

The Nature and Dynamic of Ministry, the Nature and Dynamic Purpose of the Church

by T. Austin-Sparks

The nature and dynamic of ministry is the outshining of Jesus Christ from our lives, and it proceeds from an enshining of divine light revealing Jesus Christ.

Duration: 43:50

Topics: "Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the transition from one humanity to another in the light of a heavenly vision. The Apostle Paul, who had this vision, understood four key things: the place and destiny of man, the nature and dynamic of ministry, the nature and purpose of the Church, and the significance of Christ crucified, risen, and exalted. The speaker focuses on the second point, the nature and dynamic of ministry in this dispensation. He emphasizes that God has shined His light into our hearts to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This objective glory was also experienced by Saul of Tarsus.

Transcript

What more can we say, and how better can we say, than more of thyself, O show me, hour by hour, more of thy glory, O my God and Lord, more of thyself in all thy grace and power, more of thy love and truth incarnate word. Answer that prayer in this hour, we ask in the name of the Lord Jesus in our consideration of the great transition from one humanity exposed, discredited, judged and set aside to another tested, perfected and installed in glory in our Lord Jesus Christ. We have come at length in the closing hours of this time together to the all-governing vision in the light of which this transition becomes both clear and very practical.

And we saw yesterday that with the Apostle Paul, to whom this vision, this heavenly vision as he called it, was the secret and key to his whole life ministry, when he saw the Lord Jesus risen and glorified, four things became clear to him in that vision, the four things we have mentioned, the place and destiny of man in the divine economy. Secondly, the nature and dynamic of ministry in this dispensation. Thirdly, the nature and purpose of the church now and in the after ages.

And fourthly, the immense significance of Christ crucified, risen and exalted in these other three things. Now yesterday we were occupied with the first of these four things. This morning we proceed to the

second, the nature and dynamic of ministry in this dispensation.

And we are feeling our way along, whether we shall get right to the end of the four is with the Lord. The nature and dynamic of ministry in this dispensation. The Apostle said it pleased God to reveal his son in me that I might preach him among the nations.

Now we must stay for a moment to ask and answer one question. What do we mean by ministry? I think we need a revised version on this matter of ministry. Immediately the word ministry is mentioned.

People's minds think of someone perhaps with a Bible in their hand, standing up and teaching out of the Bible. Or someone preaching the gospel to the unsaved. Someone having been shut up with their Bible studying it and making some notes and coming out into the public and giving the result of their Bible study.

Something like that is usually associated to the mind with the word ministry. It may be that here this morning when I speak of ministry in this dispensation, some of your minds at once think of something with Bible in hand from a platform or in a group, a circle, teaching, preaching. I hope the Lord is going to upset that idea entirely before we are through.

Well the New Testament of course does have two things to say about this matter of ministry. It does speak about special personal gifts for ministry in the church. He gave, the Ascended Lord gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.

These are specific personal ministry gifts in the church. And let us circle round that word in. Get your mentality adjusted again over that.

You will see what I mean in a minute. There are these personal ministry gifts in the church. But the New Testament has much more to say about the ministry of the church itself.

And it does say that these personal gifts in the church are for the purpose of enabling the church to fulfill the ministry, to do the ministry, to be the minister of Christ. Do you remember the passage? And he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry. Don't put any break there in your sentence.

The perfecting of the church, the making complete that is, of the church unto the work of the ministry. I heard Dr. Cameron Morgan once say in this very connection, this passage, and God help the minister whose church does not fulfill the ministry. And it is in that second that we are occupied this morning.

I am not going to talk about apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, these specific ministries. But about the ministry of the church. And you know that the two letters with which we have been mainly occupied this week.

The two letters to the Corinthians have in view, and very clearly and emphatically so, the ministry of the church. All that the apostle is saying is with this background of the fulfillment of the divine ministry in Corinth. And as those letters are a vehicle down through the whole dispensation to our own time, it is what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church about its ministry.

In the first letter the apostle is dealing with all those things which either frustrate or spoil the ministry of the church. In the second letter he comes out very much more clearly and emphatically on the matter of the ministry as he uses these words, seeing then that we have this ministry. And you must remember that the

apostle is writing to a church, a local church.

And he is not just talking about his own ministry, he has much to say about that. But he is speaking of the church's ministry. And the we, the we is the church at Corinth, we have this ministry, we have this ministry.

And you know the associated phrase, we have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay. Is that only apostles? No. It's all of us.

We come to that again presently. So what we are really concerned with this morning is the ministry of all believers, or the ministry of the church. Having said that, we can proceed to a consideration of the nature and the dynamic of ministry.

Once more referring to the apostle, the particular apostle who is writing these letters, we should remember that he is a representative or example minister. That is how he speaks of himself through these letters. What is true of him as to ministry, he was saying, has got to be true of the church.

He didn't put it in this way, but this is very clearly what he is saying. What is true in my ministry as to its source and its nature and its power has to be true of all believers and of the church. He is a representative minister, not an exclusive one.

He may have dimensions beyond anyone else's. But that is just his representative character. The Lord is saying by this man that here you have an example of what ministry is and how ministry is produced and what are the principles and laws of ministry and inclusively, what is the background of ministry.

That is how you must look at the apostle, as a great minister, quite true, but as in principles, a representative minister. In principles, a representative minister. And he begins, as it all began here, he goes right back to the Damascus road, to the beginning of his Christian life and ministry, for you will remember that it was there, there right at the commencement when the Lord met him on his way to Damascus that the Lord gave him his commission, to whom I send thee, whom I send thee.

And he goes right back to his conversion, to the beginning of his life in union with Christ and he says this, as to life, as to vocation, as to ministry, that I might proclaim him among the nations, God revealed his son in me. Now you've got the source of everything. It is this vision of the Lord Jesus.

That is the nature of the ministry. That is the source of the ministry. That is the dynamic of all true ministry.

That is all true ministry in this dispensation issues and proceeds from an enshining of divine light revealing Jesus Christ. It pleased God to reveal his son in me. That gives us a secret.

Oh yes, Saul of Tarsus is on the way to Damascus and on the way he saw a light from heaven, objective, objective, something that blinded him from without. That light turned out to be glorified Lord Jesus and Paul is saying here in this fragment of the Galatians that he not only objectively saw that light and that glorified man, something happened inside of him, inside of him, Jesus of Nazareth whom I am on the way to persecute and whose persecution has become the one passion of my life, Jesus of Nazareth, that imposter as I believe, that evil man, that deceiver, an overwhelming significance, walking the streets of Galilee up and down the country, that same one as has now appeared to me, same one, not a different one, only in appearance and in knowledge, but the same one.

What does this mean? And away to the desert he went and to dwell upon this and that light which had shone on him was shining in him, he was seeing and seeing, seeing the significance of who? God's son, oh yes, quite true, but no, Jesus of Nazareth glorified the man, the man, the man having reached the ultimate of God's glory, whether I saw him in the flesh or not, that's it, I knew him, all about him was a man amongst men, human eyes could not discriminate between him and other men, only there was something about him that was different, but he's a man amongst men and this is that same man in the light of that inward revelation, people who know the Greek here know that this word, it please God to reveal his son in me, the word is the subjective objective, is that too technical?

Yes, I saw objectively, but I also saw subjectively, and until that happens, dear friends, we're not in the way of effectual ministry, you may be seeing by what is said to you throughout this week, you may see in a sort of objective way, everything objectively, oh yes, that's very wonderful, very wonderful, but has it broken through from the objective to the subjective and you say, I've never seen it like that, I've never seen him in that way, that is what happened to the apostle and it was, I say, the beginning both of his Christian life and of his ministry and they both went together, you got that?

Do you know that you as a believer, as a Christian, are constituted for ministry from the day of your new birth, that you are ordained a minister the moment you are regenerated into this new humanity, understand that? Don't wait for the day when someone will ordain you for ministry, no, no, no, no, your calling from the beginning is unto ministry, it may be difficult to swallow, but we'll go on, Paul said about this that it was, it corresponded to what happened at the creation and such a wealth there is here, you never hope to even touch it, he said, 2nd Corinthians now, the great letter of the ministry, God, who said, who said, let there be light, let light be, has repeated that divine fear in a spiritual way in our hearts, has shined into our hearts, has said in these darkened human hearts, let light be, shined into our hearts, with what object? To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Those of you who have heard this before and heard me say it before, bear with me if I just stay for this moment with that word glory, oh yes, it was objective glory for Saul of Tarsus, he saw, but what is that glory? What is the glory of God? What is the glory of God? We've been hearing in the second session about the God of glory appearing, what is the glory of God? The glory of God is his absolute satisfaction with anyone or any situation, when God is satisfied, something emanates from him, you know that in simple ways in Christian experience, if there's something over which you may have had a battle, a real battle, and you got through to what the Lord has been trying to get you to, and the battle is over, and you're responsive wholly to the will of God, what happens?

Oh, such a sense of blessedness inside, isn't it? The fight is finished, the battle is over, there's rest and peace and joy within, that's death and now, that's glory, that's glory, because it's on the way to that ultimate accomplishment of the whole will of God in a humanity, when the glory will be universal, God is satisfied. You see, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ just means this, the Lord Jesus was so satisfying to the very nature of God, that there was about him something of peace and rest and joy carried with him, the satisfaction of God, I do always those things which are pleasing, that's the glory, don't think of glory just as this objective shining blazing something, think of it shining into your heart, it's in the face of Jesus Christ that is, oh how can I explain it, I want a morning on this alone, it is just this, that inside we've come to the place where we are satisfied with the Lord Jesus and meet the satisfaction of God, isn't that it?

Not what I am, but what thou art, that alone can be my soul's true rest, thy love, not mine, that's glory. Then Paul said, God carried out this new fear in my heart, in your hearts Corinthians, he shone in, he said let light be, and there was light, but it was a light that was never on land or sea, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, now that I say is the spring of ministry, the spring of ministry, what is it? What is the ministry? What do you mean by ministry?

Get your revised version now, mentally about this, ministry is the outshining of Jesus Christ from our lives, that's all, that's all, you don't need to have complications, don't need to have any artificial or mechanical means, you may study your bible and you may give the most wonderfully organised and arranged bible readings, but the question is, is that ministry? Or are you emanating Christ? Are you transmitting Christ? Is Christ coming through? Are people sensing Christ? Not your study, not your library, not your commentaries, not your versions, not your translations, which so many keep always in view, and you know where it came from, there was a preacher who was always quoting without giving the source of his quotation, this book, that book, this authority, that authority, and there was a man sitting in front of him who knew it all, knew where he got it from, and every time he made a quotation he gave the author, the preacher got so annoyed, he said, I do wish you would be quiet, and the man said himself, where has this come from?

Where did we get it? How did we get it? I'm not saying bible study is wrong, but I'm saying through it all has Christ appeared, and is he appearing, and you may be a preacher, a bible teacher of renown, and it may stop there.

The question is whether I'm officially that, or just a humble member of Christ without any public gift at all, without any human ordination, I can be ministering Christ, in some way ministering Christ, and that's the ministry, that's the ministry, that I say is the source of the ministry, the apostle is making that, it began in me, and it's going on in me, and all that I have to say to you, you believers, is what I am seeing of the Lord Jesus, growing inward unveiling of God's, now how does, that's the source of the ministry, that's the source of all ministry from beginning to end, how does the ministry grow, proceed, these letters, and especially the second letter to the Corinthians, is going to touch us quite deeply, acutely, I think on this matter, the procedure of ministry, the growth of ministry, how, how, more study, more books, oh no, oh no dear friends, that's not the way of growing, continuing ministry, and ministry has got to grow all the time, deepen and enlarge all the time, how will you please, not just at this moment, but again pick up your second letter to the Corinthians, and before you have got very far, indeed almost immediately, you're in that letter, you'll come on some words, which are repeated, repeated, again and again, what are they, afflictions, consolations, underline those words, right at the beginning of the second letter, that connection the apostle brings forth his great, own great experience, I would have you know, Dr.

Fell, we had the sense paired of life, we were pressed out of our measure, and then right through that letter, the apostle is constantly striking that note, the revelation of Jesus Christ in our hearts, we have it in vessels, and I like the literal translation, of fragile clay, capable of being broken and smashed, beyond our measure of endurance, even unto despair, we despair of life, and then he'll give us a couple of catalogues of his afflictions, and my, you ought to sit down and think about that, if you're thinking about ministry, all that he himself met, encountered and went through, from centre to circumference, at the centre, at the centre for unfaithful, disloyal and treacherous brethren, moving out from that centre, in ever enlarging circles, the many implications in this letter,

were the statements of what people were saying about him, he wasn't a true apostle, he's not one of the twelve, he never saw Jesus, after the resurrection, he's not a true apostle, he is an imposter, he is a deceiver, as deceiving, remember, as deceiving, and yet, and yet, he is just going round, tagging, this is implied, it's there, getting money from Christians, as poor, yet making many rich, see, all these are implications, a whole list of them, and if any man, if any man, has suffered, I more than the more, then he speaks of the many times he was in prison, how many times he was, he received the stripes, how many times he was in the deep, and shipwrecked, and in the deep, how many times he was in hunger, and in nakedness, and in peril, see, man, robbers, and fellow Christians, it's a

terrible double list that he gives in these chapters of 2nd Corinthians, read them again, and no wonder that word has such a large place at the beginning, the afflictions of Christ which abound unto us, that the consolations also, that's the ministry, that's how it goes on, you say, how, how am I to be a minister, how can I be an effectual minister, how can my ministry grow, I will tell you this, it will not be by your running around, trying to get open doors for ministry, it will not be by your teletalking about yourself, what you've got, with, you know, that thought behind, this will open a way for me, oh, that's not a very pleasant road, is it, no, not that way, how will the ministry grow, proceed, deeper and become more fruitful, will you, will you dare, to really say to the Lord,

Lord, my life, a ministry of Christ, will you dare, I wonder if you're going out of the ministry now, going to withdraw or resign, believe me dear friends, if the apostle is representative, and if those servants of God, who have been most spiritually fruitful, not who have done the biggest organizations, but the most spiritually fruitful, we will touch that at another point in a minute, if these are really true ministers of Jesus Christ, look at the background of their life, the secret sufferings, that hidden history with God under his hand, those periods when even a man like this man, Paul, perhaps the greatest minister of Christ, will say I despaired, I despaired of life, I was pressed beyond my measure of endurance, the true minister of Christ, ministering Christ, is going to take you

into some deep experiences, very deep experiences, that is going to be of great value to others, great value to others, it is the crucified and suffering servant of God, who is really the fruitful one, of whom you can say that man is not talking out of his library, from his books, that man knows what he's talking about, he's been there, he has been in it.

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