

An Effective Ministry

by Walter Chantry

An effective ministry springs from a calling by God Himself, a very high calling indeed, and is characterized by a message from God, delivered to the people through a minister of the gospel.

Duration: 29:04

Scripture: Malachi 2:1

Topics: "Effective Ministry", "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of an effective ministry and the role of a minister as a messenger of the Lord. The key elements of an effective ministry include a constant communion with God, a deep understanding and preaching of the Word of God, and a turning of people from iniquity through repentance. The speaker highlights the example of Levi in the Old Testament and how he turned many from iniquity by speaking the word of God. The sermon concludes with the ordination of Calvin Lindstrom and the reminder that the preaching of the Word of God should be central to worship.

Transcript

Will you open the scriptures, please, to Malachi, Chapter 2. Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. And we'll turn to Chapter 2. And will you follow along as I read the first eight verses? These are the words of God. And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.

If you will not hear, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you did not take it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your descendants and spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts, and one will take you away with it.

Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, that my covenant with Levi may continue, says the Lord of hosts. My covenant was with him one of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear me. So he feared me and was reverent before my name.

The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and equity and turned many away from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth.

For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have departed from the way, you have caused many to stumble at the law, you have corrupted the covenant of Levi. Malachi was the last prophet of the Old Testament era to have his words recorded in the Old Testament scripture.

Malachi ministered in Jerusalem about four centuries before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews had been in captivity, they had returned to the land, there were numerous times in which there was revival of truth amongst them. But now again, Malachi must rebuke the people for falling away from the truth that God had given them.

In chapter two, Malachi rebuked the priesthood in particular for its failures, as we have read in verses one and eight of this chapter. We tend to think of Judaism as a religion where people meet at synagogues and have rabbis for teachers. However, this was a system that developed during the exiles, and it was not originally God's institution in Israel.

We read in this chapter of a covenant that God had with the tribe of Levi, the tribe of the priests in the Old Testament under Moses. This particular covenant that God made with Levi is recorded in Numbers chapter 25, verses 12 and 13. And that was the occasion when Balak, the king of Moab, had called Balaam to curse the Jewish people.

And you recall that each time Balaam attempted to curse God's people, the Lord turned his words to blessing the people of God, the Israelites. Finally, Balaam, that wicked prophet, wanting the gold that was offered to him by Balak, the king, counseled the king to subvert the people of Israel, to seduce the men of Israel at the worship of the temples of his own idols, and thereby angering God toward Israel and making God to curse them. This counsel of Balaam was followed, and in Numbers chapter 25 we have the instance when the elders were meeting, and the priests in particular were being commissioned to kill those who had been unfaithful to the Lord God of hosts.

And just as this meeting was occurring, an Israelite brought a prostitute of the temple into the very midst of the camp, and Phinehas, a priest with zeal for the Lord of hosts, took a spear and thrust through this man and the prostitute, killing them both. And it was upon that action that God promised Levi that his tribe would be the teachers throughout Israel. God would bless the tribe of Levi, and Levi would teach the word of God.

So it was the priesthood that was to teach the people of God the law of God, and not the synagogue system as we remember it in the day of Jesus and the apostles when the gospel was being instituted. From this passage this morning we want to talk about an effective ministry, because that's what's being outlined in God's covenant with Levi, an effective ministry amongst God's people. And we want first to think about the wellspring of an effective ministry.

From where does it spring? It springs from a calling by God Himself, a very high calling indeed. In verse 7, the priesthood is called, or the priest is called the messenger of the Lord of hosts. He is the one that the Lord of hosts has set aside to be his messenger.

There is a God-given arrangement, and it is he who had chosen the priesthood to instruct the people in his law. This word messenger is the same word as was used in the Old Testament for angels. They were messengers of God to men on earth.

It is the same name that is used in chapter 3 and verse 1 to speak of the coming of John the Baptist, and following him the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They are called the messengers, as well as this Levitic tribe in the days of Moses and following until the coming of Christ. The Lord God has always commissioned people to teach His truth to His people.

There is an egalitarianism that has grown up in America that has infected the church, the idea that all men are equal, that all men can do all things, and one can do the preaching of the word as well as another can do the preaching of the word. And so we have some churches in which the task is passed around to everyone. Perhaps the worst expression of it today is the growing tendency to call people missionaries if on their vacation they take a week in another country they are called missionaries, as if they are doing the same task as those who are set aside to preach the gospel and gather churches in other lands.

Well, God has an order in which He calls men. Of course, our Lord Jesus Christ appointed apostles. And then when other officers were needed in the church in Acts chapter 6, the apostles told the people what they should look for in a leader, and they should choose these leaders, these deacons, but the apostles would set them in office.

Those who already had the authority of office from God would set them in office. We have the same thing happening later in the New Testament when in 1 Timothy, a list of regulations are given for deacons, a list of regulations for elders, and the congregation is to choose them according to God's regulations. But those who are already office holders put them in the office, conveying to them the authority which had been given to them.

They are commissioned and they are ordained at the initiative of God. And the wellspring of effective ministry begins with God, God's rules being followed and God placing men in office. The apostle Paul said, I am ordained a preacher.

Christ sent me to preach the gospel. Even when he talks about the heart of the gospel, he says, how shall they call upon him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear of him without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they be sent? This necessary order to the spread of the gospel, God's initiative to send those who are sent to preach, when they preach that men should hear, and then that they should believe upon him of whom they have heard. Today we are upon the business in this church of following the instruction of the word of God as one man will become a messenger of the Lord of hosts today.

God gives these messengers and that is the first and necessary part of blessing upon the ministry. But then another strand of this blessing or the wellspring of this blessing has to do with the fear of God. We frequently read of those who are put in office having a very close encounter with the Lord of hosts as they enter the ministry.

You remember that Moses was called out of the bush that burned but was not consumed. And we are told that he was so fearful that when the voice began to speak from the bush, he dared not look upon it. We read of others in the ministry, like Paul, who knew something of drawing near to God on the road to Damascus and falling down before him and learning to fear him.

The Apostle Paul said, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. Coming out of the experience of trembling with terror ourselves, before Almighty God we persuade men. With whom does God dwell? God dwells with those who are of humble spirit and who tremble at his word.

And the church needs again to know the trembling before God, at his greatness and at his sovereign power. When God's voice began to speak in days gone by, men would be disquieted with him. Disquieted because they perceived they were in the presence of some great being who had such power and magnificence and sovereignty that they had nothing to say before him and they were quiet.

Well, it is this of which our text speaks when it says in verse 5, the covenant was with him of life and peace, and I gave them him that he might fear me. And so he feared me and was reverent before my name. The wellspring of blessing from God's appointment to office, from having this experience of the fear of God within one's own heart.

And then thirdly, from communion with God. For it says in verse 6, he walked with me, Levi, the priesthood did in days gone by. They walked with me in peace and equity.

Walking with God, communing with God, listening to his voice, speaking to him, having a sense day by day. A walk is not one step, it's a constant pathway of communion with God that made for an effective ministry under Levi and under New Testament ministers. As well.

Well, these are the wellsprings of an effective ministry. What is this central keynote of an effective ministry? If he is a messenger of the Lord of hosts, then it is expected that he will have a message from God. Verse 6, the law of truth was in his mouth and there was no perversity, there was no iniquity upon his lips.

He spoke the truth and he spoke righteousness from the law of God. And it is the message of the Lord, God of hosts, that should be the center of what he does, delivering that message to the people. Central to worship is the preaching of the word of God.

And when we preach the word of God, what do we expect to hear? All Scripture is God-breathed and it is profitable for doctrine. What do people say, even in evangelicalism today? Doctrine divides. We don't want doctrine.

2 Timothy 4, in the first few verses, Paul says, I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom. He takes us right to the fearful day of judgment. And in the light of the day of judgment coming, I charge you, Timothy, preach the word.

Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching or doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.

The day will come when they will not hear sound doctrine and they will want something else. And isn't that what we're seeing in the so-called megachurches, who in their advertising say, do you go to a church where there is boring preaching, where the center of the worship and the majority of the time is spent in hearing the preaching of the word? Isn't that boring, they're saying to you? Well, at our church we have fun. The day will come when they will not endure sound teaching, but they will want something else.

And isn't that what these churches are saying? We have asked the seekers what they want and we give them what they want. And we have fun at our churches. What was the essence of idolatry in the Old Testament? When the golden calf was made, Moses came down from the mountain and he said, what is this noise that I hear? Well, the people sat down to eat and to drink, to feast and to drink of alcohol.

And then they rose up to play. And there was a song of music and of dancing. And it was the essence of idolatry.

Idolaters go right to the heart of what the people want. Feasting and alcohol and dancing and joy. And as we read in the days of Phinehas, even prostitution as a way of worshipping the false gods.

The day will come when men will not endure sound doctrine, but will want something else. But the law of truth must be in the mouth of the messenger of the Lord of hosts. And sound doctrine must be upon his lips.

Verse 7, the lips of a priest should keep knowledge and the people should seek the law from his mouth. When you look for a church, when you go to another community to visit and you want to find a church, what do you want to find? A place where the law of truth is upon the lips of the one who conducts the worship. And where truth and righteousness from the law of God are foremost and central.

And it is this with which God blesses his people. The entrance of your word gives life and it gives understanding to the simple. There was another Old Testament prophet who said, my people perish for lack of knowledge.

May it never be true in the pulpit of this church, but may the word of the living God be the central thing, the central business with which the minister of the gospel here has to do. And as he preaches the law of truth, it must be applied to the people. How then shall they live in light of the issues of our day? What should we do? What direction do we have from the Lord Almighty? The wellsprings of truth, God's appointment to office, the fear of God in the experience of the man who is placed in office and a constant communion and walk with God and the central labor of the man in office, that the word of the living God should be upon his heart and upon his lips.

A people who want this and a man who wants to give this to them. Finally from this text, what is the fruit of an effective ministry? Again in verse 6, Levi turned many from iniquity. By speaking the word of God, he turned many from iniquity.

Turning is the chief Old Testament word for repentance. In the New Testament, the word used for repentance is a change of mind. But in the Old Testament, the picture is that a man is walking in one direction and by truth he is turned to walk in the opposite direction.

A change of mind, a change of direction. Repentance unto life is a saving grace. It is given by the Holy Spirit.

And by it, a sinner has a true sense of his sin and an apprehension that there is mercy with God in Jesus Christ so that he turns from his sin to God with a full purpose and endeavor after new obedience. And that is what is being described here. Through the message of the word of God, many are turned away from iniquity.

The professing people of God need to be called to turn from each of their sins. That's what Malachi is doing in this chapter with the priests. He is calling them away from broken marriages, unfaithfulness in marriage.

He is calling them away from failure to give to the Lord. He is calling them away from giving the worst of their things to God instead of the best of their things to the Lord. And of course, what we need to call men

to who are not yet Christians is to repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.

Isn't that what John the Baptist preached? Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Isn't that what Christ preached? Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. When Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them that they should preach that men should repent.

And in the word of truth and with the law of God, we must point out how men need to repent constantly. And the fruit and the success of the ministry is that many will be called to turn to the Lord their God. It's beautiful to read the ministry of John the Baptist.

He is predicted here in Malachi in two places. His coming to the people of God is foretold. And He first taught men that they should repent, pointing out the particular sins of the Pharisees, the particular sins of the Roman soldiers, and then pointing to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Well, here was the message of Malachi concerning effective ministry as it was in the Old Testament as it continued in the New Testament. And it is a message that we need to hear as we ordain a young man to office.

So ends the preaching of the word for now. And I'm going to call some other men forward who are going to participate in the ordination of Calvin Lindstrom. But I want just before doing that to explain a few of the things that we will be doing.

The word ordination means to set someone in place. To put him in an office in particular. It's an inauguration to serve God in a particular way.

It was done in Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, with the laying on of hands. When Moses was about to die, he was told to put Joshua before the people and to lay his hands on them. The laying on of hands is symbolic of conveying something to another.

And always it is those who already hold an office who convey the authority of the office to another. This is not democracy in which the authority is conveyed by the people. The Lord conveys authority upon officers and one who has served in the office conveys it to another by the laying on of hands.

Along with the laying on of hands, there is prayer, which is recognition of complete dependence upon the Lord God on high if there is going to be any success in this office. It is not that those who put their hands upon Him can make Him successful, but we depend upon God to fill Him with the Holy Spirit. And to bring Him effectiveness in the ministry to the church.

The duties of gospel ministers we have mentioned in part. The central part of it is to have upon His lips the truth of God and convey that to the people constantly in teaching. But also to be a servant of God to all of the people.

To pray for them. The apostles said we will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. To shepherd them.

To feed the flock. To make them lie down in green pastures and leave them beside still waters. To know the conditions of their souls and to restore them when they are injured.

Especially to gather the lambs. A minister of the gospel should pay special attention to the young people. And drawing them to Christ and gently carrying them along until they are mature in Christ.

And gently leading those who are with young. In Philippians 2 we are told that Timothy was an unusual minister of the gospel. Paul is saying so many ministers of the gospel are seeking their own things, but Timothy cares more about the things of the people he serves than he cares about his own things.

And these are the things that a minister of the gospel is called to do. And we are in prayer that Calvin Lindstrom will become an example in all these matters as a shepherd of this flock.

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