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Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

Fulfill Your Ministry

Paul concludes the Colossian letter with a note. He says (4:17),

Say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.”

The word “ministry” is *diakonia* and means “a work of service.” It’s from the same root as “slave” or, in some contexts, “deacon.” Ministries in the church vary (1 Cor. 12:5) from the mundane (Acts 6:1, Rom. 12:7, 1 Tim. 3:10) to the spiritual (Col. 1:23, Acts 6:4). Paul does not specify what Archippus’s ministry was, but Archippus knew, and he needed to get busy with it. Every ministry is important and provides something vital to the body of Christ.

The word “fulfill” is *plero* and means “to fill to the top, to complete.” It is used of such things as the completion of a set period of time (John 7:8) or a set number of things (Rev. 6:11), or of obtaining a full measure of intangible things such as joy (Phil. 2:2) or good works (Rev. 3:2).

All Christians have work to do in the church. We learn some important things from Paul’s exhortation.

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“The ministry which you have received.” Your ministry is a responsibility placed upon you by God. “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly” (Rom. 12:6). If you have ability, you have responsibility. If you can lead singing, you need to do it. If you can give richly, you need to do it. If all you can do is give a ride to services, cook a meal, comfort the suffering, or bring “a cup of cold water,” you need to do it fully and faithfully. I hesitate to make this point too strongly, but the more I think of it, the more I believe that a ministry is not strictly voluntary! An elder is not an elder by the vote of the congregation, but “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). A preacher is not a preacher because he wants a career path, but because he is responsible to the call to “be a good servant of Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 4:6), to guard and spread “the treasure which has been entrusted to you” by God (2 Tim. 1:14). Every Christian must “take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” by God (1 Tim. 6:12). God gives us the tasks to complete and the tools to accomplish them. Fulfill your ministry!

“Take heed to the ministry.” Your ministry doesn’t need a label or a title, but you need to make it a priority, working at it diligently. Work it with all your strength until it is completed. Also, refuse to be distracted by someone else’s ministry. The overseers in Acts 6 gave the service of caring for the widows to seven capable men, so that they could devote themselves “to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). The Apostles would have been *unfaithful* to God if they had traded in their work for a lesser work. Paul said to Timothy, “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5). Timothy would have been ineffective in his work and unfaithful to God if he allowed himself to be distracted from paying “close attention to yourself, and to your teaching” (1 Tim. 4:16). Fulfill your ministry!

“In the Lord.” Christ will reward faithful service (1 Cor. 15:58, Heb. 6:10, 1 Tim. 3:13, Luke 14:14). Fulfill your ministry! —*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“You may judge a man by the reputation of his enemies.” —*Arab prov.*

God of Deliverances

Usually when we think of the verb “to deliver” we think of the UPS man delivering to us a package. But in the Bible, the word is used over 300 times to describe God delivering His people *from* some kind of problem. Deliverance is rescue; deliverance is salvation. And our God is the One from whom all such blessings come!

Psalm 68:20 says,

Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden,
The God who is our salvation.
God is to us a God of deliverances.

God delivers His people so often that it is right to think of Him as the very God of deliverances. Consider:

God delivered the family of Jacob from famine (Gen. 45:7) through the many trials of Joseph.

God delivered the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 6:6) by parting the Red Sea.

God walked with the children of Israel during their wandering, “to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you” (Deut. 24:14).

God said to Gideon, “I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped” (Judges 7:7), and He put the Midianite horde to flight.

God delivered David from Goliath. David confidently declared, “the Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Sam. 17:37).

The psalmists looked to God to deliver them from violence (Psalm 22:20), from wicked men (Psalm 27:12), from persecutors (Psalm 142:6), from trouble (Psalm 54:7), from fear (Psalm 34:4), from distress (Psalm 107:6), from poverty (Psalm 72:12), and from death itself (Psalm 33:19).

Sometimes we need deliverance from ourselves. David asked God to deliver him from the consequences of his own foolish transgressions (Psalm 39:8) and the guilt of his own sins (Psalm 51:14).

Hezekiah prayed that Jerusalem would be delivered from the armies of Sennacherib and the taunting of his man Rabshakeh (Isaiah 37:20), and God sent upon them a terrible plague which forced them to run away before they fired a single arrow.

God delivered the prophet Jeremiah from his political enemies and false teachers (Jer. 1:8).

God delivered the three friends from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace (Dan. 3:17), and delivered Daniel from the lion's den (Dan. 6:20). Even the pagan king Darius had to proclaim, "fear and tremble before the God of Daniel ... for He delivers and rescues" (Dan. 6:26-27).

God elevated Esther to her position of influence to provide deliverance for the dispersed Jews (Esth. 4:14).

God delivered Peter from prison, and delivered Paul from shipwreck. Later Paul said, "the Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18).

With such examples of strong deliverance, we too can look to God for aid and salvation. He promises to deliver us from overwhelming temptation (1 Cor. 10:13) and from the power of Satan (Heb. 2:15).

Let us therefore lift up to God "songs of deliverance" (Psalm 32:7). A whole "collection of idols" cannot deliver (Isaiah 57:13), the hand of human flesh and worldly weaponry cannot deliver (Psalm 33:16, 60:11, 108:12), and all the money in the world cannot deliver (Zeph. 1:18). Nor can the righteous deeds of others (Ezek. 14:20) or of the distant past (Ezek. 33:12). God alone, and a right relationship with His Christ, who was "delivered over for us all" (Rom. 8:32), provides the deliverance we need from all threats.

I love You, O Lord, my strength.
The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge;
My shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
And I am saved from my enemies (Psalm 18:1-3).

—John Guzzetta