

Ministry Matters

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[0:00] Mark chapter 9, when we look at the earthly ministry of Jesus in the gospels, what I see is a twofold ministry.

! One that is the training of the disciples for the building up of the church, his teaching, his healing, the mighty miracles, and all those encounters with people, they were ministry to the people themselves.

However, at the same time, the disciples were watching, learning, asking, sometimes murmuring, and eventually were set out to do such ministries.

Mark chapter 6, verse 7 states, And then verse 13 says, The Lord was using these opportunities to train the twelve.

The latter part of his ministry was focused on the steady move toward the cross, where he would accomplish what he came to do.

[1:31] And when we get to Mark chapter 9, we are deep in his ministry and training, and we are beginning the concentration on the cross.

We will now begin to zoom in as we go through the rest of the gospel of Mark. Zoom in on Jerusalem, and in particular upon, thank God, the cross of Christ.

I want you to notice what happens as the disciples take in the training and attempt to grasp how the kingdom works.

It becomes an interesting situation in today's passage. Mark chapter 9, beginning in verse 38, and it says this, John said to him, Now, I want to remind you of something very pertinent is the context of this passage.

What happens in the preceding, what precedes this passage. I read earlier that Christ had given them authority over unclean spirits.

[3:07] But while Peter, James, and John were on the Mount of Transfiguration, there were nine other disciples down in the valley at the foot of that mountain, failing to cast out a demon.

And Jesus told them that that ability only came through prayer. In other words, we do not depend upon ourselves for God to do great things, but instead we lean upon Him for all of that.

If He chooses to do great things, and He involves us in those great things, then He is doing it through us.

So this passage brings us to a question that I want to pose today. What really matters in Christian ministry?

What really matters in Christian ministry? We need to learn something that the disciples had to learn, and that is that it's not our ministry.

[4:12] It belongs to Christ. He's in charge, and we need to be clear upon that. And to get that right, we have to ask three questions and answer them.

The first of the three is this. Who? Who are we doing it for? Who are we doing our ministry for?

I want you to look at verse 38 again and see what's right and what's wrong in this picture. Verse 38 says, First, the man was casting out demons, and he was doing it in the name of Jesus.

Now, that was his reason. And he was obviously legitimate because Jesus said he was legitimate.

Jesus told him to leave him alone. Now, I want to remind you of what Jesus said in Matthew 7, verse 22 and 23, and it says this, On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?

And then will I declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. So I'm not saying that everybody who proclaims this is legitimate. What I'm saying is this man is because Jesus says he is.

[5:40] Or otherwise, Jesus would not have tolerated him. But the disciples didn't know that. I want you to notice what their criteria in this passage was for that one who was casting out a demon.

He said the problem is he's not following us. Now, you need to know who that comes from. It comes from John. John and his brother James were called the sons of thunder.

That sounds like a wrestling duo to me. But they were known to be a little hot-headed. In Luke 9, verse 54, they didn't like the Samaritans.

And they said, Jesus, are you ready for us to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans? So are you ready for us to? So they were hot-headed.

And this man was not sanctioned by them, nor was this guy listening to them. They didn't like it. We don't like when good stuff happens and we don't approve of it.

[6:51] And it happens a lot. It happened a long time ago. A lot earlier than this passage. With Moses and Joshua as well. In Numbers chapter 11, Moses gathered 70 men and placed them around the tent of meeting.

And God blessed them with spiritual power to prophesy. There were two other men that did not go to that tent that also got that power as well.

And they started sharing. And Joshua knew that they hadn't been part of the 70. And so he went to Moses. And in Numbers chapter 11, verse 28 and 29, it says, And Joshua, the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, My Lord Moses, stop them.

But Moses said to him, Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people be prophets. That the Lord would put his spirit on them.

What Moses is saying is, Praise God. God's working in them. Don't get in their way. Let God continue to work in them. John the Baptist followers had the same problem. When they were told that Jesus was coming, that the one would come, and that John had prepared the way for him.

[8:09] And he did such a wonderful job with that. But when Jesus came, some of John's followers did not recognize Jesus. They went back to John and said, He's baptizing people.

And they're following him. And John said in John 3, verse 30, He must increase, but I must decrease. My friend, that ought to be the prayer of our life.

That Christ increase in our life and that we decrease. That's what we all must be saying. You know what John and the disciples really didn't like? God was blessing what that guy was doing.

They had failed at the bottom of that mountain. And they were bona fide. They were set aside. They were sanctified. And if you didn't believe it, you just ask them. They were. And they said, This man's not following us.

I want you to hear me today. We need to applaud when God does a good thing in Pickens First Baptist Church.

[9:13] We need to celebrate when God does a good thing through Pickens First Baptist Church. We need to praise the Lord when God does a good work outside of Pickens First Baptist Church.

This is not the only place that God is moving. The kingdom of God is much larger than us.

Now, I will tell you, I pray daily that God will move in our midst. I like to sense it. I like to see it.

I like the evidence of it. And I pray that God will move in our midst daily. I pray that he'll move in this church. I pray that he'll move in individual hearts and lives.

Sometimes when I'm shaking your hand before a worship service, I'll look at one of you old boys and I'll go, Lord, help him. Help him today, Lord. Help him today, Lord. I'm well aware that God is moving in other places as well.

[10:19] God's movement does not have to be sanctioned by us. It doesn't even have to be Baptist. I don't care to be a part of it if it's not.

But God can move among others. It does not have to be in a beautiful 60-year-old sanctuary. It does not have to be a particular type of music.

It does not have to be a particular type of preacher. Years ago, when I knew God called me in the ministry and I wanted to prepare for that by going to seminary, we rode out to Southwestern Seminary.

I went on that campus. Beautiful campus. Wonderful institution. Knew that's where God wanted me to go. Felt like it was. I went on that campus. It was obvious immediately I wasn't where I was supposed to be.

I just knew that. Wasn't sure why. Didn't understand it. Didn't feel at home. Nothing wrong with it.

Just wasn't where I was supposed to be. On the way back to South Carolina, we went through New

Orleans.

[11:25] When you go through New Orleans, the interstate is suspended on bridges. And you can look down.

And I saw a beautiful steeple sitting over the side. New Orleans Seminary sits off with a good arm, a stone's throw from the interstate. It's real close. And we pulled in there because it was on the way home.

Rode on that campus and I knew instantly that's where God would have me to serve. I knew that's where I was to go. I just knew it. And I went there. And while I was there, you need to understand, when I went into seminary, there was a slogan going around.

And it was, if you want to learn to preach, go to Southwestern. If you want to learn to teach, go to Southern. If you want to learn to testify, go to New Orleans.

And I wanted to be a preacher. So I thought I'd go to Southwestern. God called me to go to New Orleans. Now, I will tell you, New Orleans takes that seriously. The Baptist Bible Institute was founded in New Orleans so many years ago because of the wickedness of that city and the need of the gospel to be in the midst of that city.

[12:39] And they dedicated to it. And unless you go door to door sharing Christ, when I went to school there, you don't graduate. I mean, they're serious about it.

Matter of fact, when Katrina came through, they had a satellite campus at Atlanta and an opportunity to move the whole campus to Atlanta. But the president at that time at New Orleans was so burdened for the gospel to continue to be in New Orleans that he made sure they rebuilt that seminary and left it there so they could continue to share with that wicked city.

Nothing about New Orleans is good except food. Food is pretty good. But nothing else about that place is good. But I'm telling you, the gospel is being shared there because God planted that institution there so long ago.

But when I was a student there, I went to chapel one day and I found out that one of the professors of preaching from Southwestern was going to be there.

And he was well celebrated. He wrote a lot of books. He was quite popular. I was excited. And the man got up to preach. He put a manuscript before him and he never looked at us.

[13:48] He just read what was in front of him. Now, you need to understand, when I was coming up, when I was in college, Adrian Rogers was who I loved to listen to. Adrian Rogers is the pulpiteer of pulpiteers.

He's got the voice of God. If God don't sound like that, I'll be shocked. I'm telling you, Adrian could preach. And I was blessed by that.

And I was shocked when this fellow who taught preaching at the school that was supposed to be about preaching preached like that. I was also under the tutelage of Frank Pollard.

Frank Pollard preached at First Baptist Jackson for years. Preached on the Baptist Hour, one of the few churches that were on TV at the time. And Frank Pollard, polished preacher, would give his manuscript to his secretary.

And she would type it up. And he would record it. And he would listen to it more than 20 times from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning. And he would get up on Sunday morning.

[14:53] And he would preach from memory 22 minutes every time. And they were nearly perfect every time. Don't get your hopes up.

I don't preach for 22 minutes. Whole different kind of preacher. God used him mightily. All three of those men are in heaven now.

Three completely different type of preaching. But God used every one of them. It don't take a particular type of preacher for God to do a word.

It's the Spirit of God in them. It don't take a particular type of people. God can move in anyone that opens his heart or her heart to follow the Lord Jesus.

God is moving in our world in ways that we'd have a hard time recognizing. I'm going to tell you, one of the most beautiful worship services I've ever been a part of on a Sunday morning was in Guinea, Africa.

[15:54] When I was in a thatched hut with people who were barefoot on dirt floor, praising God with all they had for all that God had given them.

And they didn't have anything. But they were celebrating the Lord. Listen. God's moving in our world in ways that we would have a hard time recognizing.

But if it's of Christ and God's Spirit is on it, praise the Lord. Now, I'll say that sometimes it's hard to distinguish what's of God and what's not. This is the good news.

We don't have to be a part of it if we don't feel comfortable with it. And if God does not lead us to be a part of it, we shouldn't be. You know what else? We don't have to judge it.

We're not the judge. It's not our responsibility. The key concern that we need to have is who are we doing what we're doing for? And I'll be very, very honest with you.

[16:55] We don't do it for the preacher. And we don't do it for the church. We don't even do it for the community. We do it in the name of Christ for the sake of Christ.

And then if it's the way God is moving us to do it, we do it through the church, with the pastor, and for the community, and wherever he would have us to serve.

But we've got to start by getting our who straight. Who is it that we're doing it for? Second question we've got to answer is this.

What? What are we doing? Jesus mentions here doing a mighty work. Well, what is a mighty work in the kingdom of God? It's interesting how the spectacular always gets our attention.

What could be more spectacular than seeing a demon leave somebody? But Jesus moves from the spectacular to the simple. And Jesus says something as small as a cup of cold water can go a long way in the kingdom of God.

[18:01] A mighty work is one that builds up the kingdom of God. And that can be spectacular. Casting out demons. Feeding thousands. Seeing many souls saved.

Or it can be simple. Just meeting needs. And sharing Christ. This cup of cold water is important because anybody can do it.

I mean, look at the first century context. Who can drop a bucket into a well and pull up a cup of water for someone thirsty? Anyone can.

You don't have to be wealthy to do that. You don't have to be one of the twelve that's following Christ to do that. You don't have to have some kind of special anointing to do that.

Friend, we all have a job to do in the kingdom. And some of that is seen and most of it is not seen. Some of it may be spectacular.

[18:59] Most of it will be very ordinary. But the question is, what are we doing? I think that's what we have to ask ourselves. Am I helping the kingdom of God?

Or am I hindering the kingdom of God? Because quite honestly, it's a whole lot easier to bellyache about what somebody else is doing or to bellyache about what somebody is not doing than it is actually to do something ourselves.

And the disciples were not keen on someone outside their group doing a mighty work in Jesus' name. That becomes much more surprising when we remember that just a few verses earlier the disciples failed to cast out a demon.

And so now no wonder they're mad that somebody else can do it successfully. And Jesus told them the problem they had was prayerlessness. I want to ask you a question.

If this church's direction was determined by the fervency of your prayers for this church, how would we be doing?

[20:07] Another question. If this church's witness was determined by your dedication to serve in our ministries, how would we be doing?

If the church's sustainability was determined by your faithfulness in giving, how would we be doing? I am so glad God is blessing us mightily. I am. I get the opportunity in a few weeks to do something that I never imagined I'd be able to do.

My daddy was stationed in the upper peninsula of Michigan in his last stint in the Air Force in the mid-70s.

Right above Kinchelov Air Force Base in Daftor, Michigan, which is out in the middle of nowhere, Little Faith Baptist Church was a southern Baptist church, probably primarily catering to Air Force families.

[21:24] It was a small church, but as I remember it, and I was very young, it seemed like a thriving church to me. And it was in that church that that pastor took time with me, and I've shared this before, I'll be quick, took time with me during Wednesday night choir practice.

We sat on the back row and prayed together. And it was in one of those times that I gave my heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I was baptized in that church less than two years later.

We moved away. I've not been back in that church in 50 years. I drove by it 30 years ago. In just a few weeks, I planned to preach in that church, the church I got saved in.

I never would have imagined as just a young boy that God would have called me into ministry and allowed me to serve him in the pastures as I have for over 30 years.

I never would have imagined that. And in that young boy's mind, I never would have imagined that I could have been a part of something as we've been able to be a part of at Pickens First Baptist Church.

[22:53] I am glad God is blessing us mightily. Because he is, it makes it a little bit easier for me to speak on a text without people believing that I'm bellyaching or that I'm upset because I'm not.

But I'll tell you what I will be. I will be faithful to the text. And the second question that this text is asking us is, what are we doing?

What are you doing? What am I doing? There is something for all of us to do. And I think it's a question we all have to ask ourselves. What am I doing for the Lord?

There's something that all of us can do. So are we as individuals, are we helping the kingdom of God? Or are we hindering the kingdom of God? Are we bellyaching or are we blessing?

Are we building up? Or are we tearing down? Are we contributing? Or are we complaining? One can contribute and complain, but you can't do both wholeheartedly.

[24:00] I want you to listen to what Jesus says. He says in verse 40, For the one who is not against us is for us. There's one more question that this text begs us to ask, and that is why.

Why do we do what we do? I want you to notice our last verse this morning. For truly I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

The reason we do what we do should ultimately come back to Christ and the gospel. Doing nice things, doing pleasant things, that's wonderful.

It's not an end in itself. Not with the children of God. No, we need to point people back to the cross. There ought to be a litmus test in the things that we really get serious about.

Do I do this because I belong to Christ? Should I do this when I belong to Christ?

[25:10] He also refers to a mighty work in his name. And that's not a passing thought. It's mentioned several times. In verse 37 he says he received a child in his name.

In verse 38 he says he cast out a demon in his name. Verse 39 says do a mighty work in his name. Verse 41 says because we belong to Christ. Why do we do what we do?

We do it for Christ. And all that we should do should be Christ honoring. All that we do should be gospel oriented.

All that we do should be kingdom building. The prayer to pray before we ever move forward in any ministry. In any project. In any idea. In any direction.

In this church or in our lives. Does this honor the name of Jesus? Can we genuinely do what I want to do in the name of Jesus?

[26:09] And putting his name on something does not give us authority. Don't get that backwards. Doing something in the name of Jesus means doing it under his authority.

It means doing it dependent upon his power. It means doing it consistent with his character.

Consistent with his purposes. We don't dictate that.

He does. And we must be prayerful enough and clear enough in his direction. That when we move forward we can genuinely say that we're doing it in the name of Jesus.

And when we do it thank God. To God be the glory in all that is done. Now I've spoken a lot today about how we as a church do what we do.

But this applies to every one of us individually as well. On our job. In our homes. With our friends. With our families.

[27:13] In our communities. May we clearly answer the questions. Who? Who are we doing it for?

What? What are we doing? Or what are we not doing? And why? Why do we do what we do?

Listen. Ministry matters. And we got to get this right. We got to get it right in our church. We got to get it right in our lives.

Because it ain't us. It ain't about us. It's his church. It's his gospel. It's his work.

And thank God we have the privilege to be a part of it. We have a privilege to be stewards of it. Let's make sure that all we do is for the glory of God. And let's get after it.

[28:19] Let's get after it. I don't know about you, but my week flew by. The week before that flew by. This next one's going to fly by. Son, we ain't got so much time.

Let's get after it. Let's do what we do to honor his name, bring glory to him. Let's do it as a congregation. Let's do it as individuals. In whatever God would have us to do.

May he be the lead. It ain't about us. It's about him. To God be the glory.

May what all we do be in his name. With every head bowed and every eye closed. I want you to know that we each have the opportunity to have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And if that's never happened to you, whether people think it has or not, if that's never happened to you, I want you to know that you can ask God to forgive you today. To cleanse you, to come into your life. And to change you.

[29:24] And he'll meet you where you are and he'll change your life. If you need to get saved today, you come down this aisle. As soon as we begin to sing and say, Pastor, I need the Lord Jesus in my life.

Maybe you've done that privately, but you've never acknowledged that publicly. You've never done that through baptism. And you need to come this morning and say, Pastor, what I've done privately, I feel led by God to make public today.

So I come. Maybe God's leading you to Pickens First Baptist Church. I'm thankful for what he's doing in our midst. God's in it.

I want you to be a part of it. You come. But for all of us, the questions are who?

Who do we do what we do for? What are we doing? What are we not doing? What are we not doing? Why are we doing what we do?

[30:28] It's been my prayer as I prepared this message. That God would speak to your heart and life today. Would show you by examining your life like only the Holy Spirit can do.

What it is that needs to change in your life to be everything God would have you to be. You just trust him today. You just follow him. Whether that's privately or publicly or with a pastor prayer for you.

You just follow the Lord as he leads. Heavenly Father, I love you. And I thank you for the privilege and the opportunity that you give us.

To serve you. To be a part of a work that's much greater than we are, dear God. And I pray, Father, that you'll help us to be faithful. Lead us now to be obedient.

And to follow you. However you lead. In Jesus' precious name. Amen. Stand. Thank you.

[31:39]