

MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL

Good morning and thank you, each of you, for coming and worshipping with us today. It is a beautiful day and what better way could we spend this day than in worshipping the One who gave this, and every other day to us!

We have a number of ministers with us today, and I would like to ask each of you, if you would, to please stand where you are. Go ahead and please stand, if you are a minister of the gospel.

Anyone? Well, I was afraid this might happen! I say that because most of you are just not accustomed to thinking of yourself as a minister of the gospel. Unfortunately, even though we know better, too many Christians have bought into the unscriptural clergy/laity idea. We know that the New Testament teaches the priesthood of all believers, [1 Peter 2:9 slide here] but for some reason we do not give that idea a lot of serious consideration.

And so, even to us, ministers of the gospel are generally regarded as paid professionals. In denominational churches such people are called the “pastors.” In the churches of Christ we call them our ministers, our preachers. Interestingly, we have given rise to some new terms in the last quarter of a century. Some men are called “pulpit ministers.” We also have “youth ministers,” “associate ministers,” “music ministers,” “outreach ministers,” “missions,” etc.

I think about that and I wonder, “Whatever happened to our being the people who go by the Bible; who do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things by Bible names?” Isn’t that who we say we are? And didn’t our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ say (Matthew 23:8-11)...

8) But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. 9) And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10) Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. 11) The greatest among you shall be your servant.

If Jesus said that, then what are we doing? I wonder if we aren’t giving in to the subtle temptation to exalt men among us. But you see, when we do that, guess what else we are doing? We are letting ourselves off of the hook. If our paid profession is the one who does the ministering, then that makes us the ones being ministered to. And that’s what we have today. We have a few ministers, and a bunch of people being ministered to. But that’s not right is it? How can we call ourselves followers of Christ if we are thinking and talking like that? Didn’t Jesus also say (**Matthew 20:25-28**)...

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26) It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27) and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28) even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Let's think about this brothers and sisters! Are you a Christian? Do you think of yourself as a Christian? I want you to answer that for yourself. If you think of yourself as one of Christ's followers, ask yourself, "Am I here to be served, or am I here to serve others? I hope you will give this some serious thought, and not just let this go in one ear and out the other.

Okay, we have a number of ministers with us today, and I would like to ask each of you, if you would, to please stand where you are. Okay, that is more like it! (you can be seated).

Now, it's important that you understand what I am talking about this morning I am trying to help you with your ministry; I am trying to equip you for your ministry. In **Ephesians 4:11, 12**, the apostle Paul said this is what elders and evangelists are supposed to do. Speaking about Christ being raised from the dead and ascending back into heaven, and in so doing, he bequeathed a leadership structure that would insure the success and growth of the church. He said, "*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*"

I believe, and I hope you do too, that when more and more members realize that Christ is expecting them to be ministers of the gospel, then gospel ministry is going to explode and the church is going to catch on fire!

Perhaps you have been wondering why the church doesn't seem to be growing. I hope you have, that it has concerned you, and that it has motivated you to think about it and to be praying about it. The church in too many places, including here in Ponca City, is not growing. Why is that? Why is evangelism almost at a standstill?

We would like to blame it on the world, of course and say, "*people are just not interested anymore; they are too busy, caught up in the pursuit of too many things and too many pleasures.*" But that's NOT the problem at all. In fact, that's what creates the opportunity for the gospel. Jesus was not mistaken and neither was he just talking about the people of first-century Palestine when he said, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*" (Matt. 9:37,38)

No, the problem is not with them, it is with us! We are the problem and the sooner we come to grips with that, and confess that, and do something about it, the better off the world is going to be. But so will we! We will be better off. We will be more alive, more excited about waking up every morning, more excited about what the church is doing, more excited about the future. We will be living with a true purpose, and really fulfilling our spiritual destiny, instead of just coming to church and trying to live a better moral life than the people around us.

Evangelism is not happening as the Lord wants it to happen because we who have been evangelized, who have heard and believed and obeyed the gospel message are stubbornly refusing to face the fact that God wants every one of us to be ministers of His Son's gospel. He wants every one of us to be vitally involved in doing whatever we can to help save others, and

we are not doing that. We are justifying ourselves that we are present for worship and Bible study every time the doors are open, and we are trying to live good, morally upright lives.

Those things are good and commendable, but that isn't all that is required of us, is it? What did Jesus tell the apostles in Matthew 28:20? Did He tell them to teach people to observe some of the things that He had commanded them, or did He tell them to teach people to observe all that He had commanded them? You know, don't you!

You see, part of work of making disciples is not just in persuading them to be baptized into Christ; it isn't just teaching them about the church, as important as both of those things are. Part of the work of making disciples is teaching them to become more and more like Christ.

- To have His mind.
- To have His heart.
- To have His vision and purpose.
- To have His willingness to sacrifice for what is true and right and important.

Every Christian, when they come up from the waters of baptism is automatically enrolled in Christ's school of discipleship.

- Some seem to never come to class.
- Others study just enough to get by, but fail to really take the opportunity seriously.
- Others drop out along the way.
- And, just as Jesus said, only a few make it to the graduation.

The objective of that school is to help Christians become as much like Christ as possible. We need to have His mind and His heart. We need to see things the way He saw them. We need to think about like Christ thought about them. That includes thinking about one of the most sobering, challenging things known to mankind, and that has to do with the seriousness of the lost condition of people.

That can be seen in the reason for Christ's coming. I think we really have to wrestle with this, and come to grips with it. Why did Christ come? Did he come so he could be baptized and spend the rest of his life worshipping God and studying the scriptures? That's not the reason he came, is it?

The Bible tells us why he came. **Luke 19:10** makes that very clear. In connection with Jesus going to the home of Zacchaeus, the tax-collector, Luke tells us that Jesus made this statement: *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

He came to do what? *He came to seek and save the lost.*

I know we know this. I know that we have read and heard this many times, but have we really come to grips with it? And until we do, unless we do, the likelihood is that our thinking will not

change, and our practice will not change. How can we get Christ's mind and heart into our own?

I believe brother Michael Mazzalongo's lesson two weeks ago gave us the answer. He talked about the power of the cross. It's the cross that has the power to break my heart, and fill my heart, and excite my heart. It's when we really think about what happened at the cross; why the cross had to happen that we will finally begin to realize why it is so important that each of us, as followers of Christ, and begin to have a heart on fire for the lost.

You see, the cross makes clear some things that compels us to stand up and be counted among the ministers of the gospel.

The cross makes it clear that mankind's sin problem has created a disaster that is without parallel in history. Think about it.

- God did not come because the world was at war. The world has been at war almost since the beginning of time.
- God did not come because the world was being ravaged by one disease or another. There have been many epidemics and pandemics that at times have wiped out up to one-fourth of the population of major cities of the ancient world. The sickness, dying and misery associated with those times must have been unimaginable, and yet God did not send His Son to stop any disease.
- God did not come because of some great natural disaster, although again, there have been many. From July to August, 1931, the Yangtze River flooded, and it is estimated that almost four million people died from drowning, disease and starvation. Almost every century has seen unimaginable horrors in that way, and yet not of those times caused God to send His son to earth to die on the cross.

Mankind may spend billions on striving to have world peace. They may spend billions more on trying to find a cure for AIDS or cancer, and they may spend billions trying to help in those disasters that strike around the globe. Nevertheless, a billion, billion dollars could not begin to touch the cost of the greatest disaster in history, a disaster that is still occurring!

The cost of that disaster can be measured, not in dollars, but in two things: One, by the deaths that are happening every day, and two, by the blood of the Son of God. Think about that.

Sin is real my friends. It has found its way into every heart, in every home, in every city, large or small, in every country, in every generation since the world began. Death is the punishment God prescribed for sin—[Romans 6:23](#)—and so every day thousands and thousands of people are dying because of sin. Currently there are almost two people every second dying somewhere. That's over a hundred people every minute, six thousand an hour, seventy-two thousand (about three times the population of Ponca City) every day! Do you think if there was a war raging somewhere, or a disease running rampant, or a natural disaster that was killing seventy-five thousand people every day that it wouldn't be at the top of the news?

But what makes these staggering numbers an even greater disaster is that most of these people are leaving this world completely unprepared for the judgment to come. And that's where you come in. We cannot do anything about people dying physically, but each of us can do something about people going into eternity unprepared to meet their God. The question is now, will we do it? Will you face up to your calling?

Listen as Paul connects what God did in sending His Son to die on the cross with what He now expects of you and me. In **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**, Paul said,

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us."

In **1 Peter 2:9**, the apostle Peter put it in a way that makes it unmistakably clear what God is expecting of you and me. He said, *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."*

Think about it good people! Why did Christ come? What does the Bible tell us?

- Christ did not come just to make the world a better place.
- He did not come just to create a church full of worshippers.
- He did not come just to get people to live better lives; more loving, helpful lives.
- He did not come just to give us a better law than Moses gave to the Jews

Jesus came to seek and save the lost! Those who were lost and then saved by Him, are to now join him in continuing that soul-saving mission. That's what it means to be a Christian; you are a follower of Christ. And if you are a follower of Christ, then you too are to develop the same mind and heart as His. You have not come to be ministered unto, but to minister. You are a minister of Christ, a minister of the gospel.

I want to ask you to do something. (Some of you will immediately forget what was taught here this morning, but some of you may take it to heart.) I want to ask you to be in prayer about this. Pray that God might grant you repentance, not only from the sins that we know about, but also from everything that might keep you from being the minister He wants you to be. Pray that He will not allow you to look for an excuse or a loophole for why you don't need to concern yourself with the lost, but that you might have your eyes clearly on the cross so that you will never, ever, forget why Christ came.