

ROPE HOLDER & WELL DIGGER (02).

May 27, 2007.

Introduction.

God's most treasured possession is His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is described as God's "only begotten Son". (*Jn.3:16*). He is God's unique Son, God's only one of a kind Son. In *Matt.3:17* God said concerning His Son, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." In *Jn.1:18* Jesus is described as "the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father." Here is an expression of closeness and affection. In order to save sinners, in order to save you and me, God gave up His most treasured possession.

The Lord Jesus Christ gave up His infinitely glorious existence to become a man in order to save sinners. In *Jn.17:5* Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world began." In *2Cor.8:9* we read, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you

through His poverty might become rich.” *2Cor.5:21* says that Jesus who knew no sin became sin on our behalf. *1Tim.2:6* says He gave His life as a ransom for sinners. In *1Pet.1:18-19* we are told the Lord Jesus shed His precious blood to redeem us. In *Gal.2:20* Paul wrote, “the Son of God ... loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

Our Lord Jesus is the primary example of a well digging ministry. And His Father was His rope holder during His life and ministry on earth. The Father’s and the Son’s love, choices, sacrifices and examples must grip our souls and consciences and draw from us a response. **Isaac Watts’** response is written in the hymn, **“When I survey the wondrous cross.”** He wrote, *“Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far to small; Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”*

Last Lord’s Day I began to preach to you on the subject, **“Rope holder and well digger.”** The expression comes to us from the beginnings of the modern missionary movement. Last Lord’s Day was our second quarter missions’ Sunday

and the goal was to challenge you in one sermon about the issues of the ministry.

But as it turned out, the topic had to be divided into two sermons. I want to do a quick review of what we covered last week and then seek to proceed with today's study.

I began by saying that there are basically three different groups of Christians in any given church. There are the well diggers, the rope holders and the no-can-do-crew. I began by looking at the no-can-do-crew. We saw, with illustrations from God's word, that the no-can-do-crew comes to church to warm the pews. They are the spectators who become the armchair critics. They know everything that must be done. And they know **how** everything must be done. We saw from James they are the talkers, not the doers. They will pray for you but never lift a finger to help you. They have a strong theology about God's sovereignty but a very weak theology of human responsibility.

Today, I want to set before you two examples from the O.T. These two examples are men who are not known to have done any outstanding works for the building

of the nation of Israel and the welfare of the people. Instead they were armchair critics who tried to subvert those who were doing good and working hard to build up the nation. The first example is that of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

Their story is found in *Numbers 16*. They professed to know how things should be done. In their view, Moses was not doing a good enough job. So, having quietly campaigned against Moses and lined up their support, they rose up against Moses, laid a charge against him and led a rebellion against him. (*vs.3*). But the repeated testimony in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers is that Moses was doing everything just as the Lord commanded him. *Exod.40:16* says, "Thus Moses did; according to all that the Lord had commanded him, so he did." The final result is that the Lord's judgment fell upon Korah and his no-can-do-crew of armchair critics.

The second example is that of Absalom. The key passage is in *2Samuel 15*. Absalom is the son of King David. He is in self-imposed exile because he has committed murder. Through the conniving of Joab, David was convinced to allow

Absalom to return to Israel. Having returned and resettled, one day Absalom decided that he could do a better job than his father in ruling Israel. So he set about to subvert his father's throne by criticizing his father's rule and pretending to care more for the people. When he thought he had the support of the people, he led a rebellion against David and declared himself as king over Israel. In the end, the same Joab who helped restore him would kill him in battle.

Our study last Lord's Day of the no-can-do-crew and these additions today show one clear fact : God takes a very dim view of those who belong to the no-can-do-crew. As a matter of fact, serious questions can be raised about the integrity of their Christian profession.

The Rope Holders (contd).

The second point we looked at is the rope holders. I stated very clearly that the fact is, in any given church there should be only two groups of people : the rope holders and the well diggers. No one who claims to be a Christian should belong

to the no-can-do-crew. In our study we looked at eleven N.T. examples of those who were rope holders. Most of the examples were rope holders to the apostle Paul. Some of the examples were well known and some were not well known. Some were men and some were women. Some were rich and some were poor. They became rope holders within the context of their gifts, abilities and circumstances. One woman became a rope holder in Paul's life by becoming a Christian mother to Paul.

When it comes to the work of the ministry, every Christian without exception ought to be a rope holder. As a church, we are involved in an ongoing rope holding ministry in India, China, New Zealand, the USA, Mexico, Haiti, and in the lives of various Caribbean pastors. We have helped pastors with books, computers, photocopiers, and other needed equipment for the effective working of their ministries. Pastors have been taken shopping for clothing for themselves and in some cases for their families. Let me add a word of counsel here about giving gifts to pastors and missionaries. Do not give them things that they cannot use.

The directions I have led you as a church and individuals in this church who have sought my counsel reflect the burdens of my heart for the work of the gospel as I have understood them from God's word. I cannot and will never accept the label that we are a third world church with a third world mentality. I know the denigrating characterizations these labels put upon us in the eyes of so-called first world churches.

We are a Christian church seeking to develop and live by a Christian mindset. We serve the God of the Bible. We are required to know the doctrines of this Bible. We are required to know the commands of this Bible and live by them. In the same breath I want you to know that the promises God gave in the Bible are for us also. And the God who is able to do exceeding abundantly for others is the same God who is able to do exceeding abundantly for us also.

The vision of the gospel work we have followed is not my vision. The vision is Christ's vision. I am following Christ. And when you follow me you are follow Christ and what He wants us to do. What we are doing is not unique. Christian

leaders and churches since the time of the apostles have done the same. On the other hand there is a sense that what we are doing is unique because so-called third world churches have believed the lie handed down to them and lived their Christian lives with a beggarly third world mentality. If I live for one purpose, it is to break up and destroy that beggarly third world mentality and bring you into the brave new world of a Christian mindset that lives fearlessly by faith for the glory of God.

I want to see you become men and women of faith who are living for the glory of God and whose hearts are burdened with the burdens in our Lord's heart. I want to see your hearts passionate for the things our Lord is passionate about. I want to see on that final day many of you taking your stand next to rope holders like Gaius and Philemon and Lydia and Martha and the others.

The things I have listed for you are not all that we are doing as a church. We are doing a lot more. You have the responsibility to keep yourself informed. Members are quick to excuse themselves by saying, *"I wasn't aware the church*

was doing all of these things.” That’s not an excuse. You weren’t aware because you didn’t want to become aware. Ignorance, we say, is bliss. Knowledge brings responsibility. Knowledge puts pressure on our consciences to take action. Knowledge brings the cross into our lives in a very practical way.

I want you to know that with God ignorance is not bliss. **To be ignorant of the things you ought to know makes you morally culpable for failing to know and failing to do.** I want you to clearly understand that you have the responsibility to become aware and to get involved. You have the responsibility to make a plan and get involved. There is no better training than getting involved, making your mistakes, seeing your weak areas and correcting, building and strengthening.

I should not have to approach you to do anything that needs to be done in this church and in the gospel ministry beyond this church. You see a ministry rope, get a hold on it. If others are already holding that rope, tell them to make a little space for you. Like the God we serve, I have no time for talkers. You have heard me say again and again from this pulpit that my back is turned to the talkers and

the armchair critics and my face is turned to the doers. God is an action God. He did merely talk about creating this world. He created the world. He didn't merely talk about sending His Son to die for sinners. He took action and sent His Son. If you are talking to make a plan, that's good. But there comes a point when talking must become action. God is a doer. You must become a doer.

The question arises : What can you do? Let me ask you : Can you encourage? Can you write a letter? Have you ever tried speaking a word of encouragement or writing a note of encouragement to preachers who have passed through this church? Have you ever thought of writing to a missionary and saying, *"I thank God for you, for your labors in the ministry and I want you to know that I am praying for you."*

Do you have a dollar you can spare? Why not give it to missions? How about spending a day in fasting and prayer and saving that food money for missions?

The Philippian church has proven that poverty is not an excuse for failing to tithe and give to missions. As a matter of fact, to fail to give to God what's due to Him

is to rob yourself of God's blessings. You children can also make little sacrifices and give. How about talking less on the cell phone and saving that money to give to some missionary project? How about doing without a box of KFC and giving that money to some missions' project? How about making the orphan home ministry in China a project? Do you know how much one dollar can do for a child in an orphan home in China or India? The Brethren in South India have started a special school and ministry for disabled children in their towns and villages. Have you any idea how much one dollar can do for those children?

Do you have a room in your house you can develop and use for hospitality? Do you have a living room you can use for Bible studies? Do you have a car with space for a person or two? I heard a lady, (no longer a member here), refuse to give someone a ride because she didn't want to be squeezed and get her new dress messed up. I heard a man say, (no longer a member here), *"only two people in my backseat. I am not overloading my car."*

Ushers are rope holders. Deacons are rope holders. You may not be gifted to be a primary preaching / teaching elder. But based on your gifts you can aspire to become a support elder, a rope holding elder. Can you be a Martha without going overboard? Can you be an Onesiphorous, an encourager and refresher of the souls of pastors and others who labor in the ministry? Can you be like Stephanas who provided a place so that pastors and missionaries could take a break from their labors and be physically refreshed? Can you become a praying mother or a praying sister or a praying father or a praying brother to some pastor, preacher or missionary?

The point is this : there are men and women who are on the front lines waging war against the forces of darkness with the gospel. They need rope holders to help them. There are big things that need to be done to keep them going in the fight and there are lots of little things to be done. What are you doing to keep them on the front lines of the battle? What are you contributing to their lives and ministries to encourage them, to refresh them, to strengthen them so that they can make greater efforts in their gospel labors?

The Well Diggers.

This brings us to our third point : **The Well Diggers.** Who are the well diggers? The well diggers are those men who are peculiarly called by the Lord Jesus Christ to the work of the ministry. They are a breed of men apart. I want to use the apostle Paul as the paradigm for our study of this point. The Lord told Ananias concerning Paul, “he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.” (*Acts 9:15*).

Paul was very conscious that he was peculiarly called to the ministry. In *Gal.1:15-16* Paul said that God set him apart from his mothers’ womb to preach the gospel among the Gentiles. In *Rom.1:1* Paul said he was called and “set apart for the gospel of God.” In *1Tim.1:12* Paul said Christ Jesus our Lord put him into service. In *2Tim.1:10-11* Paul said he was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the gospel.

Note carefully the language : chosen; called; set apart; appointed. In a real sense, Brethren, well diggers do not choose the ministry. The ministry chooses them. Well diggers do not choose the work of the harvest. The Lord of the harvest chooses them and sends them into the harvest. There is a key difference between the church taking note of a man and his faithfulness and his gifts and commending him to the eldership and a young man consciously gripped in his heart by the call of the Lord Jesus Christ for the work of the ministry. I know the difference. I have seen the difference. And I have seen the outworking of that difference. This difference is that line that separates the Pauls from the Timothys.

But let us return to Paul. There is something else to note about well diggers as we see manifested in the life of Paul. Paul was not only called. Paul was also a man driven and consumed with passion for the spread of the glory of Christ. He was driven and consumed with passion for the spread of the gospel. He was driven and consumed with passion for the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles. He was driven and consumed with passion to see the gospel ministry continue in areas

where it was planted. He was driven and consumed with passion for the care of the souls of men and women. Let us note some of Paul's statements.

In *1Cor.9:16* Paul wrote, "for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." There are many men today with the gift of preaching. They can preach excellent sermons. Some of them are ordained elders, some are not. Some of them are fulltime in the ministry and some of them are not fulltime. When they have opportunity, they will preach. And when they are not preaching, they are quite content to listen. There is no questioning the fact that these men are good men, good pastors who are doing a good job. But they do not have in their hearts that compulsion and sense of woe that Paul spoke about.

This, however, was not the case with Paul. This is not the case with ministerial well diggers. They are driven with a passion to preach. They feel in their souls that divine compulsion for preaching and that sense of woe when they are not preaching. It takes a lot more than being sick to keep them from fulfilling their preaching appointments. Preaching is never far from their minds. Their minds are

constantly formulating and preparing sermons. Even when they must listen to preaching they end up analyzing and dissecting the sermon they are hearing. And if you see them writing, most likely they are making a fresh outline from what they are hearing.

In **Rom.9:1-3** Paul wrote of his burden for the conversion of the Jews. He wrote, "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ, for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." In **Rom.10:1** Paul added, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation."

Now note Paul's burden for the conversion of the Gentiles. In **2Thess.3:1** he wrote, "Brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you." In **Col.4:3** he wrote, "praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the

word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned.” In *Eph.6:19* he wrote, “pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.”

In *Rom.1:15-16* Paul wrote, “So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” In *1Cor.9:22* Paul wrote, “I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.”

Regarding his care for the churches, Paul wrote in *2Cor.11:28-29*, “Apart from such external things, **(that is, his many physical sufferings for the cause of the gospel)**, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” Literally, “*Who is led into sin and I am not set on fire?*” “Who is led into sin and I do not burn?” We see an example of

this in *Gal.3:1*. Paul wrote, “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you...?” In *vs.3* he repeated, “Are you so foolish?” Are you so senseless? Are you so stupid? His passionate concern for the welfare of the members of the churches caused him to be confrontational and severe in his rebukes. (*Gal.2:11; 2Tim.4:2; Tit.1:13*). But when he had to be, he was also like a gentle tender nursing mother or a kind and caring father to those in the church. (*1Thess.2:7, 11; 2Tim.2:24-26*).

Note these final words from Paul. In *2Cor.12:15*, “I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls.” The statement is emphatic and is literally, “I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls.” The verb “**spend**” means to consume all of one’s resources. The verb “**to be utterly spent**” means to sacrifice one’s life. One writer describes this verse as one of the most moving in the whole Bible. **F.F. Bruce** noted there is no limit to Paul’s love for the Corinthians and concern for the eternal welfare of their souls.

In *Phil.2:20* Paul commended Timothy to the Philippian church. But his commendation revealed something about himself. Paul wrote, "I have no one else of kindred spirit who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare." In *Acts 20:24* Paul said to the Ephesian elders, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." In *Acts 21:13*, Paul said, "I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

You may be thinking that Paul is too unique an example to be a paradigm for church members. But, except for the fact that he was an apostle, Paul was not as unique as you may want to think. Paul was an apostle, missionary and church planter who was always working himself out of a job. Paul would plant a church, develop and establish local leadership and move on. But he never stopped caring for the churches he planted. Many throughout history and even today are like Paul. They are not apostles but they are missionaries who plant churches, develop and establish local leadership and then move on. Some, like Pastor Bala and

others, work only at developing, training and establishing local leaders who plant churches and / or become pastors of churches.

There are many lessons that any church member or leader can learn from Paul. Paul's burden for his kinsmen according to the flesh is a lesson we need to learn. Paul burden for the Gentiles is a lesson we need to learn. Paul burden to see the gospel spread in unreached places is a lesson we need to learn. Paul's burning concern for Christians living godly lives is a lesson we need to learn. How many of us burn with love and concern when we see believers fall into sin? On the other hand, how many are quick to pick up the phone and gossip when they see believers fall into sin?

Let me set before you the needed balance lest you begin to think that to become involved in a well digging ministry, you have to become exactly like Paul. There is a sense in which we are all chosen for the work of the ministry. In *Jn.15:16* Jesus said to His disciples, "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would

remain.” The **“fruit”** here is not the fruit of Christian character or the fruit of the Spirit. It is the gospel fruit of winning others to the Lord Jesus Christ. Note carefully the primary choosing here is not from you. The primary choosing is what the Lord did. He chose you and He gave you a task. He appointed to a particular task. He laid upon you a particular task. And that task is the gospel work of bearing gospel fruit.

At the same time there are others who are peculiarly chosen, called, gifted and set apart to the work of the ministry. The Lord does not call you to a ministry and not give you the necessary gifts required to carry out that ministry. Some of the men who are called are primary leaders and most are secondary leaders. Most primary leaders are generally a combination of well diggers and rope holders. In their own setting they are well diggers. But they are never contented to limit their labors to their own setting. Their vision is always greater than their own setting.

Carey’s friends were not merely rope holders. They were men called to the ministry and whom the Lord used to impact their own church and community and

even country. But they were also men with a larger vision who became rope holders to men who devoted their lives to the mission fields. History is filled with examples of men who were both well diggers and rope holders. And there are several examples in our world today. To name a couple from history, Spurgeon and Luther Rice would be examples. The latter name is unknown to you. In our modern setting, we have in our own circles Pastors Bala, Hamilton, Hofmaier, Piper, Marcellino, and others.

The challenge, Brethren, is not to be called to the ministry and then engage in a navel focusing ministry. The challenge is to have a vision that is both local and world-wide. The challenge for us as a church is to have a vision that is local, a vision that is world-wide and a vision that looks down the road for the coming generations. A navel focusing ministry will give you a one-generation church.

In closing, I want to make two points to the young men in this church. **Firstly**, if the ministry is choosing you, do not run from it. That would be a terrible mistake.

You say, but I can't do that. Listening to you frightens me. And the Lord's

answer to you is, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” (2Cor.12:9). To embrace the ministry is to put yourself in the place of judgment and joy. To run is to put yourself in the place of judgment and sorrow. Some of you who have grown up in this church have and watched our many struggles, battles and sorrows over the years, you have been saying to yourselves over and over, *“I would never do that. I would never do that.”*

But let me ask you now : are you saying this over and over and over again to convince and salve a conscience that is running away? My advice to you is : do not run. Stop running and get on your knees and surrender into the Lord’s freedom. Fight out this issues on your knees before the Lord. Shed as much tears as you want. But stop running. I can tell you from personal experience that to run is sheer stupidity. To run is to live in bondage.

One more thing : it is a waste of time to try to convince yourself that you will make yourself a worldly success and become a most efficient rope holder, giving tens of thousands for the support of the gospel ministry. I tried that but it didn’t

work. I still had to deal with the conscience and the reality of God's call. I came to know the meaning of the Lord's words to Paul, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." (*Acts 26:14*). Goads are large thorns. Fighting your conscience is like kicking against those large thorns with bare feet.

Secondly, I want you young men to understand that the well digging ministry has many challenges, struggles, sorrows, sufferings, disappointments and may even bring you face to face with martyrdom. Study the life of Paul and you will see that. The people whom Paul loved the most hurt him the most. If you have a family, there will be also many struggles and even dangers for your family. Your wife will share in your tears and she will have many tears of her own. Your children will struggle deeply to understand why those whose eternal welfare you are seeking must hurt you.

But there is also another side to this picture. What was the other side for the Lord Jesus? What kept Him going? What made Him embrace and endure the sheer horror of the cross? Yes, it was obeying His Father's will. Yes, it was His love

for you, His chosen people. But the stated answer is found in *Heb.12:2* which says, “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, [and] despised the shame.” Those who are called to the well digging / rope holding ministry must get a glimpse of this joy or they will quit and walk away from their calling. If the Lord is calling you to the ministry, pray earnestly that you will get a glimpse of this joy.

Pray earnestly that the Lord would focus your mind on the goal of the joy in the distance and take your first step towards that goal. That is what keeps me going – the joy of those who will stand on that glorious day with the elect from every tribe and tongue and nation singing the praises of the Lamb.