

# CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

S. Franklin Logsdon

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### PAUL’S KEYNOTE AT CORINTH

“Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not”  
(II Corinthians 4:1)

Pleasing platform performance was undoubtedly not among Paul’s acuirements. The Corinthian people spoke disparagingly both of his bodily appearance and of his oratorical ability, but acknowledged a gravity in his message. His style was clear, concise and convincing. He possessed the coveted faculty of being able to express *multum in farvo*—much in few words.

As a teacher of doctrine, he has never been excelled. Heaven’s richest wisdom flowed freely from him in a pointed, practical manner without ambiguity or verbosity. His certainty of expression, undergirded by unquestioned sincerity, gave him prestige with thinking people. The psychology of his approach, the logic of his development and the pungency of his challenge brought him the great success which crowned his dedicated efforts.

The keynote of his message to the Corinthian believers reminds of a great general who says to his soldiers, “The assignment before us is most important. We know our cause is just. Let US go forward.” After his premise was soundly established, this fearless preacher came to the point, “**Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.**”

*This is obviously a UNIQUE ministry.*

(1) It outshines the law. “**For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory**” (II Corinthians 3:9).

Paul stressed the fact that grace transcends the law, and he emphasized the better things under the new covenant. He pictured the law as a pedagogue, leading children up to Christ in Whom they could put away childish things and become men. He described the law as being weak through the flesh, and delighted in the fact that God sent His Son to condemn sin in the flesh. “**Christ is the end of the law for righteousness,**” he contended. He did not mean that Christ had merely punctuated the law, but that he had absorbed it, taking all the force of its killing letter, fulfilling all its rigorous requirements, then presenting a glorious righteousness without impossible exactions as a gift absolutely free.

(2) It outweighs the wisdom of men.

When Paul wrote, “**The world by wisdom knew not God,**” he revealed that no ministry of human origin was capable of bringing men into vital relationship with God. Education is indispensable, but it cannot bring men to God. Reformation is valuable, but it cannot justify a sinner. Worldly wisdom may raise the living standard, but it cannot lift a soul to heaven.

(3) It outlines the deliverance of God.

It is a ministry with a throb of love:

- Which reaches to the utmost depth in pity,
- Which goes to the greatest length in mercy,
- Which lifts to the loftiest height in power,
- Which keeps through the endless ages in faithfulness and
- Which gives the richest, most boundless gifts in grace.

It calls when men are careless, invites when they are indifferent and helps when all are helpless. Step by step it leads from sin and despair through the avenue of faith into the fulness of Christ.

To show that the Christian ministry offered a living message to a dying world, the Apostle emphasized its universality by stressing its plan, purpose, provisions and presentation. A world-loving God would not limit His affection, nor could He be partial in His dealings since He is no respecter of persons.

“**Christ died for all,**” Paul strongly contended, and the ministry in which he was engaged carried God’s offer of mercy, conceded His willingness to forgive and conveyed a heavenly hope to all men everywhere. This mammoth global undertaking called for a united ministry, made necessary because “**there are diversities of gifts . . . and there are differences of administrations . . . and there are diversities of operations**” (I Corinthians 12:4-6).

Paul sowed, Apollos watered.

- Some may preach while others teach;
- Some may evangelize while others edify;
- Some may counsel while others comfort;
- Some may go to the field while others “**stay by the stuff.**”

If all are faithful with their several gifts, there will be a blending of contributions to produce results that are pleasing to the Lord of the Harvest.

*It is a possessed ministry.*

The infinite God has signally honored us by placing in our hands a ministry that does miracles. It is not of future bestowment; it is a present possession. We now have it.

- Whether clearly defined in our thinking or ill-defined, we have it.
- Whether highly valued or lightly disparaged, we have it.
- Whether actually accepted or mentally rejected, we have it.

It is something from which we cannot detach ourselves. It is one of the practical accompaniments of our “**so great salvation.**” It carries a responsibility of indefinable weightiness, which, if discharged, produces a present joy and promises a prospective reward; but, if ignored, it will hound us to our dying day and will visit us with loss at the judgment seat of Christ.

This ministry is some others’ opportunity of heaven held in our trust. When we think of it in these terms, it becomes a matter of solemn moment. What is a ministry but an opportunity to be useful, the privilege of being a blessing to others—the chance to prove that our life has not been in vain; but the ministry to which Paul refers adds unspeakable importance to this general idea of service.

It is as though the Lord in His infinite graciousness were saying, “*Unto you who are Mine is committed the privilege of being My ambassadors—bearers of heavenly cargoes, covering the globe with the most needful of all necessities, the message of life and hope with all its transforming power and blessing, and they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever.*”

*That the Christian has a ministry is undeniable.*

He may do little about it, but he cannot gainsay his Scriptural responsibility. No one ever seemed to question the fact that the Apostle was a servant of God. Everyone about him knew that he had a ministry. This was true of all those pioneers of the faith. It was definitely true of the martyrs. They were given the choice of denying or of dying. They preferred death because their faith was their life. They could not give it up. Christ was everything to them. They continued their ministry until the burning fagots brought their spoken testimony to a close, and then their martyrdom spoke for them and speaks still.

An earnest Christian who knows anything about obedience to the Lord should react like Peter and John, even under attempted suppression. They declared, “**we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard.**” This is a testimony to a possessed responsibility that must be discharged.

*This ministry is equally unalterable.*

The commission is the same today as of old. The things of the Lord do not change as the fashions of men.

- The lost are just as lost as ever.
- God’s love is just as wonderful.
- The gospel is just as powerful.
- Heaven is just as alluring as ever, and hell is unchangeably horrible.

God still saves men by the foolishness of preaching.

- It may be from the lips of a pastor, evangelist or Sunday School teacher.
- It may be through a loved one in the home.
- It could be through a gospel tract carefully delivered or through a letter prayerfully written, but the Word must be presented.

It is the seed from whence new life emanates. If the ministry were not of God, it might change with the fluctuations and innovations of men; but since it is of God, it is immutable—in keeping with His own unchangeableness.

*Not only is this possessed ministry undeniable and unalterable, but it is also definitely non-transferable.*

Each servant was responsible for his own pounds while the master was away, and each of us is likewise responsible to Him Who said, “**Occupy till I come.**”

We may think we have transferred our ministry by letting another do what the Lord has called on us to perform, but not so. The books one day will be opened. Paul had once planned to go on a journey into Bithynia, but the Spirit let him know that the divine plan called for an expedition toward Europe. He might have sent Silas in his stead, but he could not have done so and have been obedient to the Lord. The present-day seriousness connected with this thought is that so many seem content with the belief that someone else will do all that is required to make Christ known in the world. This is grossly erroneous. There is something for each one to do.

“Somebody needs you somewhere,  
Somebody needs me too;  
Somebody needs a word you can say,  
Some deed that you only can do.”

*It is a perceived ministry.*

Paul took for granted that the believers whom he was addressing had a clear vision of Christian responsibility, for he said, “**Seeing we have this ministry.**”

It is most apparent that the vision of God’s people today is sadly distorted. This is one characteristic of apostate days. Satanic deception plays havoc with spiritual perception; but the thought before us suggests the possibility of perceiving it, so that no one can plead inability of discernment.

“**If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine**” (John 7:17).

It is incumbent upon those who receive Christ as their own personal Saviour to follow the example of Paul, with the same sincerity and earnestness, in ascertaining the will of the Lord.

Definiteness should not cease when one reposes faith in His Saviourhood but should ever continue in a constant acknowledgment of His Lordship.

- Samuel said, “**Speak Lord for thy servant heareth.**”
- David requested, “**Teach me Thy way; lead me in a plain path.**”
- Isaiah volunteered, “**Here am I, send me.**”

These are but a few indications of how many have perceived their debt of love to Him and have laid their all on the altar of service. They have been victors; they have held the banner high; they have waged the battle for righteousness; they paid the price and anticipated the reward, while others allowed their eyes to be dimmed by self-interest, their minds to be dulled through self-will, their hearts to be hardened by deceit, only to suffer eternal loss when the books are opened. Oh, for eyes to see and minds to understand and hearts to be willing to choose, while we may, the better thing for His glory and our good. It is decidedly plain enough for us to perceive.

How much we owe to the clear-sightedness of the beloved Apostle we shall never fully know this side of the veil. One thing is most evident as we study his life; he furnishes a godly incentive and gives to us an impetus in our engagements for the Lord.

His was an accurate perception, an enlightened vision. He had to be able to detect the leading of the Spirit in order not to run ahead nor to lag behind. If he could know God’s will, then others could; if others could, then we can. Perceiving God’s will for our lives is not the enigma Satan has led us to believe.

A simple syllogism might be cited.

God’s will may be known by those who will to know it. If we have the will, we shall know.

To one who might have lightly said, “I do not know what God would have me to do,” the Apostle would have impatiently retorted, “Preposterous!” In all those arduous and extensive missionary sojourns, Paul had to develop an accuracy in perceiving the will of God because he was an agent for Him. Something within us would cry out against an intimation that a divinely designed ministry should be carried on according to the flights and fancies of man’s imagination or by the best promptings of man’s imperfect judgment. No, God’s work must be done in God’s way to have God’s blessing. Let us learn to be more accurate in perceiving His will.

The very attitude of Paul’s Christian conduct gives credence to the fact that it was an *approved* perception. When it became clear that God was leading in a certain manner, Paul stood out almost singularly as one servant who did not make excuse. Nor did he plead inability or procrastinate before beginning the job. In acknowledging God’s way, one willingly and readily allows God’s plan to take precedence over one’s own desires.

It is an admission, always, that God’s way is both right and best. Someone has said, “There is no success outside the will of God and there is no failure within.” An approval of divine leading is a belief in the truth of this proverb. Paul never saw anything but folly in raising a “why” or “wherefore” when the Spirit made the plan clear.

He seemed to favour the fact that man has absolutely no right to his own opinion when God has once spoken on a matter. Otherwise, the authority of God would be in question. His own plans could easily be discarded in deference to God's way.

It is interesting also to note that it was an *appreciated* perception which Paul had for the ministry entrusted to him. He was glad when his heavenly Father would say, "This is the way, walk ye herein." It gave him the confidence of being in the right course and it brought him assurance of heavenly guidance. How easy to serve under such conditions. With what greater fortitude one may meet the enemy, as meet him we will in the Lord's service.

When Samuel was yielding to Israel's demands for a king, he reasoned with them, saying, "**The Lord advanced Moses and Aaron.**" By this he meant that only God can give advancement and will do so if we perceive His will and follow His way. That means the enemy must give ground that impassable barriers must collapse, that irksome problems must disappear and that victory is assured.

*It is a particular ministry.* "**Therefore, seeing we have THIS ministry . . .**"

Whatever else this grammatical demonstrative meant to others, it was freighted with the greatest significance in the mind of Paul. The Galatian believers had good reason to believe this some two years previously when the Apostle wrote them a strong letter with his own hand warning them about confusing the Christian message with other religious thinking of the day. What Christ offers needs no alteration, addition or subtraction, nor yet to be complemented by some concoction of man. It is unique and must not be confused with counterfeits which are sure to be evolved by the sower of tares. One can almost sense the unusual emphasis with which he enunciated the words, "**this ministry.**"

Doubtless his first thought was that it *contrasted the law*. The word "**therefore**" in the text at once suggests some antecedent fact or factor, and thus carries us back to the preceding chapter; namely, second Corinthians three. There, the Apostle made a forceful differentiation. He drew a contrast between the old covenant and the new. He showed that the former was of the letter; the latter of the Spirit. The one was a ministration of death; the other a ministry of life. The old was glorious; the new transcendently glorious. The old was done away; the new is still in vogue. Moses was prominent in the former; Christ fills the latter. He laboured the point that "**God hath made us able ministers of the new testament**" (3:6).

Then, Paul wanted to make unmistakably plain that this ministry *concerned the lost*. This is one prominent reason why it concerned him. This is why it should eminently concern every Christian.

It is the ministry that brings to men the message of the cross. Thus, it is that which concerned God when He gave His only begotten Son. It is that which concerned Christ when He endured the cross, and despised its shame. This ministry is redemption's release, the lifeline of hope to a world of men drowning in the deceitfulness of sin. To have a ministry of such transcendent importance seemed to overwhelm the Apostle.

He was not a bigoted, biased and unbalanced individual because he was determined to know nothing among the Corinthians save Christ and Him crucified. He was merely giving evidence of the fact that his conversion had placed him in the very center of the most awe-inspiring, heart-subduing and soul-thrilling ministry. He was now, in the sufficiency of God (II Corinthians 3:5), an able minister of a matter that spelled hope for all who were lost in darkness and sin.

The aims, ends and processes of this ministry involved not only a hope beyond the grave but also a help for those who must meet the vicissitudes of this life. It comforts the living.

To the tempted, Paul could say, “**There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it**” (I Corinthians 10:13).

To the afflicted he could testify, “**I sought thrice for relief, and the Lord assured me His grace was sufficient for me.**”

To those bereft of loved ones, with hearts pierced through with grief, he could relate the facts about the blessed hope of Christ's return, and then add, “**Wherefore comfort one another with these words**” (I Thessalonians 4:18).

From every angle of vision, this was a wonderful calling and worthy of the approval and appreciation of every Christian.

*It is a propitiuous ministry.*

In his masterful appeal, Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that “**we have received mercy.**” God had found a way to be merciful to all who would receive mercy since Christ became a propitiation for our sins, but it is this ministry that brings the knowledge of that truth. It is therefore a ministry of mercy. What he was saying is not obscured. He was pleading for performance of their ministry, the discharge of their God-given responsibility, and the very fact that someone brought them the message should prove a strong motivating force in sending them on to others with the same news which led to their own salvation. Advisedly, this was a most effective challenge.

Of all that we have received from the Lord, we have deserved nothing.

It has all been in the mercy of God through Christ by the work of the Spirit. It brings us *pardon* which involves a full, unqualified, eternal forgiveness of our sins. It involves a freedom from the domineering, degrading and disastrous grip of Satan. “**He whom the Son sets free is free indeed.**”

This ministry likewise brings us *peace* which is the product of justification. We are not only loosed from Satan's grasp but lifted into a position of fellowship with God.

Peace is the pleasant assurance that all is well with one's soul, condemnation having been withdrawn and sweet contemplations of glory filling the mind with a gladdening effect. We "tried in vain a thousand ways, our fears to quell, our hopes to raise" until we heard of Jesus Christ and His salvation. Then, came peace through Him.

This ministry also brings us *power*. It puts us in contact with the source of power. That which made Paul so tireless and effective was the power of God. It enabled him to triumph over the world, the flesh and the devil.

All of this, together with every blessing which Calvary purchased, would be the holy, happy possibility for all men if those who have received mercy would tell others.

*It is a pressing ministry.*

It must have been with more than usual firmness that the Apostle enunciated the words, "**We faint not.**" The literal translation may make this appeal more practical —"*We do not give up.*" More freely, "*We press on!*"

Such an expression was consonant with Paul's very character. After he surrendered to Christ, even kings and magistrates could not coerce him to capitulate. The devil tried in many disguised manners to bring him to a halt, but still he pressed on. Men were dying in their sins without God and without hope—their end was destruction—only Christ could help them.

In the British empire, there is a slogan which reads, "The king's mail must go through." This is how Paul felt about the King's message—it **MUST** go through!

This stimulating, irresistible challenge, ringing down through the centuries, comes to us with the freshness of those undying qualities of divine truth, quick and powerful, ready to pierce any receptive heart.

We, too, have a ministry. It is a like ministry. It calls for the same wholehearted acceptance and faithful fulfillment which were accorded it by the exemplary Apostle, whose natural qualifications were by no means exceptional, but who had a great heart of love for his Lord and a broken, bleeding heart for men without the Saviour. These two simple factors made him profoundly great.

A little more actual love for Christ and a little more real love for the lost, then, we, too, would press on—on as we know we should in those prayerful moments of our lives—on as the day demands—on as would be pleasing to Him "**Who loved us and gave Himself for us.**"

Let us press on!

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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