then you go into verse 12 and it makes this statement, "For the perfecting of the saints and the work of the ministry." And like we talked about last week, this issue with the Nicolaitans in Revelation 2, that somehow there is a chasm of the do's and the don'ts and them and us, what we see here when the Apostle Paul says that we have this ministry, I don't believe he's talking about Titus and Barnabas and himself. In fact, back up a couple of pages to chapter 1, verse 1 of this communication to the church at Corinth and I want you to notice how this whole communication begins. It says, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints that are in Achaia." In other words, what the Lord is communicating is this is not the command or the commission for just those that may be in a "pastoral or prophetic or evangelist role" here, but this calling of ministry is for all the saints, all the believers in Jesus Christ.

So when we talk about ministry today, don't think office. Don't think position. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have called on him to be the Savior of your sins, congratulations, you've been called to minister. You have been called into the ministry. Now the second question you have to ask yourself is: well, what does that mean? What is ministry? What does this word really mean? I want you to back up over in 2 Corinthians to chapter 3, verse 18. Now when the Apostle Paul was led of the Holy Spirit to communicate this message, understand that he did not write chapter 3, break, here's chapter 4. In fact, over the years we've put in chapters and verses to help us find passages and to be honest, to help us memorize. Scripture. It's really one of the main reasons we've done so, but I think we have to continue this thought. When he says that we have this ministry, back up one verse into chapter 3, verse 18 and notice what he says,

18 But we [there is that plurality again] all [that means all of us], with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

So when we talk about what does it mean to minister? What is ministry? Let me tell you what that means. According to chapter 3, verse 18, that means that when you are serving, when you are going, when you are living your life in the midst of a dark and dying world, they don't see you, they see Jesus. That's what it says. In other words, when we say what does it mean to minister? That means to be the hands and the feet and sometimes even necessarily the mouth of Jesus wherever you find yourselves. In fact, there is an old man of years ago by the name of St. Francis of Assisi who made this statement, he said, "Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary, use words."

So what is ministry? When we talk about this concept here, it means being the hands and feet of Jesus. It means that wherever we find ourselves, not just on this campus but all places of life, we represent, we picture, there is an image of Jesus; that they don't see you, they see him, and if they see you, you've given the wrong picture. You're to give them and to picture for them Jesus, the one who they truly and really need.

Now, here's where it gets practical. How do we do it? How do we represent Jesus? How do we picture Jesus? How do we display him to the world that is around us? Look at verse 2, it says, "But we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." I'm going to take that verse, verse 2, and I'm going to break it down into the four statements that are made and put it in very simple, what I call, street language today.

How do we picture Jesus to a lost and dying world? How do we leave this campus today and whether we're going across the ocean or around the corner, how do we minister to a lost and dying world? 1. Tell the truth. Tell the truth. I know that sounds simple but can we all just admit that's profound today? We live in a world that is so obsessed with the untruth, I promise you that if you're truthful, you'll stick out like a sore thumb. You will. In fact, a couple of years ago "Dateline NBC" ran a special. I'll never forget it. They said the average American lies between 18 and 25 times a day. That's the average of once an

hour. And if you will be truthful and you will be honest and you will be transparent, you will change the environment that you live in wherever you are because the world knows not the truth and you claim to know the one who is the truth.

Now, I cannot recommend the entire movie of what I'm about to illustrate but there is an old Jim Carey movie entitled, "Liar, Liar." I gather by the laughter you are familiar with it as well. But in this movie, "Liar, Liar," if you're not familiar with it, Jim Carey plays an attorney, a very wealthy, well-to-do attorney, that has made his entire living off lying. That's all he does. He lies in the courtroom. In fact, he's such a good liar that's what he's known for, that he can get anything that he needs just by twisting the words that come out of his mouth. Here's the problem: is his propensity for lying has caused him to be estranged from his wife and from his young little boy, his child. And one day, this is kind of the storyline of the movie, his little boy makes a wish on his birthday, blows out the candle, and he wishes that his dad would not be able to lie for 24 hours, and the movie shows what happens when a professional liar has to tell the truth for 24 hours.

Do you know what it does? It changes everything. It changes how he works. It changes every relationship he has. In fact, my favorite scene in the movie is where he is hurriedly going across town in his sports car and he gets pulled over by a law enforcement officer. The law enforcement officer pulls him over and he says, "Sir, do you know what you did?" And he says, "Yes." And he says, "Well, then start at the beginning." He says, "Okay, I sped. I followed too closely. I ran a stop sign. I ran a red light." I mean, he just goes on and on and on. The police officer, he's writing everything down, and he says, "Is that all?" And he goes, "No." He says, "What else?" And he opens his glove box and there are all these unpaid parking tickets. The next scene is he is handcuffed going to jail because everything that he had lied about has come to light.

In a world that is so consumed with untruth and lies, how refreshing is one who speaks the truth? How refreshing is one who comes and says, "This is what is actually the case. This is the truth." And we are called to be honest.

The second thing it says here is not walking in craftiness. Let me peel that onion for just a moment. The first thing is be honest, here's the second one, don't be a hypocrite. Don't be a hypocrite. You know, that's what the world finds absolutely disgusting about us. If you want to know the number one accusation against us, it's not about does the Bible actually have the textual evidence to prove that it says, did Jesus really raise from the dead. Those are all fine and great arguments but the greatest struggle that a lost and dying world has with us is that we act different out there than we do in here and that's what they struggle with.

You know, Jesus held his harshest words for hypocrites. In fact, Matthew 23, there is a group of people who are a lot like us. They go to church all the time. When the offering plate comes by, they give faithfully with their financial resources, and when there is a mission trip to go on, they sign up. But do you know what Jesus says to them? He says the problem is that that person that you are on Sunday, you're not the same person on Monday, and you act differently out there than you do here.

Do you know what the world struggles with? The world struggles with the fact that you get up on Sunday and you put on your holy face and you act like, 'Oh, I don't have any problems. I've got my life all together.' When they know, you know, we all know your world is jacked up. Do you know what the world is craving? Be honest about it and be the same person out there as you are in here.

You know, this week we celebrated the life of Billy Graham, a 99 year old evangelist laid to rest. His son, Franklin, during his portion of the funeral service made this statement, he said, "The thing that made his dad so great is he was the same man at home as he was when he was up preaching." That's what the world craves to hear and see in our lives. Can you imagine the impact if the person that we are here would translate to the person we are there?

He says be honest. Don't be a hypocrite. Then the next thing, it says that we have not taken the word of God and misused it. Let me tell you what we're guilty of, church, we're guilty of taking the Bible and doing one of three things to it: we either take things out of it, put things in that weren't ever there, or we take it out of context. Let me give you what I mean here. You say, "Well, how do we take things out of it?" Have you ever had a conversation with somebody about an issue or subject matter that's in the Bible such as that Jesus made the statement that he was the only way to be saved and the only way to heaven? You say, "Well, I don't know if that's really what the Bible means what it says there." Or how about this one, this is fun nowadays, did you know that Jesus talked more about hell than he did heaven? You say, "Well, I don't know if the Bible really means hell when it says that. I don't know if that's really the same imagery." What we do is we take out these things that are controversial. We take these things out that people struggle with. I've got news for you, Jesus didn't take them out, he just talked about them. He said, "This is what it is and we need to all get around it and deal with what the truth is."

So many times we say, "Well, I don't want to talk about that or deal with it. Let's just pull it out and pretend the Bible is not that clear on those subject matters." But the other thing we do is we put things in the Bible that were never there. How many times have you heard somebody say, "Well, the Bible says..."? Quote chapter and verse, please. I've got one for our culture. This is a good one. How many times have you heard somebody say, "Well, the Bible says that God helps those who help themselves"? That's nowhere to be found, folks. It's not there. And what do we do? We, the church of Jesus Christ, we take our personal agendas and our personal opinions and we give the authority of the Bible on it when we know it's not even in there, or we think it might be but it's not.

But here's the one that gets me, when we take what is in there and we pull it out of context. In other words, we take a phrase, we take a statement, and we make this whole belief system around it. Here's my favorite one of today. Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge." Straight out of the mouth of Jesus. Don't judge. In other words, don't draw a line, don't make a statement. We have not been called to declare what is right and what is wrong, we just stand back and let whatever be what will be. No! You've got to read the rest of the verse. It says, "Do not judge lest you be judged, for with what judgment you do, it shall

be done unto you." How dare you pick out the splinter in your brother's eye when you've got a log or a plank sticking out of your own. In other words, how dare you say, "Well, that is how you should or should not live your life," when you know you're doing the exact same thing behind closed doors where nobody can see it. One of the problems we have is we say, "Well, I know the issue is right before, I know we're talking about it. The Bible says don't judge." The Bible doesn't say take a step back and pretend it's not an issue, the Bible says draw a line, take a stand, but you'd better be living what you're talking about. It says that they did not take the word of God and they did not twist it and they did not turn it.

But there is one last thing here in verse 2, and commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. What that means on how we do ministry, yes, we're honest; yes, we're the same person outside these walls as we are inside; yes, we let the Bible say what it says and we don't make it say something it doesn't; but finally, we put other persons or other people's need for Jesus above our own personal desires or wants. We commend ourselves, in other words, we're more interested that they know about Jesus than if we're liked, loved or popular. The most important thing is they hear about Jesus, not that we get our ego stroked.

Now let me give you a biblical illustration here. Galatians 2. There is a man by the name of Simon Peter. Simon Peter is one of the original apostles. We know the story. Jesus comes out from the grave. The Holy Spirit comes upon him. He preaches. I mean, things are going great. By the time you get to Galatians 2, the Apostle Paul has been saved as well, and it just so happens that there is an all-you-can-eat barbecue buffet that is going on. I mean, they are having at it. I mean, you would think that you were in the south except you're over in the Middle East in the story. I mean, here is Simon Peter, he's got barbecue sauce up to his elbows and I guarantee you he had a smile on his face and here's how I know: his entire upbringing as a Jewish law-abiding individual, pork, was not allowed. It wasn't allowed but he is a new creation in Christ. In fact, the Lord came to him in a dream and said, "Hey, don't call unclean what I've called clean. Rise up and eat. Go for it, brother." And he is. I mean, he is elbow deep in barbecue sauce. He is loving life. The Apostle Paul comes up to him and he says, "What are you doing?" He says, "What do you mean?" He says, "I've been set free. I'm good." He says, "But you've been called to share Jesus with the Jews and the Jews don't eat pork and the Jews won't look at pork, and if they see you eating this, you will, listen, you will ruin your ministry."

Let me tell you what 1 Corinthians 6 says, "All things are lawful for me but not all things are expedient." Did Peter have the liberty to eat barbecue? Yes. Would it ruin his testimony to the Jews? Yes. So therefore you don't eat the barbecue so as to reach the Jews. That's a tough lesson for us. Why? Because we're here in America and we're radical individualists and we apply that to our faith so poorly. We say, "Hey, this is what I can do and I've got the liberty to do it." You may have the liberty but is it expedient?

It says we commend others. In other words, when it comes to ministry being the hands and feet of Jesus, we ought to care more about those who need to hear about Jesus than even the liberties or freedoms that we have in Jesus ourselves.

So why do we do it? Pick it up in verse 3, it says, "But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to those who are lost, in whom the god of the world has blinded their minds lest the glorious light of Jesus Christ be shined unto them." Why is this important that the "we" is all of us? Why is this important that we picture Jesus? Why is this important that we're honest and we get away from hypocrisy and we let the Bible say what it is and we are more interested in how others see Jesus than how they see us? Why is this important? I'm going to be honest with you, here's why it's important, because people without Jesus die and spend an eternity lost from him in a place the Bible calls hell. It's right there, folks. This is why it's important.

You know, this week we celebrated the life well-lived of Billy Graham and we've heard people in the news media both print and video, give their testimony. In fact, I had a good friend of mine share with me that it is quite possible because of the number of media outlets and the way that technology has transformed in today's culture that more people heard the message of Billy Graham's funeral than all of his crusades combined, thanks to technology. Everybody has been sharing their story, how did Billy Graham impact them, how did Billy Graham encourage them. Today I want to close with my Billy Graham story.

I never met him. Don't be impressed. Never met him. Never shook his hand. Never had a one-on-one conversation with him. But about 20 years ago, myself and about 10,000 other evangelists and preachers descended on the city of Amsterdam. Yeah, you want to talk about culture shock, 10,000 preachers in Amsterdam. There you go. We show up to Amsterdam for a conference that he held and at this conference, it was a typical conference, you know, where you have a big lecture type stuff and you do break-out sessions. But in the convention center, just like many of you have probably experienced in your field, there were booths that were set up. There were ministries that were communicating what they do and where they do it and how they do it. I'm going to be honest with you, I don't know which ministry that was there actually had what I'm about to share with you, but it was a part of the Billy Graham event that he was having, but it changed my world forever.

I was walking in from a lunch break or something, I was walking back into the large lecture hall and there was a screen that was set up, and on that screen was a series of numbers and they were moving quite rapidly, and on that screen it was what we call world population clock. It showed the number of people in the world, those that were being born, and those that were dying, and I want to show you a modern day example of this same clock. Up on the screen here in just a moment, we took a screenshot of a current world population clock. This was taken about 48 hours ago. We see the big number up top, 7.6 billion people. I want you to notice the third line down: birth today. This is worldwide. I mean, it just keeps coming. You can snap your fingers. Do you know what that number represents? That represents every person that we've been called to be Jesus to. Every one of them without fail. You see, Jesus said, "Go into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth." Every one of those being born today, that's

a new opportunity for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We have been called to them. That's who we're called to.

I want you to look at the third number from the bottom. Do you see those numbers? Those are the people who have breathed their last breath today and our opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus to them is no longer possible. You see, the third line down is the opportunity we have and the third line up is the opportunity that we've missed, and you and I have been called to be the hands, the feet and the mouth of Jesus. Sometimes it requires going overseas, and sometimes it's right around the corner. Do you want to know why you do ministry? Right there. That's why you do it.

Let's pray. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, maybe today you realized in a whole conversation regarding being the hands and feet of Jesus, maybe today you realized that you're the one who needs Jesus so desperately and I've got some great news for you. If you're in that position today, if you're that person today who says, "I so desperately need Jesus," you don't have to sign up for a class, you don't have to jump through a bunch of hoops. In fact, the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So let me encourage you today, if that's the position you find yourself in, just have a conversation with the Lord. You don't have to have it out loud, in fact, you don't even have to say the same words I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, I just want you to know I'm the problem. I'm the one that's messed up but I believe that Jesus is the answer. I believe today that Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to pay the price for my sins on the cross and to raise from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't know all the answers to all the world's problems, but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me and I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if that's the conversation you had with the Lord today, we'd love to entertain a conversation with you. We'd love to talk about that and see what the Lord is doing in your life. But you know, maybe today the decision that you need to make isn't about coming and having a conversation with one of us, but maybe today the decision you need to make is about when you leave this campus and you walk off of these grounds, that you live out, you walk and you are the same Jesus out there to a lost and dying world as you have declared to be in this place today. We live in the midst of a lost and dying world who desperately needs Jesus and you have the privilege of being that Jesus in their life.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time, thank you. Thank you that with all the means and mechanisms that you could have shared your good news with the world, that you have chosen us. You have chosen us, your redeemed. You have chosen us, your reconciled. You have chosen us, your children, to be your hands and your feet and your mouth and to communicate to a lost and dying world that they can be forgiven, they can be saved, and they can have a relationship with you for all of eternity. God, thank you

that you allow us to be a part of your plan. Lord, I pray today that whatever your call on our life is, that we would not let it go null and void but we would embrace it with a reckless abandonment. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be here at the front.