

Fellowship in Ministering to the Lord

by Paris Reidhead

Paris Reidhead's sermon explores the vital role of ministering to the Lord and the fellowship among diverse church leaders in Antioch.

Duration: 28:59

Scripture: Acts 13:1

Topics: "Fellowship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding and applying three specific verses. He describes how David Brainerd knelt in the snow and ministered to the Lord, fasting and losing awareness of bodily discomfort. The speaker believes that it is crucial for individuals and the church to grasp the meaning of these verses and integrate them into their lives. He explains that the gifts of the Spirit and blessings from God come as a result of obedience and walking in the truth. The speaker encourages listeners to recognize the teaching ministry of the Word and to devote themselves to prayer and ministering to the Lord in order to experience God's presence and power.

Transcript

Acts 13, we're reading just three verses. Perhaps I think we'll be able to complete with three. Now there were in the church that was in Antioch certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas and Simeon, it was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Man, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me, Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. We are continuing in this matter of fellowship.

You will remember that when the word came to the disciples in Jerusalem of God's working in Antioch, they dispatched Barnabas to represent them, to guide this new church in its establishment so that the foundation would be sure and its honor protected in the glory of the Lord He, as you will recall, recognized the lack of gift and the necessity of further teaching and so went to Tarsus seeking Saul and brought him back to Antioch. Barnabas and Saul then took the gifts that this church had received in answer to a prophecy given by Agabus concerning persecution, suffering, privation, and dearth to the church in Jerusalem. You'll recall how that shortly after they arrived, Herod began by persecuting James and imprisoning Peter, and this brought suffering again on the church.

Paul and Barnabas then returned to Antioch, and it is there that we find them for an indefinite period of time. By this time we find that to Saul and Barnabas, others have been joined, whether they came from the community of believers that had been brought to Christ or whether they were others such as Saul that had come in learning of God's work, we are not told. But Barnabas and Saul were included as prophets and teachers, and with them was Simeon, who is called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaán, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch.

Now, this is very interesting. Herod, Manaán, was of noble lineage, or he would not have been reared in the same home as Herod. He would not have had the same privileges of education, and thus the gospel has reached the up-and-out.

Isn't it wonderful that there are no limitations upon this message and no restricting it? I rather feel distressed at times that in cities such as ours we have so much more concern for the down-and-out frequently than we do for the up-and-out. This ought to be a matter of moment to all of us. There are some 26 mission societies in the city, all of whom are needed and serve good purpose for the men of the street, the men who've been victimized by their own lusts and appetites and habits and are homeless derelicts.

We are grateful, I say, for all of these ministries. But I wonder if there is the same concern in the part of the general Christian community for the Manaéans that may be somewhere. I've often wondered why we as evangelicals aren't as wise as our day and generation.

About three years ago, I became greatly concerned about establishing, in connection with the church, this church, a ministry that would reach into the homes of the up-and-out. It came about as the result of three or four telephone calls in as many weeks, or conversations, not all telephone calls, but conversations and phone calls from people that said, do you know of someone that could help us in our home, or in the home of a friend, or in the home of an acquaintance? We need someone to live in. There's a father is very prominent and wealthy, and the mother has equally so, and they have great social responsibilities, three little children.

We want someone that will stay in the home and take care of the children. And I tried every source, every place, everyone. It just wasn't possible to get anyone.

I remembered that down in Atlanta, Georgia, there was a woman that helped the Partridge family. Mr. and Mrs. Partridge had this lady come in and labor there, and she was instrumental in leading Lois Partridge and her brother to the Lord Jesus Christ. The parents were nominally Christian, attending church, but had nothing vital.

But it was this woman who did the cooking and the cleaning, that cared for the children, was able to win them and love them to the Lord Jesus Christ. And here an appeal was coming from a home similar to that of Manan, saying, can you come over and help us? Is there someone that's willing to live in? They had a lovely home and a private room, and meals, and other privileges, and a salary of \$60 or \$70 a week. No one available at the time.

There wasn't anyone that was prepared to go into that home. All the hours were difficult. They couldn't leave at a given time and come at a given time, but there was certain intrusion and privacy.

And otherwise, just wasn't anyone. So we began to talk, some of us, about the possibility of establishing a ministry where young women from high school and from Bible schools would actually see this as a mission

field and would respond to it, and would come and take several months of training, where they would be taught in the household arts and responsibilities and amenities. And then, with the prestige and encouragement that would be given, they'd be prepared and qualified to go into the home, obviously and foremost, to do the work that was there.

But, of course, to do it as Christians, and thus to exert Christian influence and Christian testimony. Because so many times the parents will say, look, I haven't time. If you'll teach the children anything about God, we're happy to have you do it.

And I do not know how Manetian came to know the Lord, but I do know that it's very difficult for the usual means of ministry to penetrate into many of these homes. And I still believe that God has Manetians in New York City and elsewhere that he wants to reach. And I haven't given up the vision.

There still might come a time when some property, such as the residence of Friendly League, might be available for the training of such. And there might be a board made up of such men as Dr. Edmonds and Billy Graham and Paul Reese and others, to some of whom I've spoken about this, who said they'd be willing to whatever influence they could for such ministry. And I firmly believe the time may come when somewhere, somehow, there may be a ministry where people are prepared to penetrate into the homes of Herod the Tatarx, where we'll see some Manetians again brought to the Lord.

See, slavery in Rome served a good purpose to this degree, at least, that often the slaves were the first to come to Christ, and they were usually owned by the affluent, and so their ministry was carried directly to that place where it could be seen and scrutinized most consistently. So here is one that's been brought to Christ, who was reared in privilege, in honor, in society, but he is there. Then the next, Lucius of Cyrene.

We don't know much about him. Obviously, he's Roman because the name Lucius indicates that it is a Latin name, and he is undoubtedly brought up in the culture of Rome, but he's come to know and love the Lord Jesus. Now, do you recognize anything about Simeon? Simeon, who was called Niger.

The river Niger is in Africa, and obviously this identified Simeon as Negro. Here was one that had come from the heart of Africa, brought probably by some slave raiding company into Rome, and there from Rome had been carried by sail to this part of the world, and somehow the gospel has reached him. But notice now the fellowship.

Barnabas, and Simeon, and Lucius, and Menaeon, and Saul. It's without racial distinction. It's without cultural distinction.

It's without social or economic distinction. There is only one thing that is expressed here, and that is they are prophets and teachers. And how marvelous it is to realize that God gives gifts, the Holy Spirit does, to every man severally as he wills.

And it is the responsibility of the church to recognize the bestowment of God. When God gives gifts, the church is bound by its commitment to Christ to recognize those to whom such gifts have been given. And there is again no distinction here.

There's no artificial barrier or nothing that is going to be the means of creating a class distinction on artificial standards. They all have come the same door, repentance and faith. They've all experienced the same grace, pardon and cleansing, and they've all received a gift.

Now these are but the prophets and teachers, those that have the distinct responsibility. The prophet was the fourth teller. I believe that prophet in this setting refers to the ones to whom the Spirit of God gave utterance of that which was included in the New Testament.

I think now that the New Testament is complete, this function of prophecy, that is of the setting forth of the truth as it was in Christ, is somewhat restricted. Now I'll explain in a moment. The word teacher obviously means then as it does now, the one who is formally setting forth the word.

Setting it forth in such a fashion as to have it seen in its structural balance. And that the fourth teller and the instructor, the teacher, are serving in this church in Antioch to establish and build up a strong company of believers. Now notice also that primarily all gifts and all ministries received by the Holy Ghost in the church are to be rendered back to the Lord.

And they ministered to the Lord. They ministered to the Lord. How? They ministered to the Lord in the fashion in which every Christian is expected to minister, but because they had particular responsibilities recognized and received by the church, there was a responsibility to each other and to the Lord.

And thus they were gathering apparently for a prolonged period of several days to fast, to give themselves up to prayer, to give themselves up to mutual edification and encouragement, waiting upon the Lord. Do you minister to the Lord or do you just minister to the church? The degree to which you can minister profitably to the church is determined by the degree to which you minister personally to the Lord. If all of your ministry is to the church, then obviously this is going to be of relatively little spiritual value to the church.

But if most of your ministry is to the Lord, the ministry to the church will be of lasting value. This, of course, is one that pastors and teachers find constantly upon them, because the tendency is to minister to the church to the point where there's neither time nor energy to minister to the Lord. A public ministry for the Lord, whether it's a Sunday school teacher, a Bible class teacher, or any other, ought to be in the proportions of an iceberg.

I've not seen icebergs, but pictures of them and information about them reveal that one-ninth or one-tenth of the ice is above water and nine-tenths underwater. And so it ought to be with our ministries. We ought to have nine-tenths of our ministry to the Lord, one-tenth to the people.

And if that's the proportion, then the ministry to the people is going to be profitable. They ministered to the Lord. They were concerned about their prayer life.

They were concerned about their understanding of the Word. They were concerned about their mutual needs and problems. They were interested in being before him and before each other what they needed to be.

They ministered to the Lord and fasted. They had become so concerned with getting God's mind and God's anointing, the truth and the equipment, that they lost all interest in food. Now, I do not believe that they fasted because they said, we're going to meet for the three-day conference and we won't eat.

This, I just feel, was not what happened. They came together and they became so enamored with him, so engaged with him, so utterly consumed with him, that nothing else had meaning. They ministered to the Lord and in the revelation of him, the food and the other interests of life faded and they simply did not realize what happened.

We are told by David Brainerd, the intrepid missionary that labored so in Massachusetts and New York and New Jersey in the early part of the 18th century, that on one occasion, going from an Indian tribe down near the Delaware on up into somewhere near Washington, New Jersey would be now, that he recognized there were problems of satanic origin. And the only possible way that his ministry could have blessing would be for him to go in the fullness of the blessing of God. And so, in the midst of snow, that he said was some two feet in depth that covered the path, say, where it drifted even deeper, he got off in the woods and he knelt in the snow near to where his horse was tied.

He said he became utterly oblivious to the passing of time until he was brought to the realization that time had elapsed when he noticed that the sun was setting and that he discovered that the snow had melted around him in a circumference of nearly four feet and that he had not been aware of cold nor of hunger. He said that it was probably nine in the morning when he knelt to pray. So from nine until probably four for that season of the year, the sun would have been setting at by four or 430.

David Brainerd, on his knees in the snow, covered by the glorious presence of God that protected him to the point where the snow melted in the circumference of three to four feet. And the hours passed as he was so ministering to the Lord that he lost all awareness of bodily need and discomfort. And he fasted.

He ministered to the Lord and he fasted. But he fasted because he was so consumed with the Lord. He was so enthralled with the Lord.

He was so caught up in the Lord. Oh, that it might come that the people and teachers and pastors and all who have any responsibility, we might recognize our prime responsibility is to minister to the Lord and thus become so engaged with him that fasting is the outcome of the revelation of his glory till all else seems to fade and beside. And as they were thus ministering to the Lord, consumed with love for him, filled with his presence, the Holy Ghost said, and they were able to recognize what he said and they wanted what he was going to say and they heard him.

And oh, I believe it's only as we minister to the Lord that we become sensitive to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Ghost said, separate me, Barnabas, and Saul for the work we're on to I have called them. Now he said this by a prophet.

Undoubtedly, this was done in prophecy, that inspired utterance where someone in the group moved upon by the Holy Ghost would speak as it were, thus saith the Lord, separate unto me Saul and Barnabas. In the hearts of all would bear witness that it was God thus speaking. I believe I've related to you how that when Bakht Singh from India was here, I said to him when I'd learned something of the principles of fellowship and their meeting, I said, Brother Bakht Singh, how came you to America? Did you just decide? Did you get an invitation? How did you come? No, he said, I'd had invitations for years.

I said, how did you come? Well, he said, we were having a time of waiting upon the Lord in one of our protracted seasons before him. And I felt the Spirit of God speak to my heart about going to America. And so I said, Lord, as this is of you, I shall say nothing, but tell first a brother and then my brethren.

And so he waited some months until finally in another period of waiting upon God, a brother came to him and said, I believe the Lord has spoken to my heart concerning you and has said that he wants you to go to America. I do not know why, but I think this is what he is saying. Has he spoken at all to your heart this way? Brother Bakht Singh said, yes, he has, but it will not be of him unless our brethren in group without suggestion from you or from me repeat the same thing.

So at another period of time at one of their extended fellowships there, I don't recall the name, a group of the leaders were in prayer ministering to the Lord and three or four of them in sequence without any previous consultation said, God has impressed us that you should go to America. So it had come first to his heart, then to the heart of a brother, and then to the heart of four of the brethren who were meeting together at the same time saying the same thing. Now if our ministries were thus the outgrowth of ministering to the Lord, could it be that there would be less tragedy on the mission field? Could it be that there'd be less heartache in ministry? Could it be that there'd be more of the revelation of the power and glory of Christ? He can only bless what he initiates.

It seems to me that in the work of God, we have here the principle on which we're to get God's mind and God's guidance and his direction. It is thus that we're to discover what his plan is for the church, ministering to the Lord, waiting before him, and thus to have the gifts of the Spirit manifest in such ministry as they were here. Notice also that when they had thus heard the mind and the voice of God, and had fasted and prayed, they immediately, or within the scope of time represented by this ministry, they laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them away.

That word sent is the word *mito* in Latin, and *apostolos* is its root in Greek, and it's the same word from which we get apostle or missionary, sent one. And they missionaried them, and they did it by finding out from the Holy Ghost that these were the ones whom he wished, and they did it by confirming that with the laying on of their hands. Now this wasn't simply a formal setting aside of these two.

Paul gives us insight into this when he writes to the young Timothy, and in so doing he tells Timothy that he has a responsibility, and he reminds Timothy of what took place in the early days of Timothy's ministry. He says that he had been instructed of the Lord, and told of the Lord, and sent of the Lord. And then he says, and you have a gift that you're to stir up, stir up the gift of God which is upon you with the laying on of my hands.

Now I think this is twofold. Obviously, the laying on of hands meant that there was an identification in all these brethren with Saul and Barnabas, and a great longing in their hearts that God would anoint them and equip them. But there was also the matter of protection, because as they thus were all spirit-filled and spirit-led men, there would be guidance given, just as Agabus had told of the dearth that was to come in Jerusalem, and as Paul, by inspiration, by the guidance of the Spirit of God, told Timothy that he was to have a certain gift.

So I believe that as these men laid their hands on them, there was the identification of the group with the individual releasing the Lord to give whatever instruction and encouragement and guidance he wished to give. There was fellowship, fellowship of the members of the body in the work of the head. And it is this that we should see tonight.

Paul and Barnabas didn't organize a work, they didn't get out a letterhead, they didn't start to promote something. Even if Saul and Barnabas had been taught of God that this was what they were to do, they kept their counsel. They waited.

They did not take this thing to themselves. Now this is not in accord with our present practices. I'm sure our present practices are better than the anarchy that reigns sometimes when every man has done what seemed right in his own eyes.

I believe that in fellowship, I believe that we should have fellowship on just as spiritual a level as we can, and because it isn't as spiritual or biblical as it ought to be, there's no reason why we shouldn't have it on the level that it is and ask God to make it increasingly more spiritual. I'm convinced in my own heart that mission cause is well served by our questionnaires and by our reports and our applications and all of the interviews that we have, and that these are essential. But I also believe that with all my heart, that as important as these are, there is here something that has been missed by the church, the immediate, personal, direct ministry of the Holy Spirit through the members of the group for the benefit of those whom he sends.

It is unquestionably, it is unquestionably necessary for the days that lie ahead for us to discover the meaning of these three verses. As far as church life are concerned, as far as individual ministry is concerned, there's probably nothing quite as important as to lay hold of these three verses until they become ingrained in our minds and hearts and related to everything else the word has to say. But of course you must recognize this, the gifts of the Spirit, the extraordinary ministries of the Spirit, and all the blessings that came from God being free to speak, grew out of their doing the thing they knew they ought to do.

And this is always the way. It's when you're doing what you know to do, and doing what you ought to do, and doing all that you can do, that God is released to speak and released to bless. They were ministering to the Lord, this they knew to do.

And they fasted because they were so engaged with him. And they prayed because they were burdened and had heartache given by the Lord for others. And this response to known duty gave way to extraordinary unveiling of the loveliness and authority and power of Christ.

Now whenever people set out to see the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit and the extraordinary ministries of the Lord, without first doing the thing they know to do, with all their hearts, sincerely because they ought to do it, then I say they're children playing with toys instead of men serving the Lord. This is the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are certainly a part of God's work, but they never replace that known duty that is clearly set before us. Thus if you want your life to be what God would have it be, do not bemoan the fact that you do not see or know the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.

But minister to the Lord and pray and seek to join with others that know how to minister to the Lord and to pray until your heart becomes consumed with him and you lose sight of other interests. And out of this response to known duty and truth comes the privilege of the Spirit of God to reveal beyond what we're accustomed to see. But I do believe that we should anticipate on the basis of obedience to known duty and walking in clear light of truth that God, the living God, mighty in the midst of his people, is pleased today to speak as he has in other days and other years.

This is the secret to that. If you want to see that, stand on this. You can't have that without this.

Do you see? If you want to see the Lord, our God, mighty in the midst of his people, then let us recognize the word, the teaching ministry, and it's before us. And walk in it. Let us recognize that our responsibility is to minister to the Lord, to pray, to give ourselves to him, and he will in that way be able to give himself to us.

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