

“Worst-Case Scenario Ministry”

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Recently, the following passage of Scripture gripped my heart:

John 11

³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “**Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.**” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me.” ⁴³ Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” ⁴⁴ And **he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”** [Emphasis added]

The question I had to answer with uncompromising honesty was, “Am I willing to minister to *anyone* the Lord leads me to?” Questions like that extinguish any smugness I have about how willing I *really am* to meet peoples’ needs. Why did this passage affect me this way? Because while I was reading it, *I thought about those whom Jesus instructed to loose Lazarus from his graveclothes.*

In a comment we tend to snicker at, Martha mentioned that because Lazarus had been dead for four days, there was bound to be “a stench.” She was not referring to the graveclothes – she was referring to the tomb being opened. If the tomb had the smell of rotting and dead flesh, certainly the stench would have permeated the fabrics covering Lazarus. Yet Jesus wanted the *people* to untie him, so He instructed them to touch Lazarus’ clothes that reeked with the disgusting smell of decomposing flesh (even though Lazarus was raised, his clothes were likely fetid).

What type of people are we willing to “loose”? Smelly, dirty, unkempt people...or just those who have problems like toothaches, depression, and head colds? What would we do if

Jesus asked us to minister to urine-soaked, bile-covered people? If we were in a church, would we call for the pastor or elders to minister to them? If we encountered them during a normal day at the mall, or perhaps during street witnessing, would we walk past them? Or would we be willing to help them in some way?

The day that this passage *encountered me*, I had to say with all honesty, “No, I wouldn’t be willing.” I would find a way out of having to deal with such a nauseating ministry situation. With that thought in mind, I then realized that Jesus *needs to form in me* a willingness to minister to the most troubled of humanity – the deformed, the demonized, the suicidal, the psychotic, and the stench-covered rejects of society.

I am sure many in the church are as needy for this formation as I am. After all, Jesus ministered to people like this probably every day, and He wants us to do the same works He did (John 14:12). Who are some of the people Jesus spent countless hours ministering to?

Sick and Tormented People

Matthew 4

²³ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and **healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.** ²⁴ Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him **all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.**
[Emphasis added]

Can you picture Jesus ministering to the multitudes who had never-ending varieties of illnesses and troubles – some who were more wretched than others were? Can you see Him dealing with the demon-possessed as they exhibited strange behavior? Can you envision Him walking up to paralytics, epileptics, cancer victims, and people with severe trauma? He did, and He ministered healing and deliverance to them. He did not shy away from the most difficult cases.

I am realizing with greater clarity that this is His will for us – we are not to not discriminate or pick-and-choose to whom we minister. Ministering to the sick and the demonized is not a clean job. Nevertheless, we are called to minister to the people whom He brings to us and whom He leads us to (see John 5:19-20). He alone can equip us with the compassion and power to make a difference.

Lepers

Matthew 8

¹ When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. ² And behold, **a leper came** and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” ³ Then **Jesus put out His hand and touched him**, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Leprosy was one of the most hideous afflictions one could have. Body parts may have been missing. One’s tissues would have been decaying or dead. To top it all off, this disease was infectious. What did Jesus do when lepers came to Him for help? He did not send them away or shun them. He healed them *by touching them*. He touched those leprous people with His own hands. Would we be willing to?

Only now do I comprehend the enormity of this question and its implications for ministry. What would we do if someone having an infectious, deforming disease, came asking *us* for help? Would we send them away for treatment? Perhaps in this day of modern medical advances, that wouldn’t be a bad idea. But what if He wanted to bring healing to them through our hands? Would we also be willing to touch them, asking the Great Physician to heal and restore their bodies? We should ask Him to give us a willing heart to touch the untouchables of this world.

Demon-Possessed People

Matthew 8

²⁸ When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him **two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce**, so that no one could pass that way. ²⁹ And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”

Deep down, we know God has given us the authority to deal with demonic attacks and to set people free (Luke 10:19; 4:18-19). However, what would we do if two-demon possessed men with incredible strength came rambling toward us? Would we run? Or would we stand our ground in Christ, realizing that they are human beings for whom Jesus died and for whom He gave us the authority to set free? If we pray earnestly for compassion and power, it can be the later.

Conclusion

Pondering the ministry of Jesus, questions like the ones raised in this brief article are provocative, and will hopefully encourage us to minister to those whom He did. I know that from this day forward, I need to ask Him for the compassion, strength, and ability to minister to those in this world whom I would rather not encounter. How about you?