

Levitical Ministry - Part 4 of 4

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The testimony of Jesus is the title of Jesus' manhood on earth, and it refers to both his deity and humanity, and it is the key to understanding the churches and the church as a whole.

Duration: 43:15

Topics: "Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the book of Revelation, specifically chapter 1, verse 2 and verse 5. The speaker emphasizes the importance of the testimony of Jesus throughout the entire book. The seven messages to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 also highlight the need for believers to overcome. The speaker concludes that those who overcome will embody the testimony of Jesus in a complete and unwavering way, leading to the end of the dispensation.

Transcript

I'm bringing this time together in these days to a conclusion by bringing you back again to the point from which we started, asking you again to look at the first chapter of the book of the Revelation. Book of the Revelation, chapter 1, verse 2, who bear witness of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ. Verse 5, from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Verse 9, I join your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Just retain those fragments in your mind and glance down the following two chapters, 3 and 4, 2 and 3, and remind yourselves again of the sevenfold reiteration of one clause at the close of each message to the seven churches, to him that overcometh. Those of you who were with us on Saturday at the commencement of this time will remember that we said these who are called the people who overcome, who are exalted to overcome, they are all brought together, answer to what is meant by the testimony of Jesus.

As you see, the book opens with this threefold reference to the testimony of Jesus, which clearly indicates that is the matter on hand for this whole book. That is the preface to the entire book. It is all going to be about the testimony of Jesus.

The testimony of Jesus is that which is going to explain everything in the book. And as we said, it is significant immediately that is presented in the person of Jesus. The next step is to deal with the churches, or the church as a whole in a representative way in relation to that testimony, the testimony of Jesus.

So we come back to this point this evening, that the Lord is ever right to the end of the dispensation. If these messages to the churches do lead on to the end of the dispensation, because there is no doubt about that I think, the word is behold I come quickly, that is the end. If they represent the Lord's request right to the end of the dispensation, these exaltations to people in the churches or in the church to overcome mean that such people will be those who embody that testimony of Jesus in a full and unsullied way.

If that is true, if that is true, then surely we are gathered at this time in line with that, in relation to that. I mean if God's quest for a vessel of the testimony of Jesus continues to the end of the dispensation, well however near we may be to the end, we are not at the end yet. And that quest goes on.

The Lord still seeks to have a people who really do embody and express what is called the testimony of Jesus. I trust that your familiarity with the very terms, language and phraseology does not take from the importance and seriousness of the matter. It therefore becomes necessary for us to give what time we have this evening to a review of what that testimony is.

The testimony of Jesus. If that really is what God wants to have in a people. And you can see from these messages, these seven messages to the churches, how serious a matter it is with God.

How far he is prepared to go in order to have it in both ways. On the one side, in judgment, in judgment of that which is contrary to the testimony. On the other side, how far he will go with those who overcome.

You could not, I think, find it possible to go beyond what is said here as to what the Lord will do for such people. Indeed he leads them right up to the throne at last. Says, he that overcometh will I give to sit with me in my throne.

You can't get very far beyond that, can you? Surely that's the highest and that's the last of the ultimate. So how many more things are said here that he will do if he can get a people like this. If he can get a vessel for the testimony of Jesus according to his own mind.

Some of the most terrible things on the other hand are said, not to the world, but to the churches, or representatively to the church. The most terrible things are said where things do not correspond to the testimony of Jesus. I say this simply to indicate how important a matter this is with God.

And that however many good and commendable things there may be, comparative things are not acceptable to God in the ultimate. He will not settle this thing upon a comparative basis. There are good and commendable things mentioned in the church, but he comes back, nevertheless, nevertheless I have this against thee, and unless thou repent I remove your lampstand out of its place.

You see, the comparative ultimate does not pass with God. He is for the absolute. He is for the utter.

So that is what faces us, and so we have to look to see what is meant by the testimony of Jesus. And you notice this simple thing at the outset, that here he is given the simplest of all his designations. The testimony of Jesus.

It is not of the Lord Jesus, or any of his other titles. It is simply the testimony of Jesus. That is the title of his manhood here on this earth.

It then is first of all the testimony of who and what Jesus on this earth was. We here in this place tonight shall have no quarrel on one matter where this begins. Almost a commonplace with us, so wholly accepted that you might wonder why it should be mentioned, the fundamental fact that Jesus is the divine son of God.

God manifests in the flesh. God was in Christ. Or utterly, Jesus was God, and Jesus is God.

That is a very striking word of the Apostle Paul in his letter to Titus, looking for the appearing of the great God, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Can't get beyond that. But I say to us, it is not a matter of contention, Christian doctrine, and yet, and yet, it is something that we should take account of again.

John was in the Isle of Fatness for that, to begin with. He was in exile for that. He was a prisoner for that.

He was suffering for that. That testimony, and that explains the suffering of the church at the beginning. You know that it was upon that very point that the Jews crucified Jesus.

He made himself the Son of God, they said. Made himself the Son of God. That was the last thing with them.

And for that, they put him to death. And for that testimony, the church itself was thrown into the vortex of that terrible persecution. You understand the persecutions from the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperors? It was purely on that point.

You see, the Caesars were deified. They were God, and often called by titles of deity and Godhead, and were worshipped as God. Jesus, as God, was a challenge to that whole system, to that whole authority.

Hence the persecution from the Roman world, as Christ had been put to death on that very score. So, the church was following in his train, and being put to death on the same thing. Jesus is God.

There is a strange fragment of scripture, which it is not easy to understand until you see it in that background. The apostle says, no one can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit. That sounds strange in itself, if you take it out of its context, its historical context.

Anybody can say Jesus is Lord without the Holy Spirit. Anybody can say that. You need not be a Christian to say that.

But here it is, no man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit. You put yourself right into the Roman and Jewish world, as it was at that time, and you stand up and say Jesus is Lord, you will need all the power and courage and boldness of the Holy Spirit to do it. You put your very life into jeopardy when you use those words about Jesus.

All the forces of evil, spiritual and temporal, will make you a marked man or woman. In that world, if you say Jesus is Lord, the cross waits for you, and you need the Holy Ghost for that. No one in that realm could dare to say it, but by the power and support of the Holy Spirit.

It was no easy thing to declare the Deity, Lordship, Godhead of Jesus Christ in those days. It is not today, in worlds of idolatry, in lands of heatherism, where Satan has his seat. Some of you know that.

The fact is this, that this is a matter which, when it is really, really spiritually embodied in a people, not a part of a Christian creed, something that you just say over and over, week by week, as a form and formula.

But when that thing is, as it was at the beginning, embodied in the power of the Holy Spirit, all hell is roused to destroy that testimony. See, you can have the language and the phraseology of the testimony without the reality.

Have the reality, and you are a marked people. You are marked down by the enemy to be crucified. Whatever that may mean, testimony of Jesus begins there.

The testimony of Jesus begins in the spiritual world which is set against the utter, undivided, unquestioned Lordship of Jesus Christ in this universe. It is there. And I won't just say this and pass on.

It is in that realm that the church really proves its testimony, its value, its significance, its power. It is in the realm of spiritual intelligences that the final proof of the church's reality is known and manifested. Not what we claim to be on this earth, but it is what we signify in that whole kingdom of animosity to Jesus Christ.

That's where our accountability is decided and measured. And that word tests the reality of the testimony of Jesus. But then it is not alone his deity that remains.

It is the testimony of Jesus, the man. Jesus, the man. What he was as the man Jesus.

You see, that other spiritual world of a hatred, bitter, vicious hatred of God which is set and bent upon spoiling, destroying everything that is of God. Everything that God has made, has made man its mark by whom it will bend its heart upon God. Man is God's chief creation.

Man is the crown of God's creation or was. In man, God saw his heritage, his inheritance. He was made for God's glory.

He was made to be the vessel and vehicle of the manifestation of God in goodness, in grace, in power, in glory in this universe. Man's destiny is a very great destiny in the mind of God. Very great indeed.

God has made this thing, this wonderful thing, this beautiful thing, crown of his creation. Which when he has it, he says, it's very good, very good. And this evil, sinister enemy of God says, I'll spoil the whole thing.

I'll wreck and ruin that. That lies behind what we find of the work of Satan in human history. Here is a man who satisfies God utterly and absolutely and is the answer back to the evil one and the evil power.

And God's vindication, that's the testimony of Jesus. What he is, not only in his Godhead, but what he is in his humanity. We could long stay to dwell upon that.

The perfections, the excellences of that man. That one on whom the eyes of the great creator God could look and say, I'm well, I'm well. No small thing for God being such as he is with all his high standards to say of any man, I'm well.

For in him is my delight. It's the testimony of Jesus as to what he was, to the satisfaction of God and the answer to God for all his desires concerning man. That's the testimony of Jesus.

No wonder Satan hated him. But then from his person we pass to his work. For the testimony of Jesus extends to the great work that he did.

Of course, because of what he was and who he was. But the work that he did. In the first place, the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of man.

He began with sin, began with sin, and he took this whole sin matter, this work of evil in human life, he took it. With all the curse that had come because of it. And grappling with that great, that terrible, that awful thing, sin.

I don't know what you feel about sin. I think in this conference the Lord has tried to impress upon us the greatness of holiness because, because its opposite is so terrible. And he took the whole sin question root and brunt and dealt with that.

He bare our sin in his body on the tree. He was made a curse for us. He was made sin, he who knew no sin.

All the sin of all time in every realm and every man was taken up by him. Fully, finally dealt with. Thank God.

That's the testimony of Jesus. But that is not all. While he dealt with the thing itself he went to its source.

He went to its source. That personal source, the prince of this world, the power of darkness, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience, and all his mighty kingdom. And he dealt with that.

He dealt with that. He cast out the prince of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

Yes, he went to the source of all this. Satan himself. And destroyed him.

Destroyed him. You say, doesn't look like it. Doesn't look like it.

Well, it depends on how you look at it. I've been much occupied through this day. Indeed, I've been wrestling between two messages for this evening.

And I have been very much occupied today with an incident and its sequel in the Old Testament. And I may as well mention it here in a moment or two. And then I'll give them both messages.

It's that terrible incident of Achan. When the people of God were moving more deeply into the land of covenant. We know how the enemy, the great spiritual enemy, had from the very beginning of that movement toward that land, they were in Egypt.

And then immediately on their exodus, and then at Sinai, how he persistently sought to break in and arrest that movement. By insinuation or insinuating himself, impinging upon the people, one way or another, seeking to frustrate that movement. Breaking in.

Here they are getting in. They're moving in. And the enemy comes in again.

And finds some ground in this man, Achan. A ground of covetousness. It was understood, it was understood clearly that nothing in that whole realm and domain was exempt from the curse that God had pronounced upon him.

It, the whole thing, man, woman and everything in that realm lay under the curse. Reasons which we had no time to explain. It was all under a ban and under a curse and that was understood.

It had got to be completely devoted. Which meant destroyed. Utterly destroyed.

But Achan, in the covetousness of his heart, took of the devoted thing, a wedge of gold and a Babylonian garment and hid it in his tent. And the next movement forward was a most disastrous thing. For all Israel, it was disaster and the whole thing was brought to a stand.

The leader, Joshua, of course, was distressed and disturbed and perplexed and bewildered. Wondered why the Lord had allowed this. Had a controversy with the Lord.

But the Lord explained. He said, Israel has sinned in the devoted thing and commanded that this thing should be tracked down to its very root and source. So they pursued their course, their manner of discovering this sort of thing.

Pursued it and gradually sifted down, sifted down, tribe and household until at last by this divine way of guidance they came upon Achan and his family. At last, he is taken. Joshua said, my son, give God the glory, confess what you have done.

And Achan made his confession. Joshua, in the wrath and jealousy of God, said, why have you troubled Israel? The Lord shall trouble you, my son. And they took him, his family, his tent and all his belongings and everything that had to do with him and burned with fire in the valley of Achor so that there was nothing of Achan and all his left but ashes in the valley of Achor.

That's the work of the devil. That's what the devil can bring about of a necessity, a necessity for God to judge like that so utterly because of a link with the devil's kingdom. But what's the sequel? Yes, it looks as though Satan triumphs.

It does not look as though Satan is a defeated foe that passed over into Isaiah and into Hosea and what have you. And I will give the valley of Achor as a door of hope and in Isaiah 66, and in the valley of Achor there shall be sheep and pasture. That's judgment passed and the very work of the devil becoming the ground of a new hope, the way of a new hope.

He's the God of hope, you see, the God of hope. He can turn the worst works of the devil to his glory. Well, that is only in one way a foreshadowing and picture of Christ crucified, being made a curse and suffering the wrath of God even unto ashes.

Yes, the devil has made that necessary by his interference and his breaking into this race. In a sense that's the work of the devil. He has made it necessary for God to judge like that unto final devastation.

But listen, listen, that's not the end. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's the end of the story.

It is not devastation and ashes. It is a living hope, a living hope. That's the sovereign grace, wisdom, and power of God that just is set in here.

Yes, it does not look as though Satan is defeated and beaten and off the field, fattened. There's another side to that story. He may be the blind instrument in the sovereign power of God to create a new prospect and a new possibility.

Believe that. The testimony of Jesus is that he has gone to sin and has gone to the source of sin and has gone to the result of sin. Through sin, all sin and death passed upon all men for that all have sinned.

Death, death. But he's gone there too. He has plumbed the depths of death.

He has taken death at the flood and has conquered death. Oh, what a mighty thing. Jesus, Jesus, the testimony of Jesus.

But then, what about his ministry? We've been thinking in these meetings very much about the Levites and especially and particularly that fragment in the prophecies of Malachi. My covenant was with Levi of life and peace. And the whole of what I've been saying to you tonight is gathered up into the history of the Levites.

All that, I won't go over it again, I dare not. But it comes here. That because of the stand that the Levites took against sin and the breaking in of the evil powers of Samuel and the stand that they took with God.

For his testimony, to carry the ark of the testimony, his testimony forward to its final glorious destination, God made a covenant with Levi, a covenant of life and peace. That is, in effect, they shall be the ministers of life and peace. In this word.

They shall be a vessel and the embodiment of this twofold great thing. Life and peace. The effect of their ministry was that, you see.

Life, life. They were countering death all the time by the altar. Their ministry related to the altar and to the blood.

Countering death and countering sin. Which meant preserving life and the way of life. Countering the anger of God against sin and God's controversy with man because of sin.

Countering it by the altar. Satisfying God in the propitiation for sin and therefore holding a ministry of peace with God and from God. Their ministry.

Now they are only, the Levites, a type of the Lord Jesus who is the great and all-inclusive Levite. His ministry, what is it? Because of that of which we have spoken that he has done and that which he is. His ministry to us and to the world is life and peace.

Life and peace. We here tonight are a testimony to the testimony of Jesus I trust. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and we have life by him and in him.

That is the testimony of Jesus. All that remains for us to do is to bring again into view these people appealed to. To him that overcometh.

That is, a people who will embody this testimony. Quite sure that is what is here meant in these messages. It is the counter to the sin which Satan himself has introduced amongst the Lord's people.

It is the counter to spiritual death which is the result of corruption and pollution as we find there in the churches. It is a people who will stand clear of that. Stand clear of it all.

And who will stand against it. And who will, by the help of God, resist the inroads of Satan and his touch, his evil work to spoil what is of God. That in brief is what is signified by this he that overcometh.

He that overcometh. They are not an elect body. They are not a spiritual aristocracy chosen for this purpose.

Any true believer can be and should be one of those. Indeed that is what the whole church ought to be. As the Levites represented all Israel, they represented God's thought for all Israel.

Although here in these churches we find that all the spiritual Israel is not like that. God moves in an inward way to have a Levite people in the midst of his people. He must have it.

And these are they who overcome the truly right. They are to take up what is true of the Lord Jesus himself. What is true of the Lord Jesus.

Firstly in themselves as in him a holy people. A holy people. And then because they are a holy people they have a ministry of life and peace.

I believe dear friends that the measure of our ministry of life, a measure of our ministry of life, ministering life to those who need life, and even to the Lord's people as we heard today. Many of the Lord's people are not really in life and there are many like Cornelius and his friends, very devout and sincere and in a way God fearing, religious but not in life until the Holy Spirit comes to them. If there is going to be a ministry of life to anyone who needs life, who is without life, it requires a people after this kind.

This is a holy life. It's a holy life and this life cannot be ministered through unholy channels. Be ye clean ye that bear the vessels of the Lord.

That's an old Levitical command isn't it. Well we call to a great ministry, a wonderful ministry, the ministry of his life. His life and his peace.

It's committed to us. Wonderful thing to realize that it is possible for men and women in holy fellowship with the Lord to be the vehicles of his life to us. Ministering life to them.

Taking life for them as James puts it. Taking life for them. It's a great ministry.

And peace, ministering the reconciliation of God to souls. It's a wonderful thing. But the ministry rests upon the condition.

A holy people. A holy people. The Lord make us like that and really have in us as a few.

Many, many more may it be. Multitudes more. But in us as a few.

A vessel of the testimony of Jesus.

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