

Levitical Ministry - Part 3 of 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the Levitical ministry's role in embodying God's holiness and purpose for His people through service and separation.

Duration: 40:12

Scripture: Malachi 3:1-2, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 5:27, Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6

Topics: "Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the nature and purpose of the ministry of preaching the word of God. They emphasize the importance of understanding and redefining the ministry in order to fulfill the Lord's desires. The speaker refers to passages from the book of Malachi and the letter to Titus to highlight the coming of the Lord and the need for purification and redemption. They also mention the various ministries that have taken place in different parts of the world throughout the year.

Transcript

I shall not take time to turn you again to all those passages which formed the foundation of our meditation yesterday and which will be behind our continuance this morning. But I will just take those which were in the prophecies of Malachi. You will kindly look at them and then add one extra passage from the New Testament.

Malachi chapter one, chapter three. Behold, I send my messenger, he shall prepare the way before me. The Lord whom ye seek will suddenly come to his temple.

The messenger of the covenant whom ye desire, behold, he cometh, saith the Lord of hosts. But who can abide the day of his coming? Who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, like fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.

And he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them as gold and silver. Now just a fragment from Paul's letter to Titus. The letter to Titus, chapter two and verse eleven.

For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a people for his own

possession, zealous of good works. This has been a year of many and far-reaching ministries to Formosa, the Philippines, Hong Kong, India, Scandinavia, Holland, Switzerland, and others. And we come with this time here to the end of that particular series and program.

And some of us are occupied with the big question, what next? What does the future hold? As you have heard, quite a number will be going from us in the course of the next two and three weeks to many parts of the world. And I feel this morning constrained to say something to you about the nature and the purpose of this ministry. Not with a desire to draw attention to or speak about ourselves or about anything that we are doing, but as to what we feel the Lord wants and the Lord is seeking to do.

And I do feel that at this terminal point, it is very necessary for all of us who have any fellowship and association in this ministry to be very clear as to what it is, and that it should be redefined as to its nature and its purpose. Within the compass of the few minutes that I have, it is that with which I want to be occupied and want to occupy you. Let me begin by saying what it is not, or some of the things that it is not.

It is not a particular teaching as such. That is, we are not concerned with some particular interpretation of truth. It may sometimes sound like that, and I think many people have the idea that that is what it is.

But I want to say that it is not that. As such, I underline that governing clause, as such. There is teaching, it may be in some respects different, may be in some respects particular, but it is not a teaching.

It is not a peculiar or separate fellowship of the people of God, body of Christians, gathered into some special association. It is not that. In any earthly sense, if it's an association, it's quite spiritual, and I trust of a heavenly character, but not something to be set up on this earth as distinct from other people, true people of God.

Further, it is not a generally good or better level or standard of ministry and teaching and practice. May be different levels of ministry and of teaching amongst the Lord's people, but our conception of this ministry is not just to be an improvement upon others, and a little different and a little better, or a lot better. That is not the thought.

The answer to the question on the positive side could not be better found than in the spiritual meaning of the Levites. The answer is there. If we could understand the meaning of the Levites in the Old Testament, see that they are but a representation or embodiment of a spiritual law or principle, then we would have the answer to our inquiry.

Let us try, in a very broad way, to comprehend that. We begin by noting that God has always had a very clear and a very positive mind as to what he wants and what he must have for his satisfaction and pleasure in his people. God is not just moving forward without a very clearly defined mind as to what he is after.

Word of God makes it abundantly clear that from eternity God has moved with his plan, his purpose, very clearly defined in his own mind and counsel. He knows what he wants, and he knows what he must have if he is to find his full satisfaction and pleasure in his own people. And that is where we begin.

Recognize that. God is not just stumbling on things as he goes along, then adjusting to the situation and raising up something to meet, something that was not anticipated or in the plan. God knows from the beginning.

To quote our scripture, and much of it, to bear that out, he knows exactly what he wants and how, and by what means he will reach it and realize it from the beginning. Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world. Well, that's where it all began.

But when the race as a whole turned aside from God and his intention, his purpose, his mind, as he did, God moved to take out of the race a nation, a part of the race in which he would recover and begin again to secure that first purpose, intention, and mind. And so he looked into the nations and began to take out of the nations a people for his name. Even in the old dispensation that was true.

A nation in the midst of the nations, in which nation he would realize what was ever in his heart and his mind. This part of the race, this chosen nation, had various features. First of all, of course, the great law had to be strictly enforced.

The law of separation or sanctification. That part had to be hallowed indeed unto God, set apart unto God, a separated, a sanctified people. The law of spiritual separation was the primary and foundation law of the existence of such a people.

They had to be separated or sanctified, the same thing. Firstly, in an inward way, in spirit. They had to have a consciousness born in them.

Their whole existence had to be constituted upon the consciousness that they were different. They were different. They were not of a peace with the other nations, spiritually and morally.

They were different. They had that consciousness. That consciousness, of course, gave rise to trouble within and without.

Sometimes went wrong, but there it was. You cannot fail to see that sense of being different by the very work that God had done, the act of God, in their calling, in their separation, in their sanctification. They knew that they were different from all other people.

It was in their very consciousness. Cannot account for many things apart from that fact. Things that I have no time even to mention.

But it is quite clear that even when out of the way and mixed up with other nations, they never lost that distinctiveness, never have. And the consciousness of being different is a part of this very thing that we have to speak about. And, of course, what was true in an inward way, in the old dispensation, was made true in an outward way.

That is, in their very appearance in the world. And in their conduct in the world. They were different.

These are, in the old dispensation, ways of indicating spiritual things. Next thing about them was that they were a people whose heart had to be holy for the Lord. Their history on this earth in a typical and symbolic way was all pointing to this.

That they were not a people who could have one foot in the world and one foot in the things of God. But that God required of them that they had both feet and every part of their heart over in relation to His things and His end. Then they were brought into being to be a testimony to the nations in the midst of the nations.

A light unto the nations to show God's mind to the nations. Let all men know what God requires and has set Himself to have. Further, that nation was called to be a priestly nation or people.

That is, to stand between God on one side and the needy peoples of the earth on the other side and mediate in a priestly way to bring men into touch with God and God into touch with men. That is the content of priesthood as a spiritual thing. And then finally, for the moment, they were there in the midst of the nations to show the authority of God over the earth.

There is one God. He is God alone. He is over all gods and over all peoples.

He is the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth. And they were there with His authority over all creation resting upon them and deposited with them. They should secure for Him His rights in the nation.

And we can go further because, although this is only brought out in the New Testament in fullness, it is so clearly seen all the time, right through the old, that this authority extended beyond the earth. It extended into the realm of spiritual intelligences who were constantly seeking to break in and take away from God His rights in the earth. This was God's great corporate act in relation to His original purpose.

But then, that people as a whole, that nation as a whole in general, came short. Failed Him. Disappointed Him.

And then He moved again within that nation. And we have that which has been occupying us so far and still is at this time, God's movement in relation to the Levites. In the place of all the first born in Israel, He took the Levites.

And they became within the nation the embodiment of God's thought concerning the nation both as to its own nature and constitution and as to its vocation and service in the midst of the nations. They were taken to supply the Lord with what His people as a whole had failed to give Him in which they were a disappointment to Him. God moves ever more inwardly as you see.

And so within the compass of the nation He took one out of every family and constituted that tribe of Levi the center of His interest and His service. Certain things come out in relation to the Levites. Firstly, of course, their representative character and position.

They were not separate from Israel while spiritually separate from the wrongs in Israel. They represented all Israel, their very constitution as being the tribe of the first born ones in spiritual principle. They represented all the families in Israel and stood therefore representatively as God's thought concerning all His people.

They were there to serve the Lord in this particular thing. Again, I emphasize what I said last night the necessity for our understanding what the service of God is. Dear friends, you and I need to be very clear about this thing what the service of God is.

Service of God has become all sorts of things. It's an omnibus thing with people today. The service of God.

But the essence of the service of God as made perfectly clear by the whole word of God is this that it really does minister to the realization of the full purpose of His heart. It is only service of God as it does that. Only that which does that is the service of God.

It is the service of God more or less according to how that ends itself. But the whole idea of the service of God is this. God has from the beginning a full, complete, clearly defined and rounded off purpose and intention concerning His people.

And service to God requires that we know what that is and that we are in line with that. And that that is being realized by what we do. We must be very clear on that matter.

So the Levites were taken from the midst of the nation in order to be a concentration of the Lord's full thought in the nation. Their ministry, though it had various aspects was mainly to do with the altar. Such ministry, such service, such a purpose always brings us very closely into relation with the sufferings of Christ.

There has been no mistake about it. When you really get right on the line of God's full purpose you are precipitated into a life in which you are going to know the fellowship of His sufferings. It's a part of such a ministry.

Another thing for the moment, the Levites were the spearheads in battle. They were a warring tribe. Strangely enough, it's a peculiar phrase, a peculiar phrase even in their relationship to the altar and the sacrifice.

It says that they were to serve in the warfare of the sanctuary. Strange, isn't it? See, if any place and anything ought to be out of touch with warfare it ought to be the sanctuary. But no, the warfare of the sanctuary.

To carry that further, it's not scriptural, but it means this, the warfare of the sacrifice, of the cross, of the altar. You're precipitated into peculiar conflict when you come into line with God's full purpose. These were the Levites.

And they embodied this word that I have read from Titus, to purify unto himself a people for his own possession. Now what was true in the old dispensation is ever true in God's thought, God's mind, and in spiritual principles. We may have passed from the time of the types, the figures, the symbols, and the outward system, embodying the principles, and come into the pure, clear realm of spiritual reality.

We have not passed out of the time or the realm of the principle of these things. And so we find in the New Testament, God's still moving on this same line. The Levites now are a spiritual company, a heavenly people, not an earthly, and not a temple.

They are the people that God must have, even though it be in the midst of his people generally, who really do know what God's full purpose is, and are committed to that and nothing less, whatever the cost may be. Have I answered our first question? I'm not saying, mark you, that we are the Levites. Don't misunderstand me.

But I am saying this, that God is ever seeking for a people here, in whom he can find the fullest response to what is in his own mind from eternity. He's ever seeking that, and he will never be satisfied with anything other or less than that. If I may be allowed to go so far, I would say that he has called into being this ministry, I don't mean my ministry, this ministry, to serve him in that way, to, in a small way, as a part of something very much larger, perhaps larger than we know in the earth, nevertheless, to serve him in this way of seeking to keep alive a testimony as to the fullness of God's intention for his own people.

Praise the fullness of Christ is a commonplace amongst us, but that is what it is, that is what it is, the fullness of Christ. That is the true Levitical function and ministry. And I want to say to you, dear friends, this morning, that the Lord wants that where you are concerned.

He does want, and will take pains to have, where you are concerned. If I said where we are concerned, you might misunderstand that. You think I'm talking about on a rope, or something that is called disfellowship, something like that.

And I mean you as the Lord's people. The Lord wants you to stand in that relationship to himself, not as something superior, not a kind of spiritual autocracy, certainly, certainly not a spiritual aristocracy, but just as a people here, amongst his own people in this world, not looking down on anybody, not feeling that anybody else, or thinking that anybody else is less, oh God forbid anything like that, but in a true heart way, to represent for the Lord all that he would have in his people. An utterness for God, and giving God a position, and an opportunity for showing in you all his counsel, and all his will, and all his purpose, and all his character.

It's a very holy calling. That is why we began yesterday, in our first two sessions, with the tremendous emphasis upon holiness. This cannot be only by holiness of life.

You see, holiness is not just a state which ends with itself. Holiness in the Bible is vocational, always. It's vocational.

It always relates to God's work. Be ye holy, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord. For his work, the work of which we are speaking, this work, holiness is vocational.

Sooner or later, I repeat, sooner or later, our work will be brought up short on the point of holiness. If we are the Lord's servants, if we are joined to the Lord for his purpose, and anything comes in, anything comes in that is unholy, the Lord may bear. He may speak.

He may exercise. He may for a time do nothing. But there'll come a point at which you'll say, I've spoken about that.

I've spoken to you about that more than once. I've waited. I've been very patient.

I don't care. We're not going any further. And some terrible crisis will arise which involves the whole question of our usefulness to the Lord, nothing less, whether the Lord is going to do any more, going any further with us.

I have to be serious again and solemn about that because, you see, the very governing principle of Levitical service to God is holiness. The whole dimension of the house is to be holiness unto the Lord because it's a priestly house in the spiritual sense. It's holiness of people separated unto God in an inward way.

It's impressive when you stop to think about it, really sit down and think a little about it. All this all the way through the Bible about separation, about sanctification, about holiness. What does it imply? What does it imply? Well, surely the implication of it all as it runs right through the Bible from beginning to end and is the, the, shall I say the golden thread through the Bible.

What does it imply? Well, it must imply that this whole realm of things is a corrupt realm. Is corrupted. Is defiled.

Is unclean. It's contrary to the nature of God. We're born into it.

This realm of earth and the lower heavens tainted and polluted. It's been touched by an unclean hand. It's being energized by unclean spirits.

It's unclean. The very heavens in the sight of God are not clean, the Bible says, with uncleanliness. The warfare against God of unholiness.

So, it's quite clear that there can be no association with God and no real work for God only on this ground of true holiness and practical holiness. God wants a holy people. I think that's the note of this weekend.

Note in my heart. God wants, He must have a holy people and then see what He'll do. See what He'll do.

But oh, it's a suffering way because it brings us so deeply into the meaning of the cross. But oh, it's a suffering way because it brings us so deeply into the meaning of the cross. The cross teaches to be a teaching and a doctrine.

It becomes almost an awful reality. Terrible to the flesh. Terrible to the flesh is the cross.

We got too cheap a cross perhaps and sing about it, talk about it, teach about it. I think we know all about the cross. The cross is a devastating thing in the realm of the flesh.

You'll find that sooner or later. The most awful thing really to come into touch with the cross in the flesh. On the other hand, what a mighty, mighty power the cross is objectively when you are in line with it, in tune with it, in fellowship with it.

When it has nothing against you, you're on its ground. What a tremendous power it is in this universe against the evil forces and in this world. Do you not agree with me dear friends that that's the position that we want to be in? On both its sides, holiness, holiness and power.

Those two things always go hand in hand. Holiness and power. We cannot have the power, know the power only by the holiness, but if we have the holiness, the power will spontaneously work.

It will. Do not have to ask for power if the holiness is there. So to sum up this whole matter of Levites in all dispensations, it's a spiritual thought, it's a spiritual conception, it is the embodiment in the creation of the holiness and therefore the power of God.

We read again and again last night from this prophecy of Malachi that my name may be great among the nations. My name shall be great among the nations repeated by the Lord and leading straight to this. He shall purify the sons of Levi.

He shall purify them. The two things go together. The greatness of his name among the nations.

A people purified unto the Lord. I close by reminding you there's other words. My covenant was with Levi.

My covenant of life and of peace. I think we've got to know more of that divine life. Don't you? We've got to know more of that divine life.

The mighty power of that risen life of the Lord Jesus. We need to know it. Every one of us and as a people we need to know it where we are.

My covenant of life. Victory over death in a spiritual way and until the Lord has finished with us here in a physical way. I still stand on that ground.

It's a lifelong ground until he has finished with us. Divine life even for the body. We want to know more about that.

And peace where God is not against us. He has no controversy with us. The conflicts between us and the Lord and the Lord and us are settled.

His covenant of life and peace is with Levi. But Levi, mark you these two things God's full purpose for his people and absolute sanctification holiness separation unto the Lord. Now you must ask the Lord how that applies because it touches so many practical kinds.

May come into the family life the domestic life may come into your business life challenge and search out and judge all your business methods and transactions. Yes. You've got to be a Levite in business as well as in the assembly of the Lord's people.

Holy unto the Lord be careful how you are involved in the devil's system of running this world to take from the Lord. In your social life in every department of life we are in a terrific business no less than whether this great kingdom of darkness is going to hold its ground or whether the Lord is going to oost it. And that issue is going to be settled in the church make no doubt about it.

Make no mistake about it. That issue is going to be settled in the church. It's going to be glory in the church and by Christ Jesus in the church.

I must stop there.

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