

The New Testament Missionary

This message was preached for the ordination of Tracy Thomas at Central Christian Church, Las Vegas, Nevada, on November 28, 1983.

Tracy's Ordination

I want to speak tonight directly to Tracy, as well as to you, the members of the congregation on the subject, "What is a minister?" I would like to read from I Thessalonians chapter 2. You may want to follow along in your own Bibles, I'll be reading verses 1-12.

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for

her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we are among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

What is a minister? We generally refer to a minister as an evangelist. The New Testament scriptures use this term in numerous passages. In Ephesians 4:11, the Apostle Paul indicates that the evangelist had an office in the church. In II Timothy 4:5, Paul challenges young Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry." Philip is also called an evangelist in the New Testament. The work of the evangelist is primarily to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ has come into the world. An evangelist also has the job of edifying the congregation and instructing the congregation in matters of the faith. Now today, most churches do not use the term evangelist, most churches refer to preachers as ministers, or preachers, or sometimes they are referred to as pastor.

These terms are used as synonymous in modern day usage to the term evangelist as it is found in the New Testament. It is obvious that the work of the evangelist and the work of the elder in the church will many times overlap. It is quite possible for one man to be able to do the work of both offices in the church. This is illustrated by the Apostle Peter, who would have certainly been termed a preacher or a proclaimer of the good news of Jesus Christ. Yet, we read in I Peter 5:1 how Peter also called himself an elder. It is possible also for those who are servants or deacons in the church to serve as evangelists or preachers. In Acts the sixth chapter we read about the seven men who were called as servants in the church in Jerusalem. They were deacons, and yet, we read in the seventh chapter of Acts how one of these deacons, Stephen, a great man of

faith, went out and preached such a strong, gospel sermon that he was put to death as a result of his preaching. In Acts chapter eight we read how one of these other deacons, whose name was Philip, went out and preached the gospel and converted souls to Christ and held a great revival meeting.

If Tracy were to live up to the description of a minister as is outlined for us in the Bible here in I Thessalonians 2, he would have to be perfect. I am sure that every member of this church has voted for Tracy to come here because you think he is perfect. I can tell you a lot of things about Tracy. I can tell you, for example, that when he was growing up he had the messiest room in the house of all the children. He threw clothes all over the floor until you couldn't even walk in the room, you had to walk on clothes. I have sometimes threatened him within an inch of his life, "If you don't clean up this room you're going to get it."

It was the most amazing thing to me, as soon as Tracy left home and went away to Bible College he changed and became 100 percent the opposite. When you go into Tracy's house today, you don't dare get a speck of dust on anything or you're in for trouble. I wish he would have been that way when he was at home. He was the worst of all the children about leaving the lights on. I can't tell you how many times I said, "Shut the lights off, Tracy, it costs a fortune to burn electricity." That's another way that he's changed. I tell you when you go to his house today, you don't dare turn anything on because he'll be right there following you, turning it off and saying, "Don't you know that it costs a fortune to run all this electricity." I can tell you so many interesting things about Tracy, but I don't want to spoil anything, because you think he's perfect, but he isn't. You'll find out as time goes on that he won't suit you in all ways and that will be a disappointment to you because you want your preacher to be absolutely perfect.

No preacher is perfect, but I was just reading, recently, about a church that found a perfect preacher. "After hundreds of fruitless searches a model preacher has been found. It is guaranteed that he will please any church that desires to call him. He preaches exactly

25 minutes and then sits down. He will hold his audience in condemnation of sin, but never hurt anybody's feelings. He works from 8 a.m. in the morning to 10 p.m. every night in all types of work from preaching in the pulpit to running rummage sales. He always wears good clothes even though his salary is only \$15 a week. He buys good books of all kinds regularly. He has a nice family. He drive a good car. He gives \$450 a week to the church. And he stands ready to contribute to every good work with which he's confronted. This model preacher is 26 years old and he's been preaching the gospel for 30 years. He is tall, short, handsome, heavy-set. Has one large brown eye and one large blue eye, his hair is parted in the middle, the left side is dark and straight the right side is brown and wavy. He has a burning desire to work with teenagers, but spends all his time with the older folks. He smiles all the time with a straight face, because he has a good sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work. He has a glowing personality with deadened feelings and nerves of iron." There you are, the perfect preacher that will suit everybody. Even though Tracy is not the perfect preacher or minister of Jesus Christ, he has come here, I hope, not to please men but to please God.

I. Boldness

So, tonight, I want us to reexamine these qualifications of the ministry as they're outlined in I Thessalonians 2. First of all, I'd call your attention to the fact that Paul, Silas, and Timothy are describing the ministry in this passage. I feel quite certain that as you have called Tracy to be Minister of Music, that you are expecting these same qualification in his life that Paul, Silas, and Timothy said were to be found in their lives. I feel quite certain that as a minister of God that your are expecting Tracy to deliver the word of God with great boldness. I want you to notice again in verse 2 of I Thessalonians 2, Paul says, "But even after that we suffered before them were shamefully entreated as you know in Philippi, we

were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention." These are easy words to use, but they are not easy characteristics to live. Paul says that he was shamefully treated at Philippi.

Do you remember what happened at Philippi to Paul and Silas? They were falsely accused. They were brought before the magistrates of the city and they were beaten with many stripes. They were then cast into jail, their feet were made fast in the stocks. That would be enough to drive most young ministers out of the ministry, but not Paul and Silas. From their position as prisoners in the jail in Philippi, what did they do? They prayed, they sang praises to God, and the jailer was converted. Now as Tracy has been called here as Minister of Music, I couldn't help but use that scriptural passage and bring out that fact. Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God, and it was because they delivered the word of God by music that the jailer at Philippi was converted.

Music is a very, very important part of Christianity. Next to preaching the word of God, I suppose we would have to say that music is most important. So, Tracy is called here to fulfill a very important ministry, to deliver the word of God with great boldness in the form of music. From this musical evangelistic campaign at the jail in Philippi, Paul then proceeded on to Thessalonica where he engaged in an aggressive campaign for souls in that city.

There are always those who will try to silence the minister. They tried to silence Paul at Philippi. But he would not be quiet; he was determined to deliver the word of God with great boldness. I do not doubt, Tracy, that there will be those in this congregation, as time goes on, who will try to silence you. It is up to you to stand firmly upon the word of God. It is up to you to be bold in delivering the message of the word of God through your own particular ministry of music.

There are those who will try to compromise the word of God and persuade you to present unscriptural music, then you will have the task of standing firm and insisting that the word of God must be presented. There can be no compromise. Any minister of Christ

must be bold in standing up for the truth.

II. Simplicity

The second thing that I would point out from this passage of Scripture is the fact that the Apostle Paul, as a minister of God, proclaimed the word of God in very simple terms. The gospel is a simple message of good news. It's so simple for example, that Isaiah 35:8 says, "The wayfaring man, though he be a fool, need not err there in."

God has given us a clear example of simplicity in delivering the word of God in the life of Jesus Christ. Without a doubt, Jesus was the greatest minister that ever lived and ministered on the face of this earth. How did Jesus deliver the message of God's word? In a very simple way. So simply that the common people heard him gladly. Jesus almost always taught the word of God by the means of parables. What was a parable? Nothing more than a little story with a heavenly meaning. Large words, deep theological messages will not generally warm the hearts of sinful people. I know that in the ministry of music is often times found the battleground in the church. There are those in the congregation who would like to hear Kiamichi music like "I'll Fly Away." Then there are those who would like to hear the in-between. How in the world are you going to please everybody? Obviously, you won't please everyone. Whether you present something like Bach and Beethoven or the Kiamichi gospel songs, just be sure it is the word of God and that the message is couched in simple language, words that are easy to be understood so that the love of God can be felt by each member of the congregation.

In years gone by, I have often worked for the North American Christian Convention. I served on more than one occasion as Registration Chairman. In 1965 I served as Vice President of the North American when it met in Louisville, Kentucky. Serving several years on the Executive Committee I can remember how we used to

read those evaluation sheets that people turned in at the end of the convention. In particular I remember the convention of 1965 in Louisville, when almost every speaker on the convention's platform read from a manuscript. The messages were well prepared., the sentences were complex. But day after day, I heard people going out saying, "What did he preach? What did he say? I didn't understand, the words were too big and complicated." When the evaluation sheets came in at the close of that convention and we read them, almost every person said, "Throw away the written manuscripts. Forget about the big words that you have to have a dictionary, in order to look up the meaning. Just preach the gospel from the heart."

I'm sure that every member of this congregation will appreciate it, Tracy, if you will keep the music of the variety that we have heard this past weekend. With beautiful words from the word of God to teach the message of God and the love of God to all who come within this building to hear the word of God. It is up to you as a minister of Christ to present the word of God with boldness, with simplicity.

III. Sincerely

In the third place, I want to say that you must present the word of God sincerely. The ministry must not be just another way of making a living. You must live your life so that people can emulate the life of Jesus as they watch you. Don't be one of those preachers who say, "Do as I say, not as I do," but be a preacher so that you can say, "Walk in my footsteps, as I walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ." A minister must have a genuine conviction and believe with all his heart that the Bible is the word of God, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and there is no other way to obtain life everlasting.

Paul gives several reasons for his sincerity in this passage of scripture. Please notice verse four, "On the contrary, we speak as

men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts." Paul says that he sincerely proclaimed the message of God because he felt that he was a steward. A steward is one who is entrusted with the belongings of someone else. As the steward of God, Paul had been entrusted with the gospel of Christ. As a faithful steward, he must pass this message along to others. You, Tracy, must sincerely be a steward of God and pass on the message of God through your ministry of music.

Then we notice in verse five Paul says, "You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness." He says he was a sincere minister because he was not a flatterer. I think it is wonderful to compliment people when they deserve compliments. In fact, the Bible says, "Honor those to whom honor is due." Tracy, you can brag on this choir all you want to, you won't be using any flattery; this is a great choir you have to work with. I wish I could hear the bell choir and the other choirs you have to work with in this church. But there is a difference between giving honor and giving a sincere compliment and then just using flattering words that don't mean a thing. All of us despise someone who comes around all the time slapping everybody on the back saying, "Oh it's great. Oh, it's wonderful. Oh, it's terrific." We know those are meaningless words, they're nothing but flattery. I would encourage you to not be that kind of a minister, but to be sincere and give honest compliments and praise where praise is deserved.

Paul also says that he was a sincere minister because he did not wear a cloak of covetousness. It is the duty of this congregation to support Tracy and his family in this ministry, to which you have called them. I trust and pray that Tracy and his family will never betray your confidence and begin to wear a cloak of covetousness. No minister should desire the things of this world to the point that he wants to be rich with the riches of this world and I need not remind Tracy, this evening, that he could've made far more money if he would have given his life to some other cause. I'm sure it's

not the big salary that you offered him that brought him to Las Vegas. But it was the opportunity to use his life and talents in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. As you now feel that God has brought you here for this ministry, I encourage you to minister with all your heart and never try to clothe yourself with the cloak of covetousness. Be able at all times to say that I'm sincerely here to deliver the word of God not to get something out of these people. On the other hand, you the congregation must never forget that it is your responsibility to support Tracy in this ministry so that he can deliver the word of God sincerely.

Paul also said he was sincere in delivering the message of God because he was not seeking the glory of men. Notice in verse six, "We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you." You have not come here, Tracy, to receive the glory of men, not to get your name in the headlines down here on the strip, or something like that. You have come here to glorify God and don't ever lose sight of that fact. It is not for your glory, but for His glory that you have been called to his ministry.

We notice in verse eight that Paul's ministry was to bring hope to the hopeless and to save the souls of the lost, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." I pray while you're here in Las Vegas that you will find many a poor lost soul and that through your ministry you will be able to impart God's word and bring hope to the hopeless and salvation to those who would otherwise be condemned to hell.

IV. Gentleness

The fourth characteristic of a minister as outlined by the Apostle Paul in this passage is to be found in verse seven, "But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children." Tracy, as a minister of Christ, I want you to be gentle as was the

Apostle Paul. Pray for patience. You will have to have lots of patience to serve a large church like this. I guarantee you that they will try your patience to the breaking point. May God give you tact. You will need lots of tact dealing with the people. When half your choir members don't show up for practice, how are you going to scold them and still keep them as friends? May kindness be one of the virtues that will be a part of your ministry. When they hit those sour notes and you want to pull your hair out, well don't do it. Compassion, oh how you will need a great amount of compassion in dealing with members of the church and also the unsaved souls that you will come in contact with. And sympathy, you must be sympathetic with people. You're depending on them to come to the practices and someone does not show up and you're about ready to blow your top and really scold them and then you find out that one of their loved ones was taken to the hospital with a heart attack or someone has come down with cancer and then you are so glad that you didn't blow your top, because now you can be sympathetic. You realize there was a real reason for their absence.

In short, Tracy, I pray that you will fall in love with every member of this congregation. Before God, I can stand here tonight and tell you people that I dearly love every member of the Hickory Valley Christian Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. There's not a one that I dislike; I like everyone of them. I hope, Tracy, that a year from now, after you have become acquainted with every member of this congregation, that you can truthfully say, "I love every member of the body of Christ that I serve." The Apostle Paul said that as a minister of God that he loved people so sincerely that he felt just like a nurse caring for a baby, or like a mother that holds her baby to her breast. I pray that you as a minister of God will have that same kind of love for each member of this congregation and a real sincere desire to help each member to know God better.

Paul loved the people so much that he was even willing to support himself. In verse nine he said, "Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship: we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you."

I pray that this type of love will be a part of your life.

V. Holy

What is a minister? The final characteristic that I want to point out is in verse ten, "You are witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed." The Apostle Paul, like all ministers, was not perfect. He made his mistakes and people did criticize him. Oh, how people are able to criticize ministers. It's amazing how many church members go home and have fried preacher or roast preacher for Sunday dinner. Tracy, there's not doubt at all in my mind that you will be criticized, especially since you are in such a prominent ministry as the ministry of music, where people have such strong feelings and such strong opinions. But, I plead with you members of the congregation to realize that you can make or break Tracy's ministry. If you want to criticize him loud enough and long enough, you can destroy him, but on the other hand, if you will love him and pray for him and support his ministry, then you can make him into an even greater minister of God. It sometimes seems easier to destroy the man of God than it does to destroy the sins that are in our own lives and correct them.

A minister of God must focus his attention on the sins of the people in order to save the people and help them to be righteous. therefore, Tracy, I charge you as a minister to be a holy man of God. What does that mean to be a holy man of God? When Paul said he was a holy man of God, I think that means he observed all the duties of Christianity.

Now, as Tracy's father, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to be able to stand here tonight and to say that I commend him to his ministry with no fears. As Tracy grew up, I never did have to worry about him telling a lie or stealing something or going to any X-rated movies or drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes or doing anything else. I'm so proud to say that he has always been an obe-

dient son and I fully expect that to be the same kind of life he will live here in Las Vegas. I'm quite certain that he will be a holy man of God.

The Apostle said he not only lived the holy life, but that he lived justly. What does that mean? He did no harm to anybody. He was honest before all men. I'm certain Tracy is not going to run up any bills and charge accounts that he will fail to pay for. I'm sure that he will be just and honest and truthful to everybody and pay his bills as any good man of God should do.

Paul says he lived before the people an unblamable life. People criticized him, but they were never able to bring any real charge against him. Years ago, when I served the Lord at Catlin, Illinois, there was a member of the church that had become a backslider, a real bad backslider. One day he came to me and told me that he would like to rededicate his life to Christ and so he did. The members of the Catlin church at first would not receive him back; they were suspicious that he was going to continue to live a hypocritical, backslidden life. But over a long period of years this man proved to everybody that his repentance and rededication was sincere. He eventually became the minister to the deaf in the Catlin congregation and continues in that ministry to this very day. One day I received this lovely card in the mail from this brother in Christ. This card reads like this:

What is a Minister?

A minister is someone who is chosen by God as a shepherd of souls in his care. He is someone who comforts an unhappy heart with a smile or a word or a prayer. A minister is someone whose strength and devotion enriches the living of others. He's someone who preaches the doctrine of Christ that basically all men are brothers. A minister is someone whose goal is to follow a worthy and lofty ideal, to guide other souls in the straight paths of truth, to sympathize, comfort and heal. A minister is someone of great

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understanding, whose selfless devotion to duty imparts all hearts the real spirit of giving and adds to life more truth and beauty.

This brother in Christ sent me this card with that verse inside because he had judged me to be that kind of minister in his life. I knew then and I know now that I did not deserve any compliment like this, because I was never able to live up perfectly to the duties of the ministry anymore than any other man. But I deeply appreciated the card. I deeply appreciated this verse and, Tracy, I want to pass it on to you in this manner. I pray that your ministry here in Las Vegas will result in the change in somebody's life and that they will be so appreciative of it that someday you will have the joy of receiving a card like this, and that somebody else will look up to you and say, "You are my minister!"

May God bless you, Son, as you are ordained to the ministry of God. That is my prayer.

Dear friends, we come to this moment of invitation. Every gospel service in the Christian Church always offers anyone that is unsaved the opportunity of giving their lives to Jesus Christ. If you have not accepted Christ as your Savior, will you do it right now? If you have never been buried with Him in baptism, will you come and obey Him right now? If you've never placed your membership, would you come right now and place your membership? Let us stand together and sing the hymn together. Will you come?

