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PROFESSOR DAVE KEEHN

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BY

DAVID Y. PARK

Introduction and Overview

My Theology and Philosophy of Ministry is based upon primarily three verses in the Bible: Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; and James 1:22. Matthew 28:18-20, as most Christians know, is known as the "Great Commission." This mandate charged the eleven to begin the completion of sharing the Gospel and making disciples from every nation. However, we know that this mandate was not only for the eleven, but also for the future believer's - the spiritual posterity of those eleven progenitors. And as such, we can be sure that this responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission has been passed down to the universal, invisible, and local Church of Christ today. By carefully reading and examining Matthew 28:20, which says, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age," it is easy to conclude and confirm that the Church has been enlisted to enter into this same type of work which was commissioned to the eleven. Consequently, this mandate is not only meant for us today, but also for those who will come after us, "until the end of the age."

Now obviously not all of us are called to do cross-cultural missions. As members of the body of Christ, we have each been given a unique variety of different gifts as well as individual callings. And just as in a human body there are a number of different parts, the same applies to the members of the Church, the body of Christ. Not all of us can be the legs, or ears, or eyes. Each of us have our own functions, which are ultimately controlled by the head, the head being Christ. We find confirmation in Ephesians 4:11-12, where it says, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...for the work of Ministry..." (emphasis mine). Nevertheless, one thing is certain, all of us have been called to do the work of a disciple, and we are to disciple all people regardless of status, skin color, or a person's culture.

As such, it is extremely imperative for all believers to understand that the ministry of the "Great Commission" is actually a "Ministry of Reconciliation." For the Word tells us that, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And again in 2 Corinthians 5:18 Paul says, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself, through Christ and gave us the Ministry of Reconciliation. For these reasons, the purpose of the Ministry of Reconciliation will help Christians, especially those in the local churches, to understand what the will of God is. And God's will is this, that we disciple people of all nations, love God by loving our neighbors, and by taking care of those in jail, the homeless, the orphans, and those who are poor. This Ministry of Reconciliation will shed light on the marginalized and forgotten people groups within our communities and give a call to action to all those who profess to believe in Jesus Christ.

With these things in mind, our Ministry of Reconciliation will use a variety of approaches to be most effective. First and foremost, the Ministry of Reconciliation begins with research. In order to obey the mandate of the Great Commission to teach all men to observe what God has commanded us, we must spend time researching and studying exactly what the Word says so that we can see where the gaps are between what the Lord has commanded and what we are actually doing or not doing. Research transforms us by filling us up with His Word and people are controlled by whatever dwells within them. Therefore, if the Word of God dwells within us, it will then naturally come out of us as a result of an overflow; this is why Colossians 3:15-16 tells us to let the peace of Christ control our hearts, and let the Word of Christ dwell within us.

After helping others to see the areas that they are lacking in as far as in terms of fulfilling

the actual mandate to make disciples of all nations, this Ministry of Reconciliation will provide practical suggestions and ideas on how others can actually act upon what they have been charged to do. We will also lead by example in doing practical ministry, such as by participating in Open-Air Preaching, doing food drives, and dropping off care packages to those located in areas such as Skid Row. The ultimate vision for this Ministry is to actually create a system in which we can create Bible Study Cell Groups for the homeless as well as build an actual physical place of worship that they can meet at and have Sunday worship in. In short, our Ministry of Reconciliation is focusing on helping to reconcile the "prodigals" by first helping the "elder sons" to see where they err, and then by commissioning them to go and seek their younger brothers - the "prodigals" - and to bring them back to the Father and provide for their needs and disciple them.

Theological Beliefs

The Biblical values that have most influenced my ministry choices are the literal instructions that God has given us through His Word. The two greatest commandments also known as the "Law of Christ" are to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and to love your neighbor as you love yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). These two commandments fulfill the Moral Laws that were contained in the Old Testament. God's overall desire and will for us is for us to Glorify Him and He receives the most Glory not from having created a perfect unfallen world, but rather through His work of redeeming an imperfect fallen World through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. This same opinion was also expressed by John Piper who said, "God created this world for the praise of the glory of his grace displayed supremely in the death of

Jesus." And it is these truths that have influenced the philosophy and theology of my ministry choices and why fulfilling the Great Commission is so important to me.

In Matthew 25:34-43, Jesus made it clear, He did not come to feed the rich, to take care of the strong, or heal the healthy. No, Christ came for the poor, for the broken, the hungry, and for the outcast. Yet in today's Churches rarely do we see these types of people in the pews. And this is not a mystery, we don't see them in our churches because they're usually unwelcome, or treated with bias, and judged. For these reasons, the marginalized and the unbelievers are not interested in attending church and also reject the gospel we preach. To them, it does not matter how well we know Scripture, and neither do they care to hear what Christians have to say. Many of them have heard the Gospel, and some of them know it well, but they need to experience it, and this may be the same case for some "Christians."

For this reason, when people of the world see us say one thing, but doing another thing, they are totally turned off, and there is really nothing we can really offer them that they want. When our lives don't reflect the message we share, all we can offer them is self-righteous hypocrisy, and who wants that? For this reason, I have made it a point to try my absolute best to apply Matthew 7:1-5 which tells us to not judge hypocritically, unrighteously, or in a condemning manner. Furthermore, focusing on actual application of the Word has caused me to spend more time living out the Gospel opposed to only studying it. What good is it if we spend hours studying the Word, memorizing it, but don't practice it? Does it really matter if you are a five point Calvinist, correct in your theology, but have no care, no concern, and no love for the poor and homeless?

Christ made it clear, if you are not serving the poor, helping the needy, taking care of widows and orphans, you are not serving Him and He does not know you. And in reality, you are worse than a non-believer who does not know Christ but yet helps the poor, even if it is for selfish reasons. As William Booth once said, "You cannot warm the hearts of people with God's love if they have an empty stomach and cold feet." For these reasons, I have chosen to focus my Ministry of Reconciliation on taking the Lord's commands literally, and being a doer of the Word rather than just a hearer.

There are also two passages that I believe every believer needs to understand correctly, and these are the stories of the "Tax Collector," and the "Prodigal Son," which are found in Luke 15:1-3; 11-24. First off, we must pay attention to all the details of the story. We need to first look at and pay attention to who this parable was meant for. If we go back to the beginning, we will see that Christ had two audiences - first there were the "tax collectors and sinners," and there were the "Pharisees and the teachers of the law." The younger son was representative of the "tax collectors and sinners," and the elder brother was representative of the "Pharisees and the teachers of the Law." In reality, this parable was meant for not only the prodigal younger brothers, but also for the elder brothers.

It is important to realize that Christ did not have to appeal to the younger brother types. They already knew they were wayward sinners. And they were drawn to Christ and His message of acceptance and forgiveness because they knew they needed it. Therefore, the main audience Christ had in mind when he was teaching this parable was actually the elder brothers, those who are what Tim Keller calls the "moral insiders." The focus of Christ then, was not the immoral outsiders, rather, it was those who saw themselves as righteous, those who placed

their faith in “religious moralism.” And this is why Jesus said to the religious leaders that “the tax collectors and the prostitutes enter the kingdom before [them]” (Matthew 21:31, emphasis mine).

Unfortunately, in our world today, not much has changed. Our churches are filled with “Elder brothers” who are blind to their own condition as a result of moral conformity. They do not see that they are the problem with our churches today. In their eyes, their moral rectitude absolves them of all obligation and duty to their fellow man. They take pride in the fact that they pay tithes, attend church every week, don’t do drugs, and keep most of the commandments - just like the Pharisees and teachers of the law, and just like the elder brother in the parable. And as a result, whether they know it or not, they avoid Jesus by keeping the moral laws. They are essentially their own saviors who do not need Christ, they are righteous by their own works, at least that’s what they think. However, what they forget is that “...all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

What people also need to understand is that, although the younger brother was far off from home, the elder brother was even more distanced from the father and alienated from the father, maybe not physically, but definitely in heart. We can see this clearly in the story by his reaction to the fathers welcoming of the younger brother. Infuriated, the elder brother refuses to join the feast to celebrate the return of the lost younger brother. We can also see that by his words, he was just as selfish if not more than the younger brother. It is also easy to deduce that he did not obey the father out of love and respect for his father, but rather, it was result-oriented and reward-based obedience. But as we can see by the story, this type of service

does not produce joy, instead, it produces pride, and an unforgiving judgmental spirit. Thus, the saying is true, "The thief of joy is comparison."

Moreover, another thing this story teaches us is that, the elder brothers do things not out of their love for others, but out of love for themselves. Whenever they do things for others, they are in actuality, doing things for themselves. It may appear that they are feeding and helping the poor, but in reality they are feeding their own egos and pride; they are trying to help themselves. And it is a result of this type of selfish self-centeredness that many younger brothers do not want to go to church.

Churches should be full of born-again sinners who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, not with the righteous born-again righteous, who have redeemed themselves. And it is because of the elder brothers lacking an understanding of the true gospel that they unknowingly and/or knowingly become condescending, condemning, and judgmental. But God loves not only the lost and broken, but he also loves the hardened religious people - and we can see this in the fact that Christ saved a man like Paul, who by the standards of his time, was a Pharisee of Pharisees.

And this is why the story of the "Prodigal Son," ends abruptly. Christ left it open for his hearers and us. He did this so that elder brothers would be able to finish their own ending. Christ gives His listeners a chance to repent of their own moral goodness. His hope is that elder brothers would come to the realization that being good is not the solution to being bad. What Christ wants us to understand is that salvation is not and cannot be found anywhere else other than in Him. What people also tend to overlook is that Christ is an example of a good elder brother. All of us were or are the younger brother in some shape or form. We were all at one

point in our lives lost. But God, the Good Father, sent His Son Jesus Christ to bring us home. And even now, Christ is seeking the lost, hoping to bring all of God's children back home. And not only this, Christ out of His own volition wants to share His inheritance with us, at His own cost, and he paid for this with His own very life on the cross of Calvary.

Therefore, the elder brothers, which most of us who are not homeless are, need to follow in the footsteps of Christ and go out and seek the lost and help to bring them home. Let the elder brothers also learn something from the parable of the "Good Samaritan." Let us not be like the priest or the Levite who walked past the injured, fallen, half dead man. Instead, let us be like the "Good Samaritan," who went out of his way, to attend to the needs of a Jew, someone who in reality was not someone who he was to have any type of interaction with.

And rather than looking down on younger brothers, let us learn to have compassion towards them and not make judgmental assumptions on how they might have gotten where they are. For all of us have the same enemy, Satan, who's only desire is to steal, kill, and destroy us - all of us should be able to relate to the man who was robbed and beaten in the story of the "Good Samaritan."

Another passage that has influenced my ministry choices and the way I do ministry is Romans 12:5 which says, "so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." And also 1 Corinthians 12:27, where Paul told his listeners that they are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Now this body that Paul was referring to, is what the Church is supposed to be. The Church is not a building, or something to be separated by a name, the Church is the body of Christ, and Christ is the head of this body, the Church. Because of this, I actively encourage those in my life to rather than just focusing on

going to Church, to go and be the Church, and to go out and build the Church, which is the body of Christ: This same idea was shared by and expressed by A.W. Tozer when he said, "Worshippers never leave church...we carry our sanctuary with us wherever we go." And these are the most important values that have affected the philosophy and theology of my ministry choices.

Ministry Implications

Therefore, there are several real life applications and calls to action that will be offered as a result of this research and the integration of our Christian faith and it's principles. The first would be to truly practice loving each other as ourselves: this is how Christ started His Ministry of Reconciliation, and he did this by saving us with His death on the cross. One practical way to practice this would be to treat others as you would like to be treated. This means that if you have or know of a member of your Church who is or is about to be homeless, as difficult as it may be, invite the member and their family into your home if you have the means to do so. Provide for their physical needs as best as you can until they are able to find suitable work and save enough money to afford a home. Or as a Church, the members of the congregation can come together and possibly raise funds to provide free or low income housing as UPLIFT in San Diego has been working on doing (Aarons, 2019). This is actually what Hillside Church of Los Angeles is also working on since we have a huge area of land that is owned by us and is not being used. And I am sure that there are actually many wealthy Christians who own unused property who have the resources to provide places of shelter for the homeless but lack enough heart to do so. But there is one group who has stepped it up in the past which is Chic-Fil-A who

is known to allow homeless people to sleep inside their restaurants on nights when it rains. Hopefully believers can take note of their charity and follow suit.

Another way to practice this Ministry of Reconciliation is by focusing on trying to help solve or mitigate the problem of homelessness due to substance abuse, mental health issues, and the criminal justice system. We can help these “prodigals” by doing Christian discipleship and local outreach. Those who are using drugs and have mental health issues should not be punished. They are using drugs because they are hurting and have deep pain in their lives that have not been solved. Some of these people have been raped, molested, used, and abused in all sorts of ways. And those who suffer from mental health issues did not ask to be born with their illnesses. People are born with mental health issues as a result of being born in a fallen world due to sin. Therefore, these people need our help and in fact have been seeking help for most of their lives but simply could not find the right kind of help. This same thing applies to those who have been in the criminal justice system. And most of the time, those who have been in county jails or prisons will almost always have substance abuse problems or mental health problems. So what is the best way to help these people?

Once again, as mentioned previously, the best solution is Christian discipleship and outreach. Christ gave us the Great Commission and this Ministry of Reconciliation as his last commandment and it is not just by coincidence. Christ was intentional in commanding us to fulfill the spreading of his Gospel message because it is of the greatest importance. One of the biggest issues with believers trying to help the homeless is by treating them as if they are pigeons. Christians come out of their homes and beautiful churches and essentially go out to the streets, give the homeless food, and then go back to the comfort of their own homes. They

address the physical needs but neglect the greater need, the need for spiritual food. As such, one of the ways I have personally tried tackling this problem is by treating the homeless like I would treat anyone else. I go out each week into Koreatown and do Open-Air Preaching and look for those who I can pray for and disciple. I am currently working on trying to create a system of Bible Study Life Groups for the homeless as well as have a bigger vision to build a physical Church building for those who live on the streets. One would be located near Skid Row and the other would be located in Koreatown. I would encourage others to try to also think of similar ways that they too can try to disciple the homeless.

And there is also one more thing that I am a part of that is helping to solve the issue of homelessness due to the criminal justice system. I am in a ministry called the Lock Ministry that focuses on helping inmates both inside the jails as well as helps those who are coming out transition back into society and get reconciled back to the Father through discipleship and their families and friends through mediation, support, and prayer. Inside jail, we have a project called the P1 Project that pays inmates \$1 each for every chapter of the Bible they write and mail to us. The other project is called the "Potter's Hand" project which I am currently working on to launch this coming December. We offer ex-felons an opportunity to earn a living by setting them up with businesses doing embroidery and T-shirt printing. This will help them to earn a living and be able to pay rent as well as pay for any other expenses they may have. We also have the "Potter's House" project in our future roadmap of 2022. This will be a transitional housing project used to disciple and provide shelter for those who are coming out of jail free of cost.

These are the types of things and some suggestions to consider to help fight against the problem of homelessness and to contribute to the Ministry of Reconciliation. All of us should

get involved with helping to reconcile all people groups, especially the homeless and the marginalized back to God and their friends and families when possible. It is not just a one man job, it must be done together as a community of believers, as the body of Christ. All of us have to live out our faith not only with words and thoughts and feelings, but in tangible ways. We as followers of Christ, must really live out our faith and live in the same manner as Christ and His disciples did. If not, everything we do is simply meaningless, and is hypocrisy. And as Charles Spurgeon said, "Faith and works are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God trusts God; and he that trusts God obeys God. He that is without faith is without works; and he that is without works is without faith." The Lord came to take care of all of our needs, so we too should also adopt this same mind set and be concerned with the welfare of others. This is what the Lord has called us to. And although I may not have the full solution, these suggestions and examples can be a start.

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