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[0 : 00] I would ask your attention to a portion of God's Word in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, verses 15 and 16.

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

And I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. Okay. Verses of 15 and 16 of the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

A minister of God is a person who stands in a most responsible position, but also, friends, it is a very honorable position as well.

Whatever be the nature of the ministry, it is an honor that God has conferred upon them if their ministry is of him. And also it is a very responsible position because there are so many things that will be required of them which are completely beyond their strength and their wisdom and their ability.

[1 : 28] and for all that is needed, they will have to be made really dependent upon the God of all grace. They will know, I believe, as time goes on, in a very practical way, in an experimental way, the truth of what we sometimes see, that a fullness resides in Jesus our head and ever abides to answer our need.

Now, in the word of God, ministers are spoken of in different ways. Those who serve others are sometimes called ministers. We read about Moses having a minister in the young man Joshua.

I believe on two occasions this young man is referred to as a minister. Once, whilst Moses was living, and once after Moses had died, he is referred to by the Lord and by his word as the minister of Moses that was now called upon to lead the children of Israel into that land of divine promise.

Now, this, of course, my friends, is a personal service that is being rendered to another. But even in that personal service that Joshua was called upon to render to Moses, I want you to remember that whilst he ministered unto Moses, he was the recipient of many favors from God through his servant Moses to him.

If you are in love to one who is a man or a woman of God, you should oftentimes attend them and visit them and show your love to them, perhaps by some kindly action of service, because that is the meaning really for the word minister, some kindly action of service that you can render to them.

[3 : 18] I don't know, my friends, whether some of you can realize how great a reward you may have in that. I have oftentimes myself found that the Lord does richly reward these acts of service.

And remember how the Lord himself has said that in that great day when the soul shall appear before God, there will be some to whom it must be said, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

So I want us then, first of all this evening, to think about the widespread application of this word minister and what an honorable and yet responsible position it is for any person to occupy in the service of the Lord, however humble and however small it may seem to them, to others that particular act or acts of service may be.

Then of course, friends, at the word of God, there are those who are raised to particular positions of ministry or service. The apostles and the disciples, they have a certain ministry to carry out.

This was of the appointment of God. The Lord showed them what it was to be and equipped them for it and basically trained them in his own school, a very humbling school.

[4 : 49] And yet they were called to be ministers of the word of God, ministers of the gospel, ministers who would bear, as Ammonius has to say to Paul, that he will have to bear the word of truth to the Gentiles and to the Jews and to the kings and others.

Well, friends, these ministers of the gospel also have a tremendously responsible position. They are solemnly accountable for God for the men in which they execute their ministry.

And I trust that in the hearts of many of you here, there may be found the spirit of much prayer on behalf of those who are called to the ministry of the word of God and that the solemnity of the position may wail in your spirit, even as it does doubtless, upon their spirit of the man.

Well, then I realized that there are some other creatures who are spoken of as ministers. I remember when I was up in Rochdale some years ago, I had to speak on a certain occasion about the angels of God who were ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation.

And after I had spoken and a little time afterwards written about this ministry of holy angels, a dear friend of mine wrote to me in rather reproving tones and said, there is no necessity for the ministry of holy angels in the church to die.

[6 : 29] The Lord has given the Holy Spirit to the church and to his people and the Holy Spirit is all-powerful and consequently, there is no necessity for the ministry of holy angels to die.

My dear friends, I want us to remember that the word of God has been written for our instruction. And whatever may be our logical conclusions with regard to certain matters, the word of God is that by which we will have to try all the thoughts of our heart and of our mind.

Now the scriptures definitely say concerning these, are they not ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation?

God forbid, my friends, that I should ever suggest that the Holy Ghost is inadequate to any great and glorious work that is indeed his own.

There is no inadequacy with the Holy Ghost whatever. But I would have you notice, my friends, the assurance that the Lord gives not only of the presence and care and power and protection of the Holy Spirit toward his people, he shall indwell them, but also the bounty of the hand of our God, that there shall be those who shall proceed from the throne of God who stand there ready to do the behest of deity on any occasion, dependent from God, but clothed with his power, and they shall be ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation.

[8 : 09] Now I'm not going to preach a sermon to you about angels and their work. I believe it would be a pleasing and edifying study to consider it from the word of God.

I hope that you young people may turn over the pages of your Bible and consider the manner in which the Lord does maintain and use these holy angels to his own blessed, gracious end in the lives of his people.

Well then of course in the word of God we read about another man who is a minister, the greatest of all. We read of him this evening, friends, where there Christ turns to those disciples who wanted to be so great.

And there he draws, shall I say, an illustration of reproof from his own life and person to them. He says, even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom to many.

There, friends, is the great ministry, the great service the Lord Jesus Christ does render before the Father on behalf of his chosen people, the Church of Christ, to serve them in love and to give his life a ransom to many.

[9 : 35] All of those final words that I've just quoted might indeed abide upon your heart this night to give his life a ransom to many.

My dear friends, a little later on this evening, if the Lord preserve us in life, we shall hope to sit at this table here to do a certain thing that the Lord has commanded us to do in his name and in his fear and in remembrance of him.

And what shall we really be celebrating? What is it that we shall be remembering? What is it that we want to know within our heart as we do this?

That there is one, even Jesus, who gave his life a ransom to many. And I believe, my friends, it is the desire of those who will sit there to have some assurance and reassurance again and yet again and not least at the table of the Lord that that precious Christ did indeed give his life as a ransom for them.

Great was their indebtedness, great was the ransom price, great was the love of the one who was willing to pay so great a ransom for the redemption of his people.

[10 : 52] And so I just mention these cases in the word of God in which this word is spoken of, the word minister. Now this evening, instead of speaking more particularly about the great manifestation of the power of God to the apostle Paul, I want to try to speak to you, friends, about another minister.

Paul the apostle, of course, was a great minister of the gospel, a great apostle of the land. His labors were most extensive and most abundant and richly blessed with God.

But I do want you to remember that there was another one here, even Ananias, who was a minister of good things under the power and purpose of God.

God, I realized how sometimes in the past as I look back from my life, I realized, friends, that there have been those that have ministered to me.

I mentioned to you one, two cases where this happened. Even as I was speaking this morning, persons who I believe the Lord raised up to minister to me.

[12 : 04] I have sometimes gone to a person's house and there I have thought, well, I do hope the Lord will enable me to speak a word or read the right passage.

And as I try to speak in prayer and plead on their behalf, that the Lord may bless me in my pleadings for them and bless them as they may listen to these pleadings.

But you know, friends, when I come away from summer homes, I have thought to myself, well, I went as a minister, but the Lord hath ministered to me through them.

Don't forget that the Lord can minister. Yes, through what the world might speak of as very insignificant and humble means, he can minister to his people through whatever instruments he may choose to use.

We don't know much about this man Ananias. There is only, as far as I know, one other reference in the scripture to him. And that is by the lips of the apostle himself.

[13 : 06] It's well to read the two narratives together and realize, my friends, how great and blessed was the work that the Lord called Ananias to do in bearing his own word to the apostle Paul.

And I did mention this morning something about the sovereignty of God in the matter of the choice. we don't read that Ananias was the bishop of the church of Damascus or that he occupied any higher exalted position in the church.

We don't even read that his name was coupled with a diaconate there. No, not by any means. But nevertheless, my friends, he was the sovereign choice of God to bear this word unto the apostle Paul.

Oh, that the Lord may display his sovereign grace and power in this. If there should be one person here who may think, well, I'm afraid I shall never be of any use in the church of Christ.

I feel to be like a dead stick rather than a living branch. Don't forget, my friends, the Lord is absolutely sovereign in whom he will use. I want you to remember that in this narrative of the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the sovereignty of God is not only seen in the tremendous work of conviction which he laid upon the apostle Paul, bringing a rebel to his feet and raising him up and making him a servant of the Most High God, but also the sovereignty of God is seen in the choice of this man Ananias to go and bear this word of God to his servant.

[14 : 48] It is deep conviction and deep affliction of soul and person. Doubtless friends, Saul of Tarsus, Paul the Apostle, would ever remember the wonderful mercy of God in sending this man to him with such a word as he did.

How great was the mercy of God in choosing Ananias to carry that message to his servant. And then in the matter of the sovereignty of God, there's one other thing that I would like to mention and that is this.

You see, the Lord did speak to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. There was no intermediary there. It was the voice of Jesus that that man heard speaking to him.

He tells us, my friends, with regard to his apostleship that he was as one born out of due time. Others saw the person of Christ in incarnation, but says the apostle Paul, the Lord made himself known to me, I am not without the knowledge of Christ, the blessed knowledge of Christ.

He had a warrant, my friends, even from Christ himself as an apostle of the church. Well now, I want you to remember this, that this same God that spoke to him on the road to Damascus could have also spoken what he called Ananias to go and speak to his servant.

[16 : 20] The Lord does use instruments, friends. There may be some of you who will say to me, well I wish the Lord would speak personally to me like he did to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

But remember this, my friends, that some of the most nasty things that this man heard, some of the things that, shall I say, pinpointed, the very work that he would have to do in the future was spoken by the lips of a man to him.

God used an instrument to speak, to reveal his own will and his own word to his servant. Now there is the sovereignty of God. My friends, what a mercy it is that God does still use instruments.

even an Ananias of this day, who shall there be spoken to by God and straying by his love, all objections cast down that may be in his mind against the thing that the Lord commands, and there that feeble earthly instrument shall be used to speak the word of the Lord to that one whom the Lord designs to favor.

Oh, the sovereignty of God in this. Well then I just want to go on a stage or two and I want us to notice this friends, that when the Lord will use a human instrument to his will, he never leaves that person at a loss to know where he is to go and whom he is to go and what he is to sign.

[17 : 57] Now lots of people seem to think, my friends, that if they're going to be servants of the Lord then, well of course there's going to be a tremendous amount of work and searching and exercise that they will have to pass through.

Let me tell you this friends, that there will be work, there will be labour, there will be exercise, there will be heart searching, burdens will have to be carried, the heart will be searched through and through time and time again if you are to be a minister of God.

But I want you to remember this, the Lord is never lost to make his will known to that person. I wonder whether you have noticed as the Lord speaks to Adonai about the one that he's to go and speak to, every detail is there given concerning the man and the place and the position.

The Lord says to him, you have to go to a certain house in a certain street, you have asked for a certain man and he sat a vision and he seen a certain man coming to him and he knows his very none.

Now you think of all the details. Oh, the Lord's not at a loss to make his will known. He's not at a loss to guide a man to the right place. He's not at a loss to direct the attention of a minister to the one to whom the world shall be ministered.

[19 : 22] Ah, the Lord knows where his people are. He doesn't need. I've had a few instances of this. Strangely, sometimes my feet have been led to a certain place or to a certain house.

I haven't really realised at all why I was going there. The details haven't been given to me quite as clearly as they were to Ananias by the Lord, but I found out afterwards friends that there was a gracious purpose in my going there.

A gracious purpose. I don't know if I have told you before, about a place on one occasion I was going down to Dunstall. It was the time when my daughter was going to have an interview at the school there and I said to her when I left her at the school, I'll just go and see a certain person and then I'll come back to you at I think hourly intervals or something like that to pick you up after your interview.

And I went down to this house. I had no thought of going before. I hadn't written to the person there. They were old friends of mine admittedly and when I got there and I opened the door, the woman looked at me and she said, oh you've come, I expected you.

I expected you. You think of that, I expected you. Without any warning, any letter, any intimation, the man was coming. She went on to tell me, friends, how that morning in her great trouble she got up and bowed before the Lord and she said, oh Lord, do deliver me.

[20 : 56] Deliver me by whatever way you will deliver me. And if it be your will to send my thy servant Mr. Brown here, I'll take it as a token that thou will deliver me.

Now you think of it friend. You see, the Lord knows the place and the person and the time and the hour. And there, in a mysterious way, you think of the combination of events, the invitation to go to an interview, the attendance there on a certain day, the fact that there's going to be some spare time and the mind being led in the direction of that house.

There were other people I knew in Dunstville I had gone to visit or in the near vicinity. I was there with a car. I could have gone down to Eden Braille. It's only about three miles away and I've been there ever so many more times than I have been to this house in Dunstville.

But no, my feet were led in that direction. All the mysterious, wonderful purposes of God. Our Lord is not at a loss to direct the steps of his servants, his ministers, whoever they may be, in the way that he will have them to go.

And then I want you to notice how after all this direction has been given, the poor man who is the minister to another, Ananias I'm speaking of, he seems to find great objection.

[22 : 19] Now I'm not going to enter into details about the objection this evening. You can read it in the Word, we read it this morning together. But I want us to notice my friends that the objections were very real ones in the spirit of Ananias.

He felt he got a reason to say this to the Lord. It came out of the heart perhaps of his fear and dread dreadful things that have been happening to the Church of Christ.

There are some persons who may say to me, well of course if you've got a lively faith, a great faith, you'll never be troubled about anything. Need to say my friends that if you see your friends being persecuted and afflicted, you're not going to be troubled about it.

And when the Lord lays some mysterious command upon you like this, you're not going to be troubled about it then. Ah, but this man, he was very troubled about it.

And he told the Lord all the objections that read his mind. My dear friends, it's far better to deal like this with our God than to adopt some sort of stoic and attitude to trouble and say, well I shall tell anybody about it, I'm not going to pray about this, I'll just put on the best appearance I can and try to bear this thing myself.

[23 : 40] Oh, listen to what the Lord says. Commit thy way unto the Lord with all the difficulties and all the objections. Commit thy way unto the Lord. Trust also in him and he will bring it to pass.

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, he shall sustain thee, he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. That's the command of the Lord, he doesn't command the stoicism of my friends, but he commands the dependence, and he works dependence in the heart of his people.

I don't think it was an evil thing on behalf of the part of Ananias to tell the Lord all that was within his heart and see how very tenderly the Lord deals with his minister.

Well, now, I want us to turn then to the word of the text. There in the face of the objections that are raised, the Lord said unto him, go thy way, go thy way.

You know, friends, it seems to me by the objection that Ananias made, that he would have had a way that would not have gone down to the street called Straight, and would not have gone to speak that word to the Apostle Paul.

[24 : 50] I think there was a way in him that was like that, a shrinking way, perhaps a cowardly way, a retiring way, a way in which my friends, perhaps, Ananias would have rather hidden in the background and let somebody else do it rather than himself, you see.

But the Lord says, go thy way, Ananias, go thy way. Have you ever thought about the wonder of that word, that God's way is going to become Ananias' way?

That God is going to work in this man according to the ancient promise, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure. Oh, my dear friends, don't forget God can do that.

He can do that. Do you mean just simply clothing yourself with objections to something or another? I think perhaps of one person here or another who may have been saying, it's all very well for some people, of course, to be baptized and join the church.

It's all very well for some of these people to sit around and thank you to the Lord this first Sunday in the month of September, 1966. it's not for me, you know, not for me.

[26 : 06] Go thou thy way. Go thou thy way. Go thou thy way. I've thought of a connection with Daniel, you know. The Lord comes to him and there the mystery of some of those remarkable prophecies, those visions that have been granted to him seems to weigh heavily upon his spirit.

And the Lord says to Daniel, Daniel, go thou thy way until the end be and thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the day. You proclaim my word, leave the interpreting of the mistress to me, the one who gave it to thee, and go thou thy way.

But not the way of the choosing of Daniel's sinful heart, he was a sinner, he was a man of life passion to you and me, my friends. Not the way of the devising of some poor sinful heart, but the way of divine appointment, the way in which the Lord will work in a sinner to will and do of his own good pleasure.

Go thou thy way, the one that ends that God should ever say to a sinner of this earth, go thou thy way. Remember what the Lord has said about our natural ways, the ways of our natural choosing, he said there is a way that seeth right unto a man, you see, he can examine it by all the examination of logic and sense and reason and it's a way that is right unto a man, but the end of that way is death, is death.

It doesn't always mean my friends is a way of vice, or a way of drunkenness, or a way of outward infidelity. It doesn't mean that. A person doesn't have to join a secularist society to be in this way, the end of which is death.

[27 : 53] It can be a moral way and an upright way may be, but oh my dear friends, it's a way in which Christ is not, and there is no need of the redeemer in his redemption.

There is no guilt of sin and no crying for mercy. there is a way, a religious way even, that seemeth right unto a man, but the end of that way is death.

Oh, says the apostle, I was in that way once. Oh, I thought that the things that I did were my salvation. I looked to the Lord, and I thought I was blameless concerning it, and there I should be approved and accepted by God upon my obedience.

And now, he says, these things that one time I so ardently trusted in, I count the drops now that I may win Christ, who is the way that came from the night.

Oh, sinner, there is a way that seemeth right unto a man at the end of that wise death. But there, in the midst of the world to die, there are those, my friends, who like near men, under the power of that one who worketh in them to will and to do of his good pleasure, the Lord says, Mary hath chosen that good part, that shall not be taken away from her.

[29 : 14] Our friends of the Lord can turn to such persons and say, go thou thy way, go thou the way. It's my hand, my power, that has caused thee to enter upon that way through the straight gate and walking along the narrow way, it'll be my power that will maintain you in the way, but it's also thy way, it's the way that you love and you delight in and you rejoice in, it's the way in which you will find enlargement of heart before your God, and go thou thy way and hear to this man who may seem to be full of objections, the Lord said unto him, go thy way, go thy way, go thy way to Saul of Tarsus, I know he's what he is, he's been a great rebel, very a fury against God and against Jesus Christ, but go thy way to him, I've appointed you to go, I'll be with you, your word will not be in vain that you speak, go thy way

Ananias, go thy way, and then of course there is the description of the one my friends to whom Ananias has to minister, oh it's a wonderful description here as the Lord says, he is a chosen vessel under me, chosen vessel under me, think of it friends, here are this man, probably who abounded in sin and rebelled against God of the most dreadful kind, who was virtually guilty of the awful sin of murder of Stephen, the martyr of Stephen, they laid his clothes at the feet of a young man whose name was Saul, who was a member of the Sanhedrin, and was virtually responsible, as it were, in religious law, for this execution of the man, which was completely contrary to Roman law, and also completely contrary to truth, you see, and here this man, you see, virtually, the execution, or at least the responsible person, in the execution of the martyrs,

Stephen, you see, and there ends upon that man, the choice of God did rest for more eternity. I would that some person here may be very, very troubled about their election.

They long that it might be clear and sure to them. It's a real concern to them, this matter of the eternal election of God, and whether they have their fortune in him.

And of course, my friends, there is such grateful fear in your heart that being what you are, you could never be the subject of the choice of God. And not only so, but the devil will come and he will tell you that it's an absolute impossibility that the choice of God could have ever wrested from such as you.

[32 : 22] I want you just to remember a word that the apostle Paul speaks. He says, I'm the chief of sinners. Chief of sinners. Friends, the chieftain of sinners, is no barrier in the way of the choice of God.

Oh, there is a magnification of the grace of God in his eternal choice, shall I say, of the chieftain of sinners. That's it, the chieftain of sinners. Oh, the glory of this.

My friends, the eternal praises of the heavens above and all the bestness, blessed truth, that God in his inevitable while has set his joys upon the chief of sinners.

The chief of sinners. Won't only be told that takes the song, but oh, the whole of the redeemed, they will all realise their lost and ruined position, their hopelessness and their need.

In that great day, when at last the glory of the heaven, unwowed themselves before their faces, they will say, unto him that has loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

[33 : 31] He was the first elect of God and we were chosen in him over one of wonders.