

Jonathan Middleton's Ordination

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Preacher: Jeremy Middleton

[0 : 00] The epistle is written in the epistle of St Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians in the fourth chapter, beginning at the seventh verse. And you'll find it on page 1175 in the Bibles.

Ephesians 4, verse 7. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, What does he ascended mean except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions?

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Virtually the first task that was assigned to Adam in the garden involved him in essentially being taught the principle of speaking the word of God with the power of God, and in that way effecting the very pattern of God himself.

[2 : 09] The God who in the very beginning said, Let there be light, and it was so. Now he brought the animals before the man in the garden, and he bid the man name the animals in that manner.

And whenever we are told, whenever the man, whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. He was being taught to speak the word with an authority invested on him from on high, in the confidence that that word would indeed be invested with the power of God to effect what it accomplished.

And it has always been our conviction as parents that that is the first major task assigned to parents as well. In the birth of their child, God brings another living creature before these individuals and bids the parents name that living creature.

We named you Jonathan Paul, and we did so in the same manner and with that same spirit that Adam was called by God to name the animals.

We did so prophetically insofar as we gave you that name in the belief and conviction that that would be descriptive of the pattern of life to which the Lord would call you.

[3 : 40] And we did it prayerfully as well with the prayer that he would indeed be as his namesakes in the Bible. And all that I want simply to say this evening, drawing out from the passage that Michael has just read and applying it very specifically to you, my son, as I charge you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to see it applied to all of you as well. And your name will indeed frame all that I have to say in opening this passage of Scripture, both to you and to all of us.

And you will have guessed from my garb that I am a Presbyterian rather than Episcopal. And as a thoroughgoing Presbyterian, I have three charges to address to you.

The first is simply this, from verses 7 to 10 of the passage that Michael read from Ephesians, cherish constantly the grace of God's Son.

You'll see there Paul speaks in verse 7 to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. We named you Jonathan Paul. The name Jonathan, a Hebrew word, and a Hebrew name means simply gift of God.

[5 : 06] That's how commonly it's put. But in truth, it is more specific than that. It is the gift of the Lord, the covenant name of God. He, the one who has given this child to us.

And that giving of God lies at the very heart of the gospel. The best known verse in the Bible, I guess, would be John 3, 16. God so loved the world that He gave His Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life.

And it is that notion, that awareness of the sheer grace of God in the gift of His Son that we wanted to embed from your birth into your life, your perspective, your whole upbringing, and indeed your whole living.

as the song that you'll be very familiar with says, how deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure.

And that, I know, and you know, is your testimony and your experience that the Lord Himself, in the goodness of His grace, has made this wretch a treasure.

[6 : 24] And today, as we celebrate this significant occasion in your life, we recognize, as you do, the grace of God. It was a costly grace. The giving of His own beloved Son, as He goes on to elucidate in the succeeding verses, verses 9 and 10, the one who ascended is also the one who descended.

And there is a whole rich treasure store of theology in that simple phrase, the descending of the Son of God, He who from all eternity knew no sin.

He who from all eternity was the very Son of God Himself. And He yet was pleased for our sakes to assume our humanity, to expose Himself as such to all the trials and temptations that we must endure, and even going to the extent of that dreadful, utterly abhorrent, God-forsaken death upon the cross in our place.

That's all wrapped up into the descending into the earthly regions. That's what it cost to make us a treasure under God. Behold the man upon a cross, my sin upon His shoulders.

Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers. It was His love that held Him there until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life.

[7 : 54] I know that it is finished. And therefore, first of all, I want to say to you, Jonathan, throughout all the ministry that God has called you to, fix your eyes on Him, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Delight yourself always in Him and be confident always to say those words of that hymn. I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom, but I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection.

Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer, but this I know with all my heart. His wounds have paid my ransom.

And you are a ransomed man. And that's what it cost. It cost Him everything, and He was glad to do it for you to bring you to this point today.

And that humility whereby we're told in the Scriptures God gives grace to the humble, that humility whereby we recognize that every single thing about us is His gift to us, His grace towards us.

[9 : 04] And that leads on, really, to the second of the headings that I have. The first, cherish constantly the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

And for those of you who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, who've not really appreciated just why we celebrate Him, why we honor Him, why we exalt Him, it's for that reason that in Him we are made new and given a whole new life, given a whole new status, given a whole new future, and given a whole new calling in Him.

It is the grace of God. Constantly cherish the grace of God in His Son. Secondly, verse 11, let me exhort you throughout your ministry to steward carefully the gifts of God's Spirit.

You see in verse 7, having said there to each one He gave gifts to men. In verse 11, He goes on, so Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers.

And you are to remember, and we are to remember, each and every one of us in Jesus Christ, that they are ultimately His gifts. And you therefore are to steward them all for Him.

[10 : 27] You are to exercise those gifts that He has given, very undoubted, very considerable gifts. You are to exercise them with a reliance always on His help.

There is not a Sunday passes by, but I pray words that the Lord first spoke to Moses when Moses pled with the Lord and said to the Lord, pardon your servant, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past, nor since you have spoken to your servant.

I am slow of speech and tongue. I could not find a better description of myself. But the Lord said to him, who gave human beings their mouths, who makes them deaf or mute, who gives them sight or makes them blind, is it not I, the Lord?

Now go. I will help you speak and teach you what to say. And not a Sunday passes by, but I'm pleading that before the Lord and saying, Lord, you better do that, otherwise I am stuffed.

And the people amongst whom I serve, they are going to be singularly disappointed. They are his gifts and you are to exercise them in reliance on his help and to exercise them too with a concern for his glory.

[11 : 42] Like John the Baptist, you must always decrease in order that he, the Lord Jesus, may increase. For the gifts that God has bestowed upon you, for you to exercise in reliance on him and on his spirit, they have been given in order that men and women, girls and boys might have a clearer view of Jesus, a closer walk with Jesus and a deeper love for Jesus.

It is to be about him. And I learned early on that when someone, and occasionally it happened, they came out at the end of a service and shook me by the hand and said, what a great sermon.

I would have to immediately disavow that and say, no, you have missed the point if you think it's a great sermon. It's a great savior. And your concern is to point people to him.

We named you Jonathan because not only did we see you as a gift from the Lord, but we wanted you as well in your life to be a gift of the Lord to others beyond ourselves.

We effectively prayed as Hannah herself in the Old Testament in 1 Samuel had done with her firstborn son.

[13 : 09] She gave her firstborn son to the Lord. And your mom and I, we effectively did that with yourself.

We said, he is your gift and we want to give him from the outset to you, Lord. You are therefore Jonathan. You are not Jack.

Apologies to any of you who are called Jack, by the way. But you are not to be a Jack of all trades. You are to be one who is a master of the one trade, the one calling that has been directed to you.

And how that works out in practical terms, I think, is best described in the charge that was given to Ezra that was spoken about him in Ezra chapter 7 verse 10.

When he is introduced, we have first of all his great lineage and then we are told that the hand of God was upon Ezra for, because, Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of the Lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

[14 : 26] And it's thereby that you become a master of your trade. It doesn't happen magically, it doesn't happen automatically, it happens as you resolve to be devoted to the study of the Word of God, to the observance of the Word of God, and then to the teaching of the Word of God.

And you make that your concern because you are called to steward well and carefully the gifts of God's Spirit. And the third charge, verses 12 to 13, is this.

Let me exhort you not only to cherish constantly the grace of God's Son, not only to steward carefully the gifts of God's Spirit, but to pursue confidently the growth of God's kingdom.

God makes things grow. That's the wonderful description that is given to us about Him. That's just who He is and what He does. It's not that when there is growth, that's God's doing.

It's just that this is the very nature of God Himself. He makes things grow, and therefore the gifts that He has given to you and the calling that He's addressed to you is very specifically to equip His people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

[15 : 52] We named you Jonathan Paul with your biblical forebears in mind. Jonathan is, in my view, and you may dispute this with me afterwards, but in my view, he is probably the most Christ-like individual in the Old Testament.

He was the crown prince of Israel. He was the son of the king. He was a very able guy, a very bold guy, a very careful guy, a very gifted guy, the crown prince of Israel, who nonetheless recognized the call of God upon this young shepherd boy, and who recognized not only the qualities in him, but committed himself to that shepherd boy, and when he found the shepherd boy beginning to reach the point of despair, wondering whether God's future ever would materialize for him, there was that point that we read about in 1 Samuel 23 where David was in the wilderness of Ziphon.

It was a wilderness experience for him, and Jonathan, the son of the king, went out to him,

recognizing the need that he had, went out to him, and we are told strengthened his hand in God.

That kept David going, the rest is history, and the next we read of Jonathan, he is lying dead on the mountains of Gilboa.

It cost him everything to strengthen the hand of that next generation, and it was that ministry that he was pleased to give himself to.

[17 : 39] And that is a large part of the ministry you have been called to exercise, to labor and to minister in the power of God's Spirit, that whatever it may cost you, you may strengthen the hand of the next generation in God, and raise up that next generation strong and fruitful in the Lord.

You are to invest in the future, God's future, and the harvest that he down the years will reap. You are to equip God's people for works of service, to build up the body of Christ, and to seek that maturity among your people always, which is what the Apostle Paul himself sought always to do. Him we proclaim, he wrote in Colossians chapter 1 verse 28, him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

And for this, he said, I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. Now, I know that as you enter your study, not here, but at home, you have suitably framed a letter from one of my predecessors in Gilcombson Church in Aberdeen.

Mr. Still, long years ago, he kindly wrote Susan and I a letter in the immediate aftermath of your birth, in which he noted how you had been named and assured us of his prayers, and he has in writing his prayer.

[19 : 24] May he be as loving and faithful as the former, Jonathan, and as strong and mighty. Then he kind of put a dash and said, well, not quite, as the latter, the Apostle Paul, a man of God at any rate.

And there was a man that you'd never met, who long before you had any consciousness prayed across the miles for a child he'd never seen and prayed that you might be a man of God.

As loving and faithful as Jonathan in the Bible, as mighty, not quite, as the Apostle Paul. He never saw the fruit of that prayer, of course, and you may never really see the fruit of your labors any more than Mr. Still saw the full fruit of his, but he pursued the growth of God's kingdom, struggled with all the energy that the Spirit of God powerfully works in his people and invested himself in his gifts in the future generations.

And it is a timely and in some ways remarkable provenance that you are ordained to this holy ministry in a building tonight which itself reminds you of the investment which your forebears within your family prayerfully made in pursuit of the kingdom of God.

Almost to the day 145 years ago so none of you will remember this but almost to the day in this very building right here your great, great grandparents were married and made vows the one to the other.

[21 : 10] And as you look over my left shoulder you see that stained glass window there erected long since in memory of your great, great, great grandfather.

father who was a founding member of this congregation. And that is a window onto the faith of your family forebears who pursued the growth of God's kingdom, invested themselves in the cause of the gospel and prayed that generations of their families still unborn would rise to become men and women of God.

And it is as such a window also onto the great faithfulness of our God who from one generation to the next multiplies his blessing and causes his grace to abound.

And therefore I exhort you expect that, covet that, pursue that, that Christ's people may be edified, that his kingdom may be amplified, and that his name may be glorified.

Let me encourage you therefore in closing to recognize that as you constantly cherish God's grace in his Son, as you steward carefully the gifts of God's Spirit, and as you pursue confidently the growth of God's kingdom, he in turn is able, as Paul would later say in the same letter to the church at Ephesus, he is able to do abundantly and immeasurably more than all that we ask or think according to his power at work within us.

[22 : 42] To him be the glory. and in Christ Jesus and in the church throughout all generations forever and ever. And may it be so. Let us pray. Gracious God, we thank you for all that you have given to us in Jesus Christ, your Son.

How marvelous it is, how wonderful indeed is that song that we sing whereby we track the ways in which you take wretches such as ourselves and transform them by the power of your Holy Spirit into that which will be your treasure made and conformed to the very likeness of your beloved Son. We thank you, gracious God, that in him you call us not only into your family but into your service and equip us with different gifts. And we thank you that in the exercise of those gifts you bid us in reliance upon your Holy Spirit expect confidently that you, the God who makes things grow will indeed multiply abundantly down through succeeding generations the grace that has been shown

towards us.

Bless and use Jonathan like that and may that be the truth about each of us and the specific calling to which we are called and we shall gladly join at the last with all the saints in giving you the praise and the glory for it.

Amen.