



MOUNT MERRION FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

(BELFAST NORTHERN IRELAND).



Pulpit Ministry of Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church

Lord's Day Morning 13th January 2008.

Series 'God's Covenant Heritage'

No.4. "The Messengers of The Covenant."

Scripture Reading 1Peter Ch 5:1-4

By. Rev. Paul Thompson.

Our last message in our series ‘*God’s Covenant Heritage*’ focused upon the Covenant Legacy that Christ has bequeathed to His Church. As the beneficiaries of Christ’s legacy we receive a whole constellation of promises, the initial promises being *Faith and repentance Eph Ch1:7 Ch2:8; Forgiveness Heb Ch8:12; Holy Spirit Ezek Ch36:26-27; Heaven Rev Ch21:3 etc.* We are also promised sanctification, guidance, perseverance and final glorification.

All that the legacy of the Covenant entails is altogether unfathomable, its depth it is beyond our comprehension, this means that only Christ can bring His people into the full enjoyment of the promises of the covenant. That consideration turns our minds in another direction, we are now compelled to consider the ‘*earthly administration or publication of the Covenant legacy*’ and to those through whom the promises of the covenant are made known. It is Christ’s covenant, He has purchased all its contents by His blood [Acts Ch20:28] and it is He who is the administrator of the Covenant, He governs its administration. Turn to Malachi Ch3:1, “*My messenger*” speaking of John the Baptist. The word ‘*messenger*’ comes from a root meaning to ‘*despatch*’ as a messenger, specifically of God, *an angel or a prophet, priest or teacher.* John’s message was that of declaring Christ, see Matt Ch11:10. John the Baptist is described as Christ’s ‘*messenger*’ his errand was to declare the promised Messiah! However, in Malachi Ch3:1 we also have the title “*The messenger of the Covenant.*” this is referring to Christ not John. It is clear that from the moment of Adam’s fall Christ began to publish His Testament and legacy as the *Messenger of The Covenant.* God sent Him, God should have sent the messenger of death to destroy sinful man, but God sent the Angel of Grace! As such He brings to us the good news of the covenant, news from heaven, a far country. Even though the Church of Christ is redeemed, in our ignorance He explains to us the mysteries of His legacy [Job Ch33:23; 1 John Ch5:20; John Ch6:45]. In this work He has made use of Angels [Dan Ch9:21 Gabriel], Prophets and apostles, those offices being now defunct, He now employs the Pastor who by the word instructs and directs His people during their continued existence on earth, when finally in heaven He as the great Pastor of the Church will assume this role Himself. The reason for Christ giving Pastors and teachers to administer His covenant legacy to the Church is because Christ knows that they need pastoring, they need cared for. Pastors are messengers, they are on an errand to declare the covenant promises of Christ, they have no other message! Rev Ch1:16 The stars in Christ’s hands are the angels or ministers of the churches [v20] ‘*aggelos*’ - ‘*pastor*’ or ‘*messenger.*’ In Christ’s hand He disseminates His *ministering angels* where the flock of God is. Though Christ is primarily the ‘*Angel of the Covenant*’ who administers the Covenant, His ministers also are engaged in the earthly administration of the Covenant!

I have often said that it is a most amazing thing that Christ has appointed men for the task of supplying and nourishing the sheep of God. This means that those called to that office must consider the nature of such a calling.

1) Their Administration. “*Feed the flock of God.*”

Those who are authentic undershepherds will have the marks of the true shepherd upon them. Ezekiel Ch34:2-31. The Lord reproves the shepherds of Israel for neglect and unfaithfulness in their office. In this passage we see the converse of 1 Peter Ch5:1-5, all that God expects of His pastors is thrown to the side!

a) They are to Maintain a Careful Oversight

This is suggested by the language Peter employs to describe how the undershepherd is to discharge his ministry, *willingly; not by constraint; a ready mind; being ensamples* etc. The literal rendering of ‘*oversight*’ is ‘*take the care of it*’ i.e. ‘*in a spiritual manner.*’ He is to strengthen the weak; healing the sick; bind up the broken-hearted, he is to seek those who are lost; watch over them that they go not astray; and restore them in the spirit of meekness, when they are gone out of the way; admonish them, reprove them for sin and preserve them from false teachers error and heresy. Peter draws a comparison when he says, “*Not by constraint.*” The word ‘*constraint*’ relates to severity - ruling with force. There is always the danger of men aspiring to the office of pastor elder out of a want for livelihood and not out of a sense of necessity that Christ has called him to desire the office of an elder. The call of a true pastor will be manifest when he discharges his office, [*is he in it for himself? Motivated by money and power etc.*] “*Not for filthy lucre.*” Not with a covetous disposition, which is a filthy one for the sake of gaining money, and amassing wealth, as those in Ezekiel’s time [v3] and in Peter’s day, [2 Pet Ch2:3]. When Christ calls a man he furnishes him with the gifts of his Spirit; one gift that Christ always

“It was by the ear, by our first parents listening to the serpent, that we lost paradise, and it is by the ear, by the hearing of the word, that we get to heaven, “Hear and your souls shall live.”

...Thomas Watson...

gives His pastors is a heart endued with love and care for the sheep. The heart of Christ ought to be reflected in the heart of the pastor, one who loves and cares for the sheep. Here in Ezekiel Ch34:4 the Lord says, “*Ye have not strengthened, neither healed, neither bound up...*” there was no love or care exercised for the flock of God! Pastors are to administer their office with care and concern! A man will only be willing and able to tend the flock of God when he himself has experienced the love of God in his own experience. John Ch21:15, “*Simon, lovest thou me?*” Three times the Lord affirms Peter’s love before He commands him “*Feed my sheep.*” If a man have not the Love of Christ in him, he is not fitted for the task of shepherding! Such a man will find the work burdensome and loathsome, cannot willingly discharge his calling! Lovingkindness, Readiness, willingness all mark the true shepherd - he reflects Christ!

b) *They are to exercise a diligent preaching ministry.* “*Feed the flock of God which is among you.*”

This is the charge of the gospel minister. In Ezekiel’s day the flock of God was not being fed, v2-3, “*ye feed not the flock.*” The feeding of the sheep relates primarily to the preaching of the word, the Lord emphasises the feeding of the flock for a number of reasons:

i) *They are liable to dispersion.* How true it is that when there is no shepherd the sheep wander aimless and directionless, often into places that are harmful to them spiritually. Look at Ezek Ch34:6, “*My sheep wandered through all the mountains...my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth.*” Dispersion was the result of the shepherds not feeding the flock see v8, “*and fed not the flock.*” It is not God’s will that his sheep float around here and there, the Church is ordained for that purpose, so that you can join yourself to it and benefit from the protection that it gives. Spurgeon once responded to a contemporary preacher who asked why he had no evident problems with congregational disintegration stating, “*I tie my sheep by the teeth!*” in other words preaching was the chief means of preventing dispersion.

ii) *They are liable to malnourishment.* They need the food of the Lord lest they grow weak. When that happens error and heresy is uncontrollable. This was the problem at Ephesus [Rev Ch2:2-5]. They had removed their eyes from off the Son of Man (The Word Incarnate - The Alpha and Omega) who stood in the midst of the candlesticks Rev Ch1. The word has a preserving effect. When the mind feeds upon that which is healthy a sound spiritual state is achieved - 1 Tim Ch6:3; 2 Tim Ch1:13 - From the word ‘*sound*’ we derive the English word hygiene, healthy etc, healthy doctrine. A lazy pastor will breed a lazy congregation, the pulpit reflects on the people! Be ye an ensample Peter says to the church leadership!

iii) *They are liable to destruction.* “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*” [Hosea Ch4:6] An ignorance of God is the removal of protection. A theological and Christological pulpit serves for your protection, your mind is directed to Christ, there is safety under such a ministry. Neh Ch8:4 “*Ezra stood upon a pulpit of wood.*” Hebrew ‘*Migdal*’ - Fortress; Tower or castle [Prov Ch18:10; Psalm 61v3]. That is why we ought to pray consistently for our ministers, because their ministry affects the people of God. Under a faithful ministry God’s people are protected and nourished. You are to be diligent in feeding your souls upon the word, for if you do not feed upon the word you leave your soul open to attack. Jer Ch12:7-11 “*Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard [heritage].*”

That is why the Lord stresses to His pastors Ezek Ch34:7, “*Hear the word of the Lord.*” a faithful ministry!

2) Their Accountability.

There are many motivations for the minister and elder to discharge his duties as an undershepherd faithfully.

a) *The Charge of the Trinity.* Each member of the trinity is engaged in the provision of pastors, *The Father* - Jer Ch3:15; *The Son* - Eph Ch4:9-12; *The Holy Ghost*, Acts Ch20:28. Each minister works under the shadow of God, to God He must give an account!

b) *The Context of the Judgement day.* Ministers and elders discharge their office in the shadow of the judgement seat, we will stand with our people before the throne. Heb Ch13:7, “*Remember them that have the rule over you, who have [preached] spoken unto you the word of God...*” Heb Ch13:17, “*Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves: for they watch [sleepless] for your souls, as they that must give account...*” [2Cor Ch5:10-11]. The accountability here extends beyond the Pastor to the congregation, ministers must give

“*Preaching is Theology coming through a man who is on fire.*”
...Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones...

an account for every sermon preached [*that deals with pulpit laziness*], but they also must give an account for your soul. Like Christ they watch for your souls! Psalm 121:3-4 He who keepeth [*means watch*] Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps! Why does the minister and session exhort you to the sacramental imperatives of Baptism and the Lord's table, or to be in attendance at the prayer meeting and engage in other Christian duties? It is not Lording over the flock! It is because we must give account for our ministry and then for you! That is why Christ exhorts you as the congregation to "*Take heed how ye hear!*" [Luke Ch8:18]. The question that ministers and elders always ask, "*will our account of you be handed over with joy or with grief?*"

3) Their Award. "*Ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*"

For those of Christ's messengers who are faithful in the dissemination of their office there is an award. It is an award that they receive when the Chief shepherd appears [Christ's return]. The sheep that they have been entrusted with are not their own, they are His [John Ch10]. Though at present He is absent from sight, being in heaven, but He soon will be revealed from heaven the second time to receive His sheep! Peter describes the appearance of the Chief shepherd as a coming King Heb Ch13:20, '*The Great Shepherd.*' Christ is the greater David. All other awards fade away, Christ gives a crown resplendent with His glory that fadeth not away! Paul said in 2 Tim Ch4:8, "*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day...*" he was striving for '*an incorruptible crown*' [1 Cor 9:25].

Crowns are promised to all those who are faithful James Ch1:12, "*...he shall receive the crown of life...*" The Lord writes to the minister [angel] of Philadelphia Rev Ch3:11 and exhorts him and the church to exercise faithfulness, "*Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*" The happiness of the future state of the saints is signified by a crown. This crown is theirs as part of their legacy - not a crown of ambition achieved through struggle but one purchased by the righteousness of Christ and sealed with His glory. Will you receive a crown from the hand of the Chief Shepherd?

By. Paul Thompson.

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them."

Hebrews 10:16