

Text: Heb. 8:1-6a

Title: "The great design for Christian ministry"

Time: 7/16/2015 pm

Place: NBBC

Introduction: As your pastor I receive some unsolicited emails. One of these comes from an organization that calls itself ministrydesignconcepts.com. They send me advice in emails about how to design a better church ministry. The last email I received talked about the key ingredients I needed to develop my volunteer and leadership team. They recommended an acrostic that Rick Warren came up with called *SHAPE*. *SHAPE* stands for *Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experience*. The idea is that we need to train our volunteers and leaders in these five areas to have a ministry that is designed for success.

Well, I thought about those emails as I studied our passage. And as exciting as those ministry design emails can sound, I think we have a ministry Designer and a ministry design that cannot be surpassed described for us in our passage. The word for *minister* is used in v. 2, the verb *to minister* in v. 5, and the noun for *ministry* in v. 6.

What we find as we read these words in our New Testaments is that they have very little to do with business psychology or analytics relevant to organizational behavior. What they have to do with is sacred service. We get our word *liturgy* from the original underlying Greek words we are dealing with here. The idea is simply work that is done in sacred service.

So when it comes to our understanding of God's design for Christian ministry, we begin with the idea of sacred service, and we begin there because the work that matters

when it comes to Christian ministry is actually a service rendered by Christ Himself (vv. 2, 6; “I will build my church,” Matt. 16:18). I want to make three observations about God’s design for Christian ministry this evening.

I. God designed Christian ministry to be ruled by our High Priest and King (v. 1).

Illustration: James Madison was our fourth president and is remembered as the “Father of the U.S. Constitution.” He co-authored *The Federalist Papers* and thought deeply about the nature of human government. In 1833 he wrote in a letter: “It has been said that all Government is an evil. It would be more proper to say that the necessity of any Government is a misfortune. This necessity however exists; and the problem to be solved is, not what form of Government is perfect, but which of the forms is least imperfect.”

Application: Well, when it comes to the governmental institutions of man, that is entirely correct. We need the one that is least perfect, because none of them is perfect. But this is not true for the local church.

It turns out that our form of government is perfect, although it is not always perfectly obeyed. It is the headship of our Priest-King. We are a body, and He is the head of the body. He owns the church, having purchased it with his own blood. And He administers and builds the church as the ascended Priest-King who sits at the right hand of the throne of Majesty on high.

We see this throughout the New Testament. We certainly saw this truth in the passage this morning on the bema seat of Christ. Listen to what Adolph Saphir says about the Book of Acts, for instance, in this regard: “The book narrates the

acts, not so much of the apostles, as of the Lord Jesus, the glorified Head of the Church. It is to the ascended Lord that Peter attributes the gift of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. It is of Jesus in heaven, and of His return thence to fulfil the promises spoken of by all God's holy prophets since the world began . . . , that the apostle of the circumcision testifies, after the first miracle in Jerusalem. It is to the ascended Lord Jesus that the prayer of the proto-martyr is directed [Stephen]. The ascended Jesus appears unto Saul of Tarsus, and calls him to be His disciple and His apostle to the Gentiles. The Lord from heaven appears throughout this book as the Head and Ruler of the church; He guides and blesses His messengers; He opens the heart of Lydia; He comforts and encourages the fainting heart of the apostle Paul in Corinth; His hand is with the evangelists, so that many believe. The whole life, strength, and victory of the Church are derived from Jesus, seated at the right hand of God, who is in this book called emphatically Lord" (2:457).

Do our lives as members of this church reflect that form of government over our ministry? God has designed our work here to be ruled and controlled by a King-Priest. Have we bowed before His majesty and authority and committed ourselves to obey Him faithfully by His grace?

II. God designed Christian ministry to magnify an offering of our High Priest and King (vv. 2-3).

Illustration: In the Old Testament, God designed the offerings to be done by the priests. Perhaps the most egregious violation of that design happened the day Saul failed to wait for Samuel and offered the sacrifice that only the priest was to offer (1 Sam. 13:5-14).

Application: The author of our Hebrews passage wants us to understand that when it comes to Christian ministry, only one offering matters, and only one High Priest and King can make that offering.

This is especially true because the offering in question in v. 3 is an offering and sacrifice for sins (see the phrase in 5:1). Sinful man has pitched a lot of his own tents, and he has tried to come up with his own sacrifices that he would offer to God hoping that his works and sacrifices would be acceptable for his sins. That never works.

When it comes to Christian ministry, the problem is our sins, and the only solution is the shed blood of Christ. We need that shed blood, not our religious substitutes, in order to deal with our sins. Christian ministry should be a magnification of that bloody sacrifice on the cross.

Illustration: William Allen was a pastor from Pittsfield, MA who served as the President of Dartmouth University for three years and then as the President of Bowdoin College in Brunswick, ME for nearly 20 years. While in Maine he published a hymnal focused much on the hymns of Isaac Watts. The work, however, also contained many hymns that Allen himself wrote. One of these celebrates the offering of our Savior mentioned in this passage:

The monarch on his throne
May boast his state and train:
Jesus, the Lamb, my soul hath known; -
I boast a Savior slain!

Rich man, though feeble, old,
May boast his wealth and gain:
I ask no gems nor treasure'd gold,
I boast a Savior slain!

Philosophers in pride
May boast their knowledge vain:
My soul hath known the Crucified;
I boast a Savior slain!

And e'en in world of light, -
When heav'nly home I gain, -
Amidst the host of angels bright,
I'll boast a Savior slain!

Christian ministry is designed to bring glory not to monarchs on their thrones, rich men in their treasures, or philosophers in their knowledge. It is designed to give sinners an opportunity to magnify a Savior in His offering and sacrifice. We boast a Savior slain.

III. God designed Christian ministry to point to the greater ministry of our High Priest and King (vv. 4-6a).

Illustration: I know nothing about sewing, but I do remember my mom having these paper patters of outfits that she wanted to make from time to time. The pattern was helpful getting to the outfit, but it was a poor substitute for the outfit. This passage says something similar about the Old Testament worship practices that were centered on the tabernacle and the temple. They were the pattern; they taught much about the reality; but now we have the real thing.

Application: Our author is arguing here that Christ is the real thing. The temple worship of Moses's law was only a pattern of the real thing. The pattern had some inadequacies. Only the sons of Levi could serve in this way, and they were the pattern of a Son of Judah (v. 4). So the pattern is only a pattern, it is not the reality.

The reality is Christ, and the pattern is designed to point to Christ. The problem addressed by this emphasis was that the Hebrew Christians had the reality in Christ, but they were tempted to go back to the Jewish pattern, making that more important than Christ.

We can make at least two applications for our church today:

1. Like the Mosaic tabernacle, we must want our ministry as a local church to be patterned after the real thing — Jesus Christ. We want what we do in our assembly times to be guided by the instructions He left us in the New Testament. It is not our goal to take a survey of the community and thereby find out how our ministry ought to be patterned. We must be a pattern that points to Christ.

2. But as a pattern of the real thing, we must understand that we are no substitute for the real thing. People need Christ in a way that they do not need church. They need church only to the extent that church points them to Christ. We have to be careful as church members about going through the motions here without ever encountering or experiencing Jesus Christ. God designed Christian ministry to point to the greater ministry of our High Priest and King. We must find Him here.

Conclusion: So if I might go back to that email again as we conclude. How would God design our ministry as Christians? Though it makes no easily remembered acrostic, He would do three simple things.

(1) He would put Jesus Christ in absolute charge and control of our lives. Have we put him in charge to rule our lives?

(2) He would magnify the cross work of Christ as the solution for our sin. Is that what we magnify?

(3) He would assess all we do according to whether it truly points to the real thing – the glory of Jesus Christ. Is He whom our lives point to? Is His honor and glory our great ministry concern?

May we have a God-designed Christian ministry in the world this week.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching