

MINISTRY UNTO THE LORD

I Samuel 2:11, 3:1a—And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest...And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli.

Colossians 1:14-20—In whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens.

Mark 12:28-31—And one of the scribes came, and heard them questioning together, and knowing that [Jesus] had answered them well, asked him, What commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, The first is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. The second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Shall we have a word of prayer:

Beloved Lord, we want to thank You that we are found here in Your presence worshipping You. We are so glad that we are that much nearer to Your coming. However long or short it may be, we are those few days nearer to Your coming. And for this we thank You and worship You. We are thankful for Your salvation which You have wrought on the cross and into which by the Holy Spirit You have brought us. We ask You now, Lord, as we are gathered here for the ministry of Your Word, will You anoint the speaking of Your Word and our hearing of it? Let a double portion be ours. Let there be no sleepiness or complacency but may we feel as if the Lord is speaking directly to us. And we ask this in the name of our Messiah the Lord Jesus. Amen.

We are considering together what it is to be a link to the Lord when a new era or a new phase in divine history is taking place. However we like to call it—epoch, era, phase—the Lord finds a person at every point of history at the turning point. Whether it is Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, John the Baptist, or others, at every turning point in divine history, there has been a servant or servants of the Lord who have been linked to the power of heaven, to the will of heaven, and to the throne of God, and have been used, as it were, to bring in that change.

I have read those interesting comments on Samuel that we have in the Word of God: “he ministered unto the Lord.” Many people will just gloss over that and never think about what it means. But it is very interesting that as a lad, probably not more than seven or eight years of age, if that, it describes him as ministering to the Lord—not ministering to the temple, nor to Eli

the high priest, nor to the work, the organization or whatever else, but he ministered to the Lord. Why does the Scriptures say of Samuel that he ministered to the Lord? Actually, he was doing very ordinary things, just watching over things. Why is he so described as ministering to the Lord?

In our Jewish tradition, Samuel is treated with awe and enormous respect. There is something about his character and his spiritual stature that has left an impression upon the rabbis throughout our history. In one place it says, “Even if Abraham, Moses, and Samuel were to intercede, I will not hear,” meaning that these three were of incredible spiritual stature.

Samuel was great because of his commitment to the Lord, his total surrender and obedience. He was the kingmaker, the one who brought in the king—David. It was a mistake with Saul, but it was David who was the real king that the Lord was looking for.

SAMUEL’S MINISTRY BEGAN AS A YOUNG BOY

I want us to consider together about this phrase “ministering unto the Lord.” From the very beginning Samuel ministered to the Lord. It could not have been that easy. His mother left him in what for him must have been austere and strange surroundings. He was with the high priest Eli, but Eli's two sons were crooks. In many ways, it could not have been easy for this lad to grow up as he did, but we are told that he ministered unto the Lord. He did not minister merely to the high priest or to the temple but he ministered to the Lord. It is so possible to minister to the work, the church, the system, the organization, even movement, and not the Lord. Overcomers are separated from all others because at the heart of their service is a ministry to the Lord. They do not minister merely to things, to an organization, to the temple, to the tabernacle, or to the church but to the Lord Himself. It is possible to work *for* the Lord and not *with* the Lord.

WORKING WITH THE LORD

I meet many people in my travels, and I am old enough now to have seen an enormous number of Christian workers who work for the Lord but they do not work with the Lord. There is an enormous difference between working for the Lord and working with the Lord. When you work for the Lord, you are all the time advertising your need, looking for help, for support, or for many other things. When you are working with the Lord, you suddenly discover that God provides completely for what He commands. When the Lord is *the* worker and you are a co-worker with Him, you can trust Him for everything. That is really the heart of this matter of ministering to the Lord. It is to work with the Lord. He is the Master; He is the Lord; He is the key to the whole work. It is His commands that we follow. It is the work He apportions that we do. But in the final analysis, it is the Lord’s work that we are in. There is a huge difference in ministering to the church, to the work of the gospel, to evangelical works, and ministering to the Lord.

There can be no ministry to the Lord without those three t's that I talked about yesterday. If there is no unconditional total commitment to the Lordship of Jesus, to the Person of Jesus, there can be no ministry to the Lord. There may be ministry to things, but no ministry to the Lord. If there is no total surrender of my will to His will, then I will be doing my own thing with

the Lord's name attached to it. When my will is surrendered to His will, a ministry to the Lord begins. Let me take it one further step, if there is no total obedience to His will, there is no ministry to the Lord. Then my work becomes a self-satisfying work and I become self-centered.

ARE YOU ADDICTED TO WORK OR TO SLEEP

Some of us are by nature—not all of us—are workaholics. We have an addiction to work. Some other people have an addiction to sleeping, to lying down, doing nothing and just enjoying themselves. But there are some who are workaholics. I do not know which is the greatest threat to the kingdom of God—a workaholic or someone who is addicted to sleeping. The work of the Lord can very easily become a self-expression, a self-fulfillment, something to do with myself. This little phrase has within it the key to genuine service. The thing that made Samuel so great was that he ministered to the Lord and that from an extraordinary young age.

THE LORD JESUS AS CENTER AND CIRCUMFERENCE

Ministry to the Lord can only come when the Lord is the center and circumference of our life. When our life is cluttered with a whole lot of other things, there is no way we can minister to Him. He has to be not only the center but the circumference; He has to be everything.

The Scripture I read from the Colossian letter of the apostle Paul is extraordinary. He begins simply by saying, "In Him [Christ] there is redemption." Then he goes on to speak of the Lord Jesus as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. He then says there is nothing made in the universe or on this planet by God that was not made through the Lord Jesus and for the Lord Jesus. Then he makes this incredible statement. He says, "In Him everything holds together, [consists]." That is a fabulous statement. Everything holds together in Him.

EVERYTHING HOLDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST

You will remember that when they crucified Jesus at 9:00 in the morning, at 3:00 in the afternoon He died. Before He died, He cried out: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" It was the moment that the sin of the world was laid on Him and the serpent entered the Lamb. In that moment, the sun withdrew its light. Now people who do not understand these things think that it was an eclipse. But no eclipse has ever lasted as long as that on the day of the crucifixion. It was as if a sword went through the heart of the Father. In that moment, because all things hold together and consist in the Lord Jesus, the sun itself stopped shining.

It is amazing to consider the greatness of the Lord Jesus. Do you realize that the One who saved you is so great? Do you realize that everything you can see was made through Him and for Him? Do you realize that He is the invisible energy and power that holds this whole universe together? Do you realize that He is your Savior? If He is so great, is there anything impossible with Him? Is there anything He cannot do? Is there any need He cannot meet? Is there any obstacle He cannot overcome, any problem He cannot solve? If in fact everything was created through Him and for Him and holds together in Him, this One who is your Savior and Lord, there is nothing impossible for Him.

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD OF ALL

It means very simply this: if you do not make Him Lord, if you are not totally committed to Him, if your will is not surrendered to Him, if you are not obedient but disobedient to Him, then your life in the end becomes a mess. Even as a Christian, as a child of God, you may believe everything but nothing works because the key to it all lies in the Person of the Lord Jesus. He is the center and circumference of everything. The wonder is that He became man in order to die for you and me, to save us, and then prepare us for eternity to come. When you are totally committed to Him, He can do His work in you, He can produce spiritual character. When you surrender your will to His will, which is the most difficult thing of all, He does not have any problem with you. He can handle you, He can mold you, He can form you. When you are obedient to Him, the way to conform you to the image of His Son is open. So simple is this gospel and yet so misunderstood.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SALVATION OF GOD

Many Christians have absolutely no idea about the Person of the Lord Jesus. They think of Him as a Person but not as the greatness that He is. He is the center of everything. When it comes to eternal life, He is the beginning and the end. He is the center and circumference. He is eternal life. When you receive Him, you receive eternal life. He is the salvation of God. His very name Yeshua means salvation. He is the beginning and the end of salvation. He is the start of it, the progress of it, the development of it, and the completion of it.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE BEGINNING AND END OF THE BIBLE

This Lord Jesus is everywhere in our Bible. There is not one of the sixty-six books or letters that make up the Bible where the Lord Jesus is not the beginning and the end. He is the Alpha and Omega. He is the divine alphabet. He is the Word of God. The amazing thing is this: who was it that walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day, every day? Who? No man has seen God at any time. Who then was it that Adam and Eve saw if it was not the Lord Jesus? Who was it that Moses saw face to face and spoke with him? Who was it that Abraham saw when the God of glory appeared to him and in Him he saw the city of glory? This changed his life and God called him My friend. There is no greater testimony to Abraham's character than that God Almighty should call him My friend. Who was it that stood in the temple and said, "Samuel, Samuel?" To whom was it that Samuel said, "Speak Lord, your bondservant hears"? Who was it that changed Jacob into Israel and of whom Jacob said, "I have seen the face of God and lived?" Who was it that Isaiah saw in the temple high and lifted up, His train filling the temple? In our Bible the Lord Jesus is the center to every part of it. He is the beginning and the end.

If you want to get to know your Bible, the only way is to be utterly committed to the Person of the Lord Jesus—not to Christian religion or to Christian theology. The only way to get to know your Bible is to know the Person of the Lord Jesus. It is to minister to the Lord.

DEVOTION TO THE LORD IS THE KEY

Here is how Paul ends it. He says, "He is the head of the body, the church, that in all things He might have the preeminence." Think of your body and your head. Head and body belong

together. If someone cuts your head off, you are finished. The very fact that the Bible speaks of the church as the body of the Lord does not mean that it is some kind of description of the church existing on its own; it is something to do with the Lord Jesus. Our greatest problem is when we serve things, organizations, merely theology and do not serve the Lord. In the final analysis it is our devotion to the Lord that is the key, our devotion to the Person of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus is not an agency. He is not a power. He is not an instrument. He is not an it. He is a Person. Are you getting to know that Person?

I remember years ago I was at a conference in Honor Oak. Mr. Sparks was the leader of that conference. A brother had come from another country that was far away. He was an interesting person to listen to, very forceful in some ways and quite dynamic. I went to each of the sessions. He spoke of the Lord Jesus as food, as drink, as air to breathe, as exercise for your spiritual muscles. I was enthralled. The man had impact. His ministry was very strong and very incisive. I remember speaking with a wonderful old brother in Honor Oak whose name was Oliphant. Brother Watchman Nee had called him the womb of the church there. He said, "How did you find it, Lance?" I said, "I was so impressed. That man is powerful. The way he spoke was so incisive. I found it marvelous to think of the Lord Jesus." I noticed he looked a bit clouded. Then he said, "Well, there is a problem. When Jesus is food that you eat, water you drink, power that you avail yourself of, an instrument in order to get on, how do you worship Him? In a way it is a kind of self-worship because He is in you." I was very surprised. Now with the wisdom of years much, much later, I realize that brother Oliphant had put his finger on a problem. You cannot worship someone who is an "it." Of course, the Lord Jesus is food; He is the bread of life. Of course He is water; He is the water of life. Of course we grow as we receive Him, as we possess what is ours in Him. But what about ministry to Him? How do you minister to someone who is only in you? It is when you see the Lord as the Lord, and His greatness that you fall down at His feet as one dead. That is ministry to the Lord.

MINISTRY TO THE LORD IS WORSHIP

What is ministry to the Lord? It is worship. Worship is an old English word which also came to America. It means originally "worth-ship." When you worship, you acknowledge the worth of the person whom you are worshipping. That is why in the old Episcopalian marriage service, when the husband made his vows, he said "With my body I thee worship." Many people would say he is worshipping her. But he is actually saying, "With my body I acknowledge your worth." That is worship. Nobody has ever really ministered to the Lord who does not know how to worship Him. When real worship comes out of your heart, it is something mind blowing, or as you would say on this side of the Atlantic; it is awesome. Somehow or other you are lifted out of yourself. If you ever touch worship like that, you will never be the same again. That is the essential heart of ministry to the Lord. It is to worship Him, to acknowledge His worth, to worship with your whole being. It is so tremendous.

These people who are at the turning point in divine history are those who really worship the Lord. There is an utter devotion to the Lord in those people. It was so of Samuel. It cost him everything to side with the Lord against King Saul, but he did it again and again. However, his utter devotion to the Person of the Lord Jesus meant that he could do no other. He could not

deny the Lord. He could not compromise his relationship with the Lord. That is the amazing power of this ministry to the Lord.

WE HAVE BEEN CREATED FOR WORSHIP

Do you know anything of the ministry to the Lord like that? In your quiet time, is it what you can get from the Lord? Give me, give me, and more. Or is your quiet time a ministry to the Lord? You worship Him. Do you know that we human beings are created to worship? I know many older ladies often tell me that the birds are worshipping the Lord. But in actual fact, some of those birds are all to do with marking their territories. It is wonderful to hear them, but animals were not created to worship—birds, fish, dogs, cats, horse. They could develop a relationship with human beings but there is no worship even from a dog who is the most subservient of them all. Human beings were created to worship. Until a human being worships, they have never fulfilled the meaning and significance of their constitution. But the moment they begin to worship, they will discover they can never be the same again.

THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT

I think that brings us finally to that passage I read in Mark's gospel. They asked the Lord Jesus a trick question, "What is the greatest commandment of all?" The rabbis are always discussing this. Jesus said, "The first and greatest commandment is this: Hear, O Israel: the Lord thy God, the Lord is One: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength. Out of that, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Matthew puts it this way, "Upon this lies all the prophets and the law." Mark says, "This is the greatest commandment of all."

To minister to the Lord is to express our love and adoration for Him. That is ministry to the Lord. Furthermore, when we begin to love the Lord like that, suddenly all of the chores we have to do in our service are gilded. Somehow or other it permeates everything we do. That is the love of God shed aboard in our hearts.

You know of course better than I that the apostle Paul rose to heights unbelievable in the Corinthian letter when he said, "If I preach or prophesy without love then I am nothing, just a tinkling clanging cymbal. If I give my body to be burned without love, then it means nothing." Supremely he was saying this: to be in love with the Lord is the key. That is why He sought you. That is why He saved you. That is the one thing and the only thing that will satisfy Him. When you return that love, your service becomes a service permeated with the love of the Lord Jesus.

HIS PRESENCE WITH US

In the book of Exodus, Moses said to the Lord, "If your presence does not go with us, do not carry us up hence." Then the Lord said the most extraordinary thing in Hebrew, "My presence shall go and I will give you rest." He never put in the "with us" that is in your English translation. In the Hebrew it makes so much sense: "My presence shall go." This work of the Lord is when His presence goes. When His presence goes, we go with it. When we go with it, we find rest. Where there is no love, there is no rest. Where the love of God is there in power, we find rest.

EPHESUS LOST HER FIRST LOVE

Do you remember the Lord Jesus spoke a word to one of the finest churches in the New Testament era, the church of Ephesus? “I have this against you; you have left your first love. Repent or else I will come to you and remove your lampstand, that is the testimony of Jesus, from you.” So important is this first love, which is not puppy love; it is a quality love. When a person is in love, they do not talk about how much it cost or how far they have to go to see a loved one, or what they have gone through. It means nothing because love somehow transcends it all. This first love that the church in Ephesus had, they lost it. It is interesting that the Lord should point that out because they were doing so many other good things. But the ministry to the Lord had stopped. It was now a ministry to things.

I will finish by reminding you of the way the fourth gospel ends. Perhaps the gospel of John is the most remarkable of the four gospels. It is a revelation. I think most of you know it. It is not a history like the other three gospels. John selects eight claims of the Lord Jesus: I am the bread of life, I am the way, the truth and the life, I am the true vine, and so on. I have always said John's gospel is the most Jewish of the four gospel, far more Jewish than Matthew. I AM is the unmentionable name of God linked to the bread of life, to the way, the truth and the life, to being the door, to being the true vine. It is amazing.

THE LORD'S EXHORTATION TO PETER

The way this gospel ends is extraordinary. The Lord met His disciples at the lake of Galilee and cooked them a breakfast. Then He said to Peter, “Simon Peter, do you love Me more than these?” Peter stuttered, having denied the Lord three times, and said, “Yes Lord, You know I love you.” But he used another word for love. And the Lord said, “Feed My Lambs.” Then the Lord said a second time, “Do you love Me more than these?” Peter said, “You know I love You.” Jesus said, “Tend My sheep.” And a third time, He came down to Peter's level, and He used the same word for love that Peter used. He said, “Do you love Me more than these?” Peter was annoyed that he said it a third time. And he said, “You know I love you.” Then the Lord said, “Tend my sheep.”

In other words, it was ministry to the Lord. It was as if the Lord Jesus was simply saying, you cannot feed my lambs or tend them or my sheep unless first you are in love with Me. Do you love Me more than anything else? Then your service will be a service and a ministry to the Lord. It is that kind of service and that alone which determines whether a person becomes the kind of person the Lord can use at a turning point in history. It is rather challenging in a way because it finds us out. It is much easier for us to be caught up with doctrine which is good and essential, even with theology, with the things of God or with service. All that is required in service is much easier than to stay within first love. But in the final analysis, it is whether that love of God is shed abroad in our hearts first and foremost to the Person of the Lord Jesus and then to our neighbor. May the Lord help us in feeding lambs, tending lambs, feeding and tending sheep, to know that it means nothing unless first of all, we are in love with the Lord Jesus! May He help us to minister to Him!

Shall we pray:

Beloved Lord we bow in Your presence. We come so short of what we should be. And particularly, Lord, we want to ask Your forgiveness if we have left our first love and if somehow routines and things have taken over our lives instead of ministry to Yourself. Lord, hear our cry. Renew our first love. Fan that flame of Your love in every heart. Fan it into a great fire. Lord, hear us. There is no other way that this nation will be touched, no other way that this terrible collapse of so much in this nation can be halted unless our hearts are filled with a renewed love for Yourself. Do it, Lord, we pray. We ask it in Your name. Amen.