

The Church - Part 6

by Les Wheeldon

Les Wheeldon emphasizes the foundational role of God's ministry to His people as essential for effective church ministry.

Duration: 1:10:04

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 8:14, Acts 21:4, Acts 21:11

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of approaching the Bible as a living book, through which God can minister to our lives. He encourages listeners to lay their lives before God and allow Him to heal and touch their hearts. The speaker highlights that joy is the mark of people under the ministry of the Spirit, and it is the strength of God. He also discusses the three realms of ministry: God ministering to us, us ministering to God, and God ministering to people. The speaker shares a powerful story of a woman who was able to witness to her neighbor effectively after seeking God's guidance. He concludes by emphasizing that while sharing the Gospel is important, it is ultimately God's converting power that brings about transformation in people's lives.

Transcript

We continue our studies on the church by turning to the question of ministry in the church tonight. We look at the question of ministry. We looked last week at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit being the foundation of the church and one of the immediate responses to the outpouring of the Spirit was the ministry began to flow in a totally new and dynamic way.

There was no preaching on the day before the day of Pentecost. Interesting, isn't it? When I say that, I mean the actual day before. I don't mean days before.

Of course, there was much preaching. They were sent out to preach, but they weren't preaching and teaching one another before the Spirit came. Lots of things happened when the Holy Spirit came.

Now, when we think of ministry, we perhaps think of the gifts of the Spirit, which we will have to look at, and we think of preaching and so on, all these kinds of ministries which go on in the church. So, we're conscious that there are ministers in the church and they are ministering. And we're also conscious, perhaps, that we are encouraged to be ministers, all of us, and so we need to examine some of these questions about the ministry of the church and ministry in the church.

The ministry of the church can be divided into three, which I want to do. Three basic divisions of ministry in the church. The first is God's own ministry, to his people in the church.

That's the first. The second is the ministry of the people of God, to God. And that's the second.

And the third is the overflow of those two, which is the ministry of God to man, through man, which is the overflow of the first two. And actually, the breakdown of the third is entirely a result of the breakdown of the first and second. In other words, if God is ministering to us, and we are ministering to God, then there will be twelve basketfuls left over at the end of every meeting.

Now, sometimes you go to a meeting and you can feel, didn't get much, there wasn't much to get, we're picking the bones tonight. Well, that may be a result of your own heart, and it could be a critical attitude that you have. And I know that if someone goes in the Spirit, to listen in the Spirit, you can get blessed in all kinds of things.

I'm sure you can even get blessed listening to the news. We had a brother in Epsom who was blessed by watching a bus passing. And how, you may be asking.

Well, he was a policeman, and his number was something like 42 on his lapel. Policeman. And he was thinking about whether to go into retirement or what, and he passed a bus which said, number 42, out of service.

And it spoke to him. And I forgot what the, there's another sequel to it, but he saw another bus number 42, another day, but I forgot what that one said. But anyway.

So you can be blessed by all kinds of things. And it is true that God can speak to you through amazing things if your heart is right. But the first realm of ministry is from God to our hearts.

Let me just read a very small event in Matthew's Gospel. It says this, Matthew chapter 8, verse 14. When Jesus was coming to Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, sick of a fever.

He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and ministered to them. There's a lady, absolutely laid low, unable to fulfil her ministry.

And the Bible says that when she was raised up she ministered to them. It also says in one place that she ministered to him. On another occasion it says she ministered to them.

But the heart of her ministry, and the reason she could minister, was because he touched her. He touched her first. And if a person is going to minister anything, they must be in a place where God is ministering to them.

And this is the first realm of ministry. God must be writing on the hearts of his people. God must be writing on the tables of our hearts.

You know that when they went into the tabernacle, there was the Holy of Holies, and there inside was the Ark of the Covenant. And there in the Ark of the Covenant were the tables of stone, the manna, and Aaron's rod. And the tables of stone were written by the finger of God, and so on.

But there were the marks of God's blessing for the people. God ministering to his people. We can take this in any way we like now.

We could look at Moses. Before he could ever lead the people, he had to be led. Before I can minister salvation, I must be saved.

Before I can minister the peace of God, I must know peace in my own heart. Before I can minister release from hurt and all kinds of things, I must know a heart that is healed from hurt myself. And it is amazing when you actually begin to examine the hearts of people who are seeking to minister.

Some people are incredibly damaged and hurt themselves. And it comes through the ministry. It comes through in all manner of ways.

They themselves have not known the touch and the hand of God raising them up to the place where they can minister. And the church must know this, but of course also the leaders particularly must know this. Now, it's easy to say that, and the congregation always gets happy when you tell the leaders what they've got to do, because they say, oh good, let's tell them what to do, and I don't have to do it then.

But it is true that the church has found, and we'll come to this later, on apostolic ministry and commission more than that of elders. What do I mean? Elders are a covering for the church and are vital for the running of the church. But the apostolic commission was we will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

And not all elders are called in that way to that. But the truth is that the church is built on the fulfilment of the apostolic commission. We will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

And although it was given to apostles, it was the pattern for the church that the church must rest in the fact that men are to labour in the word and in doctrine. We'll look at this in a moment. But the labouring in the word and in doctrine is, first of all, letting God deal with your life.

And the whole heart of ministry is the laying up of lives before God. There is no doubt that every one of us will run dry. We will all run dry.

No matter what our experience of the Holy Spirit is, we will run dry unless we maintain the place where God is ministering to us. And this is the wonder of ministry, that as I lay my life before God, he comes to me and writes on my life and heart. He writes with the finger of God.

And there is no doubt that this is the realm of reality. You can study, you can get computer disks now that will give you a thousand sermon illustrations. Aren't you glad I haven't got one? But you see there are all these tools of ministry that are now available for preachers whereby they can give engaging and interesting talks.

Very wonderful, but utterly useless. I'm not saying that illustrations, might be a list of illustrations, might be useful, might make some people's, you know, talks a bit more interesting. But it doesn't minister God.

The ministry of God only takes place when God has been ministering to the minister. And I must, and we must all as a church, know the place where God is ministering to us. Now in that realm there is a place for every one of us to know a place alone with God.

We must know it. Some must lead in it, but we must know the patient looking to God to minister to us. When Moses went up the mountain, he was up the mountain for 40 days and he did not eat, he did not drink.

In my opinion, I don't think he breathed. I don't think he slept. That's my opinion, that's not what the Bible says.

But the reason I think it is because I don't think he grew thin up the mountain. I think he was physically sustained by the eternal presence. When we get to heaven we shall not be dependent on physical air.

We shall be dependent only on the life-giving presence of God. But Moses went up the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights. And that was, I know, a very special, very special time.

And it was not something that was repeated a lot, but where he went up there was not only what happened there, but it was what became set in his life as the pattern for his whole life and ministry. He began to know the place where God is ministering to man directly. And that is the strength of the ministry of the church, the direct ministry of God to our hearts.

Now, we are going to look a lot, examine these things even further in the sessions because there's lots to say about all this in all kinds of levels. But the truth is that the Old Testament ministry came short of the holiest of all. You know that.

That their ministry fell short of actually penetrating through to the presence of God. And the truth is that the ministry must not fall short of penetration to the presence of God. It's the most vital dimension of ministry is that our lives are steeped in the presence of God.

Now, I've no doubt that this requires patience. I was reading today in Jeremiah, that's where my reading is at the moment, and I just noticed this word in Jeremiah 42. Jeremiah was a prophet.

And the book of the prophets, Jeremiah and Isaiah and so on, all these prophets, Samuel also, their lives are described in the books, not just their prophecies, some more than others. But in the prophecies you learn something of the ministry of the prophets. And so, for example, you find that here's Jeremiah in chapter 42, it says this, that in this chapter people came to him and said, can you tell us what to do? We want to know.

And we will obey, they said. The actual details of the story aren't important. So they pleaded with Jeremiah to give them an understanding of the will of God.

And Jeremiah came out with a prophecy in chapter 42. He said, well, you are to stay in Israel. Don't go down into Egypt.

A short time before, he had actually commanded the people to go forth to the Chaldeans and be willing to go into captivity. But now he completely turned his message around, different day, weeks had passed, the Chaldeans had come and occupied the land, and now he said, now stay. First he said go, now he said stay.

When he said stay, the people went. When he said go, the people stayed. Typical of the Israelites, or shite of the human heart.

But what I wanted to bring out here in this particular chapter was this, that they asked Jeremiah, can you tell us the mind of God will obey, they said. And then in verse 7 it simply says this, it came to pass after ten days that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. And when you read a little phrase like that, you can see that that man paid a price.

You could say, did he pay a heavy price? His reward, he didn't pay a price actually, his reward was the ability to fellowship with God. But that man went and sought God for ten days before God spoke. You know that when you want God to minister to you, the answer of God, you know that it is not, just think of it this way, ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened to you.

Now some person said to me here, I asked and I didn't receive, I sought and I did not find, I knocked and the door was not opened to me. Then we're faced with the possibility here by a testimony, if somebody had that testimony, that the word of God, of Jesus is not true. Because Jesus said that everyone who speaks finds.

But you and I, we all know that the word of Jesus is true, though every man be a liar. So that every man who says I sought and did not find is a liar, though he doesn't know it. What he is actually exposing is that he never really sought, because if he sought, God has promised he will find.

There is absolutely no room for any doubt about it. God has said if you seek me, you shall find. Another quote from Jeremiah, you shall seek me, you shall find me, when you shall search me with all your heart.

And the truth is that God is not playing hide and seek with people, he is a God longing to minister directly to the needs of the hearts of people. He wants to pour in the oil, the balm of Gilead, he wants to pour in healing and power and strength and cleansing. All the things that God wants to minister into the heart of his people, it's absolutely clear that is the set determination of God to be the chief minister in his church.

The chief minister in the church is God. He is directly involved in the ministry in our church. It's absolutely fundamental.

God is the chief minister, and that means that he has opportunity for ministry, and that means that there are people who are willing to go ten days, forty days and forty nights seeking God. God is a speaking God. He is a God of communion.

He is not a God who leaves us in monologue. He is a speaking God. He is a God who comes and ministers to his people and pours out his blessing and writes on our hearts and puts things in our minds.

God is the God of impartation. He will impart to us. Now, you will say that sounds very grand.

Can you give me any help to say on how to actually do it? How can I seek God? How can I let God minister to me? Well, there is an element of mystery in it which I cannot take away. There is an element of mystery where the searching and seeking heart will have to have thirst as its fundamental characteristic. You must have thirst for God.

But I also know that when you get before God and you think, do I read the word or what do I? What I would say is, in your seeking of God, read your scriptures. But watch and listen carefully as you read your scriptures for the speaking of God. Because as you read, God will breathe something through and something will come to you.

It won't happen every day. It won't happen as often as we all like. But when God speaks to the seeking heart, the heart that has engaged itself to read his word and pray and wait on him, when he speaks into your heart, do not read on, but pause.

And let what God is saying penetrate deep into your heart. I would say once God has breathed on a scripture, you should train your mind to dwell on that scripture long and deep. What I believe is that God often touches people's hearts, but the touch is but the foretaste of what he wants to do.

And I believe that the greatest need in the ministry of the church is to take the taste that God gives us and to go and follow through on it to fully receive what God is speaking to us about. And to lay our lives before him. I believe that the reading of scriptures should, whether we are touched of the spirit in that way that I've described now or not, the reading of the scriptures should not take us into lengthy reading alone.

Now that is good. It should also take us into a searching out of God's heart to understand the meaning of what he says. And I believe that will involve quiet meditation to allow the spirit to take the word and minister it to us.

The scripture is spirit-breathed. It is a tool of the spirit. I have no doubt that the use of the scripture is a vital key in the seeking of God, as it is in the preaching ministry.

It is in all the ministries. The scripture is a window into the eternal. And it is not to be seen as an information book, though it is that also.

It is to be seen as one of the chief tools of the spirit of God in his ministry to our lives. Remember that when you turn to the Bible you are turning to a living book. God wanting to minister to you through his spirit through the book.

So what you are to do, what all of us is to do is to lay our lives before God in the time that we are able to allow him to minister to us as he brings out the needs of our hearts and begins to heal and touch and give joy and gladness. Because the people whose God is the Lord and who know him ministering to them will be filled with joy. The mark of the people under the ministry of the spirit is joy.

Joy is the strength of God. So we don't need to talk about this. These are things that are clear.

But the thing is that here is God wanting to minister himself amongst us. Remember that where it all starts there is Isaiah another prophet who was in the house of the Lord on the Lord's day and he saw the Lord high and lifted up and he heard the cry around the altar Holy, Holy, Holy and as he saw the holiness of God he was convicted of his sin. I am an unclean man, I have unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

He was convicted of his sin. Now I don't think Isaiah had sinned or was a sinner in any realm which we would identify as being immoral. I think Isaiah was the man you would have said he would be the leader of the church at that point.

I think he would be a man who would be immediately made an elder as soon as it was ever possible to make an elder. Isaiah would have been made an elder if he was amongst us today. He would certainly be involved in the ministry, he would certainly be recognised, he would be honoured and all this.

But he was the man who when he saw God he cried out. He didn't just say, he didn't say well I suppose I need a bit of cleansing in my life. He cried out for his sin.

And it was not a sin that you could mention or name. It was the sin of his heart. Whatever that was we don't know but it was the sin of his condition.

It wasn't a sin he'd committed. It was the sin of his state. And God ministered to him by touching his lips with burning coal.

And that's a wonderful thing to happen to any prophet, to have his lips burnt with coal. I can't imagine it would have been a very pleasant experience physically. But it wasn't particularly the physical side.

But it was a searing, a burning up of sin and a changing of his life. Who can doubt that a man who is to prophesy, a man who is to minister must know the Lord and must be ministered to by God. Now if there is no one going forward in this place of being ministered to by God then there is no ministry in the church.

All ministry begins with God ministering directly to his people. All ministry. We cannot gather together in the hope that somehow something will happen because we're together.

I know that God is gracious. Lots of things happen like that. But that is not the foundation of the ministry.

The foundation of the ministry is God dealing with us directly. And that often happens alone. It happens in all kinds of places.

And the more God is doing this the more the stamp on the hand of God will be on the church. This is the ministry of God to his people. The second area of ministry which I mentioned is the ministry of the people to God.

And here we can read in Acts of the Apostles chapter 13. And here we read in verse 1. There were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers. It's lovely to have a number of prophets and teachers in the church.

Barnabas was one. Simeon that was called the black man, Niger, probably an African. Lucius of Cyrene, that's Libya, another African.

And Mennon who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. He was from a rich, wealthy, privileged background. And Saul.

So quite a wonderful array of ministers there. Because the man who had been brought up with Herod, Herod was a monster. It's like saying he was brought up with Saddam Hussein.

We pass over the reading of Scripture and we sometimes don't realise what it said. But so when you think about it, wow what a group of people. And Saul.

As they ministered to the Lord. Beautiful. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted to the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, I don't believe he spoke out of thin air, I believe that one of the prophets opened his mouth and said these words, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work where unto I have called them.

When they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they being sent forth by the church. And you all shout protest now.

No! If you would have heard a missionary complain that not being enough being done for me, I'm forgotten on the mission field. That just shows he was sent by the wrong people. A missionary is not to be sent by man but by God the Holy Ghost.

Much better sacred position to be. You know that when C.T. Stiglitz went as a missionary to Africa, he said I go sent by a committee. And it was a wonderful committee.

He said they have promised to give me every penny I shall ever need. Supply every need I shall ever have. And they have promised to give me all the power I shall ever need.

And they have promised to provide spiritual power through the intercessions of one of them. And all kinds of things. And they have also promised to go with me to Africa.

And stay with me and never leave me. And he said it's the committee of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It's a wonderful committee to be sent by.

If you get sent by a mission board you will soon be in deep water. It's a very dishonouring thing to hear a missionary complain. Dishonours the name of the Lord really, doesn't it? Dishonours the name of the Lord when one of the Lord's workers complains, drops the hint that he's not really being looked after properly.

Not being supported properly. I'm not getting much money. You're forced to say well, who are you working for brother? For the church? Are you employed by the church? Or are you employed by God? You know that recently a man went to court.

It was a vicar. And he, or a minister, I don't know which church he was from, he went to court to claim expenses from his church. And he said that his support was far too low.

I don't know what church he was from. I haven't got a clue. I just remember hearing this on the news.

But I remember the reason it struck me is because the judgement of the judge was wonderful. The judge said, seeing you are employed by God, and God is the one who has employed you and put you in your position, this is beyond the competence of this court. And I thought that was a wonderful thing to say.

But you know the ministers of the Lord are tempted to complain sometimes. I'm not accusing people. God knows my heart.

There are times when you think, and then it comes back to you, the Lord said, well, have I let you down less? Tell me when. You're forced to say, no Lord, you've never let me down. I might have wanted something and I couldn't have it, but that was not something I would have died without.

You know that every person should be grateful for what they cannot afford. God gives you what you need, not what you want. And what you cannot afford will be bad for you.

Otherwise he would give you it. If it would be good for you, he'd give it to you. If it's beyond you, thank him.

Because he's the decider, isn't he? Of us all. Not just me, or someone in the ministry. God is the provider for us all.

So here we've got these men ministering, and they ministered to the Lord, and they fasted. What did they do to minister? They were ministering to the Lord. This is the greatest wonder of the Church.

You know, I've probably asked you this question before, but I do ask people sometimes, why have you come to this meeting? Why have you come? And when you ask that to people, sometimes they are in different meetings, of course they have different answers. If it's the Bible, they say, oh, I've come to learn

the Bible. And if it's a Sunday morning meeting, well, you know, all kinds of answers come up.

But the question is, the reason many, many people, the majority, attend meetings is because of their need. Their need. Now that's absolutely obvious, that we all have need.

And we need God, we've started there, God ministering to our need. God ministering to us is the basis of all ministry. But of course, how long does it take for God to minister to our need? Well, when Lazarus was dead, it took a moment, but it erased him from the dead.

And when the leper was healed, it took a moment, but he was healed. And so on. And there are things that take longer, and there are things that have to be worked through, and repentance has to be deepened, and all kinds of things.

But the truth is that God is a God who makes us whole. And when I am whole, the question then is, why do I still go to meetings? And again, people say, I need refreshing, I need blessing, I need this, I need, I go because I need things. Well, of course we all need refreshing, we all need blessing, but the first question of a saved man who has been ministered to of God, salvation is of the Lord, it is not of man.

When God has ministered to your heart, the first question of a saved man is, in going to a meeting is, what does God need? If I use that phrase, I don't want to dwell on that expression, God needs nothing. God has no needs, if he were a God of need, he would not be God. God can live without me.

God can live without my love and my worship, it will not diminish his stature or his Godhead one bit. But there is, in this sense of need, there is a deep desire in God that he has when he comes to a meeting, when he is with us in a meeting, or when he is with us in our lives, there is something that God is wanting. And the great question that I have to ask is, what does God want from this time? And one of the reasons that a person does not go on with God is because they never get beyond the fact that they want something from God.

They never get to the point where they realise God wants something from you. You know, if I can turn to this great scripture, I hope I can turn to it, beautiful scripture, it is in 1 Chronicles 29, verse 11, And thine, O Lord, this is David speaking, thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty. For all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine.

Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all. And in thine hand is power and might, it is 1 Chronicles 29, verse 12 now, and in thine hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

Now therefore, our God, we thank thee and praise thy glorious name. But who am I and what is my people that we should be able to offer so willingly after this thought? For all things come of thee and of thine own have we given thee. There's the truth of ministry to God.

All things come of thee and of thine own have we given thee. When I give to God, I only render to him what he's given to me. That's why the first thing in ministry is God's ministry to us.

The second thing is our ministry back to the Lord. I minister back to him. I respond back to him and pour out back to the Lord.

And what do we pour back? Well, we pour back worship. What is worship? Worship must be defined because it's the word, like all words that are not in our daily language, we need to find other words to understand what we're doing when we worship. One of the attitudes of worship, one of the characteristics of worship is gratefulness, a grateful heart.

You know that out of the ten lepers, only one returned to thank him. All have ministered to a God, but only one ministered back to him. And here's one aspect of it, gratefulness.

I give you my grateful heart, Lord. Another aspect, which for me is the chief aspect, is wonder, to wonder at God, to gaze on God, pour out our love and adoration in wondering in the person of God. And here they all were ministering to the Lord, ministering to him, serving him.

And ministry, the ministry is all to do with what we as a church are doing. Now, as a church, we are to be about the work of the minister. We are all in the ministry in this sense.

Every one of us is a minister. God ministers to every one of us, and we all minister to God. And part of the ministry to God is simple attentiveness to him.

You know, one of the psalmist's psalms says back there, it says, our eyes look unto thee as the servant's eyes look unto the master. This is the heart of a minister. Not looking now for my own need, oh I've got this problem, I need guidance, I need some money, I need something else, I need this.

But I am looking free from need unto the eyes of my God to see what he shall say to me, what he wants from my life and what he wants for this church. What does God want? Let's forget about everything else. What does God want? What is God's will and heart for us as people? What does he want for us? There's another dimension to this.

We can think of worship and praise, these things, but there's also the dimension of intercession, interceding. And I know that intercession is not so much bringing prayer topics. You know, I don't think that there's a whole list of prayer requests.

Jesus isn't working down a whole list saying I want to pray for this and this and this and this. He's bearing the whole world on his heart. And as he's there before the Father, he's interceding.

I believe that it's sometimes eruptions of love for the human race before the throne of God. I believe that this is the place where all ministry flows. I know that all the rest of ministry flows from the place where God has ministered to us and we have ministered to God.

It's been said that the prayer meeting is the most important meeting of a church. And it is true. But only in this sense in which we're saying it's a place of God ministering to us and us ministering to God.

We're not thinking of preaching, we're thinking only of God in the midst. Discerning God, serving God, looking to God, understanding God, being sensitive to God. And if it took Moses 40 days and 40 nights to understand the church, the pattern for the church in a picture, it will take us as churches a long time before God.

Ministers will have to spend a long time before God. It is not a matter of once a week getting a word on a Sunday morning. It's a matter of seeking God determinately to enter into the councils of God for his church.

This is true of ministers, it's true of churches. We have to understand in our hearts what do we actually want? The state of Quo? Or do we want to enter into the realms of God revealed word and power? Because when God is moving and when the church is ministering to God and God is this great flow of ministry, then there's one thing that is released. In all the ministry of the church comes in the word of power.

Because then we turn to the third realm. God ministering to people, to us. I just heard a story of a woman who could not, did not know how to witness to her neighbour.

She did not know how to witness to her neighbour and every attempt she made failed until she went to the Lord and said to the Lord, is there anything you want to say to my neighbour? And the Lord said, tell her don't be afraid. Very simple. So she went round to the neighbour and she got the courage.

That morning the Lord had spoken and she went to the neighbour and she said, I know this sounds strange but I've been praying for you and I feel that God has something he wants to say to you. He said, what is it? She said, don't be afraid. And the lady burst into tears.

She got her hospital appointment that morning and has been gripped with fear. The information I have about the gospel is wonderful to share. I want to share it with people.

But the converting power is God. God has not sent us forth to do his work for him. There's a verse of a hymn which I sometimes have chuckled over.

It says that I may speak and think for thee. Work and speak and think for thee. You think that means I'm going to work for God, I'm going to think for God, I'm going to speak for God.

No, no, no, it doesn't mean that. God doesn't need you to think for him and speak for him and work for him. God wants you to be a channel for his working.

He wants to work, he wants to speak and I know that when the power of God is manifest people are converted with power. The first two realms of ministry must be put right first. But notice this, there are gifts of the Spirit but there is no gift of prayer.

Never speaks of a gift of the Spirit called prayer. Why is that so important? Prayer is the life of the church ministering to God. Not a gift of the Spirit, it's the life of the Spirit.

The Spirit itself is ministering to God. The Spirit himself is involved in the ministry and the whole point of being gathered in the Spirit is that through the Spirit God ministers to us. There's no gift of the Spirit there, it's God himself.

There's no gift of the Spirit ministering to God. There's no gift of worship. There's no gift of these things.

These are the lifeblood of the church. The gifts of the Spirit come later. First establish the lifeblood of the ministry.

Gifts can be stored, but gifts that I've, I don't know if I've talked to you about gifts before, probably, I don't remember, but I always think of gifts like taps. They're only the means for the water to pass, they are not the water. And a man dying in a desert isn't looking for a tap, he's looking for water.

If you wanted a tap and you find a pair of taps you'd be disappointed. You want the water that comes through it, you want to turn it and see clear crystal light giving water. And the gifts of the Spirit, if you like, they're the holes in the bucket.

Bad example, bad phrase to use, but there you go, we don't want leaky buckets. But the thing is, they're the water flowing, they're the taps flowing, the pressure inside must cause it to spur forth life from amongst us. God working in our hearts.

We ministering to God, we knowing God, we being close to God. They ministered to the Lord and fasted and as they ministered the Holy Ghost said, and I notice a vast difference between that and other phrases, the Holy Ghost said, look at another phrase that comes later in the chapter which is much weaker and not substantial, it's in chapter 21, verse 4, finding disciples we tarried there seven days, who said to Paul, through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. Interesting phrase here, it's going to get confusing in a moment.

But when we get to verse 11, when he was come to us, this is the prophet Agabus, he bound his own hands and feet with Paul's belt and said, thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this belt and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Do you realise what they're doing again? Verse 12, they besought him, through the Spirit, not to go up.

But the Holy Spirit didn't say don't go up. The Holy Spirit said, this is what will happen to him. In other words, here we are with all our feelings and yes and we are blessed and we say, oh what the Spirit saith.

And it's a mixture, often is. Lovely, edifying, but not this powerful dimension when thus saith the Holy Ghost. Now of course you could start using that phrase instead.

It's not the phraseology we're interested in. We're not interested in somebody standing up and saying, thus saith the Holy Ghost. But that's a wonderful dimension isn't it? God at work.

This is the work of God. And in chapter 13, as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me. I love it.

Separate to me. Barnabas and Saul for the work were unto I have called them and they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost. Isn't it wonderful when we begin to be aware of what God the Holy Ghost is doing amongst us.

You know the whole realm of ministry depends entirely on God the Holy Ghost. We must know the dimension of God the Holy Ghost. God the Holy Ghost.

When you look into the realm of God ministering to us and we ministering to God, you're really in John 14, 15, 16 and 17. The life of the Spirit. Revealing Jesus to us.

Leading us into prayer, into session. That's the realm of the ministry. God to us, we to God.

And then the third, as I've said, flows from it. The gifts of the Spirit that God has given us. God gives gifts and so the gifts are established.

Now when we begin to look at the gifts of the Spirit, we need to be persuaded of various things. We need to be persuaded and not waver. For example, the church is the pillar and the ground of the truth.

What a tremendous statement there isn't it? The pillar and the ground of the truth. In other words, if I said to somebody, I want to find out about Egyptian hieroglyphics, where do I go? They might say, oh there's only, well you can go to the library, they've got a bit there. And you can go to the London Museum, what is it? British Museum, you can see a few of them.

And then they'll say, oh there's Donald Wiseman I think, I don't know if he's still around, but he's one of the great professors on it, he knows all, he can read them. Who do you want to go to? They've got the expertise. But if I say, I want to be saved, where do I go? The church.

Now you may say, oh no, no, no, you don't need the church, you need God. But the truth is, the church is the pillar and the ground of the truth. If I'm going to get any access further, you may say, well the Bible's there isn't it? Do you know that a hundred people, one of them, one out of a hundred will ever read the Bible before they convert? Never! People are not normally converted through reading the Bible.

The first book they read is the church, the Christians. Then they read the Bible. They've got to read, in some measure or other, they've got to know, what is our expertise? Well we're experts at, what are we experts at? Marriage counselling, are we? Now, marriages, we should have good marriages, we should have strong marriages, we should be an example in our marriages.

We should make the world want to know why our marriages are so good. Raising children, are we good at that? Are we experts at that? Well, we'll be examined on that some day. But the truth is that we could be experts on that, but that's not our expertise.

We should, as an overflow, have all kinds of things happening in our lives and make the world want to know what it is about us. What is it about us? The answer is, it's the Gospel of God. It's the Gospel of God.

I, as a minister of Christ, have the final answer to every human problem. But it's only the Gospel. It's not psychology, it's not my counselling, it's not all the different things that the world would like to train the churches.

The church is being trained in worldly methods and there are schools and colleges training the churches and the ministers in endless ways to meet the need of the world by the tools of the world. And what's the answer? Weakness and powerlessness, because the church has betrayed its one key, which is the Gospel of God. If I train up in psychology and counselling, I may help people over their problems, but I won't solve them.

But if I get close to God and know his word and his presence, I will be an expert in the one thing that counts, and that is the message that Christ died for the human race, to raise them out of their problems by a miracle of power. And he can solve every problem. He can make an insane man sane in a moment.

He can cure a drug addict in a moment. He can forgive, he can deal with guilt that goes back through generations, and curses, who cares what the problem is? The Gospel is the power of God to salvation, and the church has it. Now the church must know its treasure.

It's like knowing that we're sitting on the greatest treasure. We have it. And we should be confident of it.

We should not seek other methods. We should not be ashamed of it. You know that when we come to those questions of the gifts of the Spirit, one of the greatest wonders of the church is that it is the place where the Gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Ghost.

Whatever we look at in the gifts of the Spirit, when you look through the New Testament, the church preached the Gospel. Now what gift of the Spirit is that? You could say it's a ministry rather than a gift. Prophetic? Yes.

Prophetic gift, all these things. But the greatest honour of the church is to preach the Gospel, the ministry of God to man through man. And one of the things I want to say and absolutely build up is that the honour of the preaching of the Word must be maintained by the people of God.

Never belittle or decry the preaching of the Word. The preaching of the Word in the midst of the church is one of the central ministries of the church. Do you know we live in a day where one of the chief things that is attached is preaching? Discussion groups? Fine.

Preaching? No. Why? Because people want their opinion taken into account. I've been to discussion groups, different groups, and as soon as you open it up for questions you've got a minefield.

Because there's some troublemaker there determined to get his opinion in. Sometimes that's the case, sometimes not of course. But the thing is that the church must not apologise at all for the eternal ministry that it confided to us.

When I talk about the ministry of the church I'm talking about its eternal ministry. And I believe that those who are called to preach should see it as their chief calling. You may have to continue to go to work.

That does not mean you need a secondary calling. Your work is only to enable you to live and fulfil your spiritual callings. It's part of them.

It isn't against them. But the truth is that the church is called to fulfil its ministry which is to preach the Gospel. And we must not dabble in other kinds of areas of setting up this service and that service.

You know one of the things I'm aware of in Africa when you go and look around at the extent to which the churches get involved in other works, medical being the chief of them, education a second, all kinds of things, and they're good. But they are not the expertise of the church. The church is not an expert.

You go to Laogad and there's a wonderful church as well in the shadow of the hospital. But the truth is that the Gospel being preached in Nepal is not only because of a hospital. There's places where that Gospel will be preached where there'll never be a hospital.

Now praise God that the hospital is built on the direction of God. We believe it was built by a miracle. We believe God is in it.

But we are never to lose sight that God is not making us up as a medical enterprise. Jesus did not say, there's a bark over here and there's a flower over there, go and get some, boil them, get the juice and give it to this girl and the fever will go. And he could have done.

He could have given a few keys and said this, this and this and he would have transformed the medical state of the entire world by giving a few keys. He left the world sick in that sense. He did not give a natural cure.

Why? Because he knew that the natural cure is no cure. It's only a postponement of death. Real health comes through the ministry of God.

The pillar and ground of the truth is the church. The ministry that is the answer, it is not a suggestion, it is the answer. We have the only answer to be human as there is no other.

And it lies in our midst as a treasure, as a jewel. Praise God that we can treasure this jewel and see it burn brightly amongst us. I would that the preaching ministry excel in every church.

That men give themselves to the excelling of the preaching ministry. Let me add at this point that I do not believe that every brother in the church should preach. I don't believe it.

I believe it will lead to suffering in the churches. I believe it will lead to weakening of the ministry. Are all prophets as the scripture the answer is no.

Are all apostles, no. Are all pastors, teachers, whatever it is. The answer is no, we are not all.

Every one of us has limited gifts. Every one of us. Every one of us is a part or whole.

And every one of us needs to know our place in the body and not stray beyond it. Blessed is the man who knows his ministry. Blessed is also the man who knows what is not his ministry.

It is the truth. I remember reading a book, there is a very good book by Martin Laurie Jones called Preachers and Preaching. If you are a preacher you should get that book, it is a wonderful book.

But in it he says he would put obstacles in the paths of people who want to be preachers. He wouldn't encourage them. That is the opposite of what I have always been hearing people say, well you encourage people to go and preach.

He says no. He says you have got to make it hard. That is an old school expression isn't it.

You have got to make it hard for them. They have got to fight through it. Now I know there is a place for encouragement.

There is. I wouldn't agree with that all the way. But what he is saying is you can't make people preachers.

If it is in them it has got to be something that goes beyond the little obstacles that come. If you are a preacher and you are beset by shyness, are you going to be a prisoner of shyness all your life? If you are a preacher and God is giving you that gift and calling, what are you going to let rob you of? If it is in you and you are going to get through, you have got to get through with God and fulfil your ministry. But I believe one of the chief ministries that must be attended to in the church is the preaching ministry.

Now at this point you could say, oh he is talking to that two or three people who preach. I am speaking to the whole church now because you should pray earnestly for the people preaching. You should make it one of your chief intercessory prayer topics if you like.

You should make it something that you engage in to support and uphold the ministry of preaching in the church. Because the life of the church will depend on its stature, on its greatness. I am using these phrases, I know they can sound carnal, but the ministry of preaching can be of such stature and power.

We need great preaching, powerful preaching, stirring preaching. Tell yourself, well you should go and seek God for forty days. What about you fasting and praying? What about you enabling it to happen through the prayers and the nourishing? I believe that when a gift is given to a church through a brother,

that man is a gift to the whole church.

And must be nourished and kept and cherished by the whole church. It talks about honouring them who labour in the word and in doctrine. Were elders who do that are worthy of double honour? Twice nothing.

Double honour, what is honour given to elders? Again, we live in an age where we are all seeking to water down these things. Honour is that respect of what God has called them unto and the nourishing of it in prayer. Double honour for those who labour in the ministry of the word and prayer.

Pray for them, sustain them, fast for them, that the ministry in the church flourishes. Well we have begun that realm, but we will stop there.

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