

Messy Ministry

Week 28: July 9-15 – *1 Corinthians 15, 16; 2 Corinthians 1, 2*

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Helpful Resources

Map of Paul's Missionary Journeys

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

While ministering in Ephesus, Paul received a letter from the Corinthians about problems in their church. False apostles or teachers had deceived the people and caused them to fall away from the true gospel. Before Paul could visit Corinth, he sent a "sorrowful letter" addressing their issues. While he knew strong words were necessary, Paul was concerned about how the Corinthians would respond.

When he left Ephesus, Paul traveled to Macedonia where he reunited with Titus (who had carried his message to Corinth). Titus shared with Paul the Corinthians' response to his letter. Even though the Corinthians received Paul's corrections well, the false teachers had stirred up the congregation against him for various reasons, which prompted his second letter.

The Corinthian church was a mess. They had multiple issues to overcome, most of which were caused by enemy forces working to undermine the gospel's influence. However, though life is messy, its messes provide opportunities for ministry. In this review, we will consider how Paul provided a good example of how we can minister in love to messy people.

- Mess and Ministry

1. **Resurrection Resistance** (*1 Cor. 15:1-58*)

Mess: False teachers had sown doubt in the minds of the Corinthians regarding the idea of resurrection. Paul wrote, "How do some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead?" (v.12).

Ministry: Their doubts prompted Paul to write the greatest defense of the resurrection in all of Scripture. He pointed to the eyewitness evidence of Jesus' resurrection (v.5-8), the consequences to our faith if resurrection is false (v.13-19, 29-32), the comparison between the first and second Adam (Jesus, v.20-22), the order of end time events (v.23-28), and an explanation of how the dead will be raised and in what body (v.34-57).

2. **Life and Death** (*1 Cor. 15:54-57*)

Mess: Perhaps, the messiest aspect of life is death. Death is a consequence of sin. Unless the Lord returns, every one of us will die, and there is nothing we can do to escape death.

Ministry: Despite the finality of death on earth, Christ's resurrection and promise of eternal life give us hope. Death is not the end for His followers. Thus, during one of life's most difficult moments, Christians replace "loss" with gain. Death has no victory over us.

3. **Collection Concerns** (*1 Cor. 16:1-9*)

Mess: The church in Jerusalem had come under great scrutiny for following Christ. Jewish Christians were being persecuted, which likely included the boycotting of their businesses and the loss of income. The enemy inflicted great suffering on believers in that region.

Ministry: To relieve their suffering, the churches Paul had planted asked for the privilege of raising and sending a collection. Thus, out of the misery of financial hardship, the Corinthians were given an opportunity to meet the needs of fellow Christians.

4. **Comfort from Discomfort** (*2 Cor. 1:1-11*)

Mess: In the opening of his second letter, Paul shared some of the hardships that he had faced prior to coming to Corinth. He and his teammates had endured intense persecution, which even threatened their lives.

Ministry: However, amid his suffering, Paul experienced God's comforting presence (grace) which enabled him to endure. As a result, he was able to comfort others in their affliction with the comfort with which he had been comforted.

5. **Change of Plans** (*2 Cor. 1:12-2:17*)

Mess: Paul had originally planned to visit Corinth twice, but in the end, he was only able to visit once. The false teachers used this change of plans to prove that Paul was not trustworthy, that he did not keep his word. They were attempting to sow division.

Ministry: Paul used the opportunity to explain his situation, his clear conscience, and the fact that even though they might not be able to trust the plans of men, they could always trust the plans of God. The change of plans was in the best interests of the Corinthians.

The Bottom Line

Life is messy, but life's messes always provide us with opportunities for ministry.

Questions to Consider

1. Are you more apt to see the mess or the opportunities for ministry? Explain.
2. What encourages you most about the resurrection of Christ? Which aspect of your own resurrection are you most excited about?
3. The death of a loved one might be the most difficult aspect of life. How do the truths of the resurrection provide hope and ministry in the midst of terrible loss?
4. Are you regularly aware of the mess in others' lives and alert to opportunities for how you might minister spiritually, emotionally, or financially?
5. What trials or difficult moments have you experienced in life? What did God teach you during that time? How have you used your suffering to comfort others in their affliction?
6. How should we view a change of plans? How does a change of plans relate to ministry?