

Warriors, workers and worshippers

Part 1

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[00:00:01] I am delighted to be here with you and to see so many from different places and from distances who have made the effort to come along. Might we commence our evening lecture by singing together the words of Hymn 462. I thought it was appropriate in the Wildfell Hall that we might sing a hymn by Mr. Hockey.

But there was another brother about these parts who was a contemporary of his, Mr. Theophilus Ruse.

I don't know if any here would remember that name or that brother. But in 1925 he wrote a book and very plain covers, they didn't put books and fancy covers in those days. [00:01:08] And it's called Warriors, Workers and Worshippers.

And inside the subtitle is Notes on the Journeys of the Ark of God from Sinai to Sinai.

And the contents of the book actually are taken up with the Ark of God and its various movements. So the title of this book is somewhat misleading because it's not so much about Warriors, Workers and Worshippers as it is about the Ark of God. Well I just say that by introduction because the subject I would like to take up tonight is this subject. [00:02:05] Warriors, Workers, Worshippers.

We have to be warriors. Of course we have to be sure that we're fighting the Lord's battles. I think it was Admiral Lord Nelson who found two of his officers quarrelling on deck one day and he turned them round and he said, Gentlemen, that's the enemy. He was speaking about the French of course.

So we need to assure ourselves that we are fighting the Lord's battle.

Are we workers?

The Lord said, Look on the fields, for they are quite on to harvest.

[00:03:07] He said, I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day, for the night comes when no man can work.

There's a time coming when we'll not be able to labour for the Lord any longer. A time when no man can work. But in the interval, as well as being warriors for the Lord's truth, he would encourage us to

be workers in his vineyard and then worshippers. What a privilege we have. The exhortation in Hebrews is, Let us draw near to be worshippers in the Lord's presence. Now these themes are brought out, I believe, in the Old Testament and in connection with the children of Israel in the wilderness. So if we might turn, please, to Numbers. Book of Numbers.

[00:04:13] Numbers chapter 1, verse 52.

And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own count, and every man by his own standard throughout their hosts.

But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel. And the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony. [00:05:09] Chapter 2, verse 1. Verse 3. And on the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they have the standard of the camp of Judah pitch. Verse 10. On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben. Verse 18. On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim. Verse 25. The standard of the camp of Dan shall be on the north side.

When we turn over into chapter 3, we've got the relative positions of the sons of Levi. Verse 23 of chapter 3. The families of the Gershonites shall pitch behind the tabernacle westward.

[00:06:17] Verse 29. The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward. And verse 35. The chief of the house of the father of the families of Merari, these shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle northward. Verse 38. But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the east, even before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward, shall be Moses and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel. So we find, beloved brothers and sisters, that there was a certain order attaching to the camp of Israel in the wilderness.

[00:07:17] And we can learn from that that God has an order, a divine order. And just as he had a divine order then, he has a divine order for us today. We can find more about that in the New Testament.

These chapters in the book of Numbers and in Leviticus and in Deuteronomy are very instructive for us. In Israel, the menfolk were divided into three broad categories, taking them in reverse order to the title of the book I mentioned.

[00:08:02] We have the worshippers, then we have the workers, and then we have the warriors. If you had a picture of the tabernacle, you'd be able to visualize the structure. In the east, at the gate of the court, at the entrance to the tabernacle, that was the place where the priests were found. But you know, the priests were only a very small minority. They were just the sons of Aaron. Distinct from them were the Levites, and distinct again, the tribes, the children, the sons of Israel.

So, if we were to take them starting on the outside, we've got the tabernacle structure surrounded by the tribes, excepting Levi. They were the warriors. They were those who went forth to battle. They were, so to speak, the common people. [00:09:08] Then, from those tribes, the tribe of Levi had been taken out and had been set apart for the service of Jehovah. They formed a smaller group from within that commonwealth of Israel. And then, as I've said, Aaron and his sons occupied a special place, the warriors and the workers and the worshippers. Now, in Israel, if you were one, you weren't the only.

You fitted into one of these categories in the time. But when we come to the anti-time, these things are true of all the Christians, all the believers at the present time, and I'm including in my remarks the sisters. [00:10:01] They have a function as well. In Israel, we're dealing here with the males, and we're dealing with separate categories, separate groupings. But when we come to the anti-time, and when we come to the theology, we find that these things are true of each one of us at different times and in different ways. We can be someone who's seeking to go out and defend the Lord's interests in a general way, or we can be someone to whom the Lord has given one of us something to do. Or we can be at another time, another attitude, another aspect, we're one of those who draw near to God in worship. And these things are wonderful privileges, wonderful privilege. Peter refers to it, connection with priesthood, in his first epistle, where speaking of the believers generally in 1 Peter 2, verse 5, he says, [00:11:12] Ye also are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. The truth here is the priesthood of all believers. We are all together in this thing. It's not confined to a sacerdotal family, it's not confined to just a certain number in our midst who act in a priestly way on behalf of the others. We, all together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, are priests unto God. We're a holy priesthood, and as we get down the verses, we are a royal priesthood. Well now, another question that comes to mind in regard to these matters is that they were taken up in connection with God's house.

[00:12:16] God had said, Exodus chapter 25, let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. And the most important item of furniture in that sanctuary, in that tabernacle, was the Ark of the Covenant. Made of the acacia wood, the incorruptible wood, speaking of Christ's manhood, overlaid with the gold, that which was proper to deity, that which was of God. We know when they travelled and when they crossed the Jordan, that ark went down into the waters first, and the waters dried up, and the children of Israel could go through on dry foot. [00:13:02] A type of Christ going into death, and of our association with Christ on the other side of death. So that, the way in which the ark went down into Jordan, as well as the materials of which it was constructed, gave us a pretty clear idea that it's speaking to us of Christ. Well that's the pattern for us today. We had it on this afternoon, Jesus stood in the midst, he came into the midst of the assembled camp, and he said, peace be unto you.

And our brother referred to that scripture in Matthew, which is very precious to us, Matthew 18 verse 20, where two or three are gathered together, in my name, there am I, in the midst of them. So we see then that intelligent service for God takes place in connection with the divine centre, the house of God, and the place where Christ is found in the midst. [00:14:14] And that's a very important guideline for us. And that's exactly how it was in New Testament times. Be it at Jerusalem, or as the testimony spread, Corinth, Thessalonica, Laodicea, Ephesus.

All these cities that Paul visited, and where the truth spread, believers came together in simplicity, they came together in assembly, they came together in dependence on the Holy Spirit, with no special priestly class, or no official that stood, as it were, between them and God. But simply meeting as believers and meeting in the Lord's name. That's how it was then, and that's how it should be today. We know of course that very much confusion has come in, and we know that there's a good deal of corruption, abounding in Christendom. [00:15:16] We can even read about some of it in the newspapers these days, the disgraceful things that have been allowed to happen under the name of the Christian profession. But we want to get a clear pattern. This was the pattern here, the Children of Israel meeting, the tabernacle structure was a pattern of things in the heavens that was given to Moses, and they answered to it in these particular details. And we have scriptures which would guide us in this present day in regard to Christian things, as to the way in which we should meet together and carry out these things in practice. Children of Israel all had a place. The other thing that's stressed too is that God numbered them. In chapter 1 we find the Lord commanded Moses so he

numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai. And the Lord takes an interest in each one of us. He numbers us. He's got a place for us. He's got a purpose for us.

[00:16:28] He would have us gather together around himself. He would have us, as it were, seek to bring into realization these truths of which we're considering, the idea of worship and work and warfare.

And it's important that we consider ourselves and ask, are we available? Are we available? We have to acknowledge we live in very difficult conditions.

[00:17:14] Numbers are dwindling outwardly. There are many discouragements. So it's very gratifying to see a company like this together this evening with an interest in God's truth. It's particularly good to see the young people here. I remember once, many years ago, going to a little meeting in the Shetland Islands and it was the most northerly place in the British Isles. I think we can still call Shetland the British Isles, where there was a breaking of bread. The brother who was there was somewhat of an eccentric. He'd been a pilot in the First World War and the meeting met in his house and he lived there with his cats. And I don't know how many cats there were, but there were cats everywhere, crawling out from under the seat and jumping up and down all over here. [00:18:24] It was a house full of cats and also I seem to remember that the roof leaked. Well now, another visiting brother was there and he said afterwards, he said, it really would take a real grasp of separation to come here. And that's what I want to say to the young people tonight. It takes a real grasp of the truth of God. It takes a real appreciation of Christ, a real affection for Christ to continue to meet together around the Lord Jesus.

[00:19:06] To continue to seek to answer in practice to the truth of the house of God. Because it's not God holding you, it's not from himself. There's nothing outwardly to keep us.

We know that everything that's been committed to man and responsibility has failed. It's a truth that runs right through the scriptures. Adam and Eve in the garden, they failed the test. Noah in the renewed earth, drunk in his own tent. The law was broken before even Moses came down from the mount. Nebuchadnezzar made a great image and he encouraged his citizens to worship it and not give God proper honor. [00:20:08] You can see right throughout the failure and apostasy in this excessive dispensations. And we know too that the church has failed in responsibility. But we have to say, dear brothers and sisters, we've made a poor show of it ourselves. We failed. We failed in answering to the truth of God. And it's very apparent to those who have eyes to see. So we have nothing to boast of, but still, even despite our failure, these principles and these truths of God remain. And just as the children of Israel gathered together around the tabernacle, around the door of the tent of meeting, we're not all together in one geographical place in the wilderness like Israel. We're not. But around a specific center like that. [00:21:04] But as we've said, the Lord has said, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. So in different localities, we seek to answer to the truth. And it's very precious to see that God takes account of this. And he numbered the people. And he's interested in us individually. And we should be exercised. That others can be brought in to enjoy the truth and to meet in a manner that's pleasing to the Lord. And also that our young people should continue in these things. So having made those remarks, I want to talk about worship, the worshipers, priesthood. And we have the consecration of the priest mentioned in Leviticus chapter 8. And I just want to refer to a few pertinent points in connection with our drawing near to God. [00:22:03] Because of course, the thought in connection with the priests is approach to God. God has approached us in Christ in a wonderful living way. He's approached us in a man. And

it's in order that he might have a response from our hearts. So we've been made priests unto God. And it's in order that we might bring our worship and praise and thanksgiving to him. Now in chapter 8, where the priests are brought before us, the consecration of the priesthood brought before us, the first thing I want to notice is in verse 1. Where it says, take Aaron and his sons with him. Aaron's sons were priests because of their link with Aaron. It's clear from this verse. Aaron and his sons with him.

[00:23:13] And we, as believers, are priests because of our link with Christ. We have the priestly family. And in Hebrews chapter 5, we're told that Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest. No man taketh his honour unto himself but he that is called of God. So we find that Christ is called of God. And by the decree, it says thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. And in verse 10 of chapter 5 again, saluted of God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. We are priests by spiritual descent. We are priests because of our link with Christ.

[00:24:12] Most important to see that. In chapter 1 we're told that God has anointed him with the oil of gladness above his companions, above his fellows. So Christ has his companions. He has his fellows today in this world.

And this is a wonderful privilege for the people of God. Both he that sanctifies, the sanctifier, and they that are sanctified are all of one. Hebrews chapter 2. For which cause? He is not ashamed to call them brilliant.

So we are brilliant of the risen Christ. We're his fellows. We're his companions. We're all of one with him. We're brought into the closest possible proximity that can be because we're linked to him and with him in resurrection. [00:25:18] Dear ones tonight, if we don't take anything else away with us tonight, let's take away to our homes the fact that we are precious to Christ. So near, so very near to God, nearer we cannot be for in the person of the Son we are as near as he.

We've been brought into a place of great nearness. We've been graced in the beloved. When the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, he sent the message by Mary to the disciples, I send unto my Father and your Father and to my God and your God. We're all of one with him. We have that same nature. We have the possibilities of worshipping God. We can praise as led and taught by Christ. It says of him, in the midst of the assembly will I sing praise unto thee. [00:26:17] So sometimes we sing in our hymn books, join the singing that he leadeth loud to God your voices raise. We've been brought into a position of great nearness, a position of great proximity to God in Christ, to be associated with Christ before the Father just as Aaron's sons were associated with Aaron. Remember again in Israel and in the Old Testament, Aaron and his sons formed just a small proportion, a very small proportion of the nation. But this is a privilege as we've seen from Peter that is true of all believers. So the first thing in chapter 8 here is that Aaron and his sons with him, this close link that we have with the Lord. And then we're told that in verse 6 that Aaron and his sons were brought near and washed them with water.

[00:27:16] And this would speak to us again of the purifying effect of the word of God. We've been born again. We've had that moral cleansing, being washed with water.

And in Peter chapter 2 where he spoke of this holy priesthood, he says that we have to lay aside, wherefore laying aside all malice and all guile, hypocrisies and envies and all evil speakings. These are the things which should not characterize us as believers. [00:28:05] Sometimes, sadly, these things enter into our lives. But we should see that positionally we've been brought near, we've been washed

or we've been bathed, we've been cleansed, we've had that moral cleansing that the word of God brings and therefore we are expected to answer to it in our practical lives. And then we're told that in regard to the sons of Aaron that they were clothed, verse 13, he put coats upon them, girded them with girdles and put bonnets upon them as the Lord commanded Moses.

This would speak of purity in our associations, these white garments, these white robes. Purity that must distinguish us as believers even as to the bonnet or the mitre that we have in our head.

[00:29:15] Are we pure in our thought life? The head, the mind. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. It tells us of the things that are pure and it says we are to think on these things.

Pure thoughts, pure impressions. We're in a world of moral filth. It's all around us and it invades our privacy. We need to have this washing of the water, we need to be pure in our minds and the fact that they wore this mitre on their head would suggest this thought to us. [00:30:07] It's an important thought to us as to what we're doing in the spirit of our minds. In their walk, in their associations, in the garments that they wore also it would speak of our separation and a holy life. Some of the other things that are mentioned here would speak of the same thing because first of all we have in connection with their consecration, we have the sin offering brought in, the bullock for the sin offering. And Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bullock for the sin offering. Their connection with the sin offering, the thought is that Christ has been made sin for us, that he has borne our sins, that he stood in our place. [00:31:03] And as those sons of Aaron laid their hands on the head of this bullock, it was so to speak as if their sins were transferred onto the sacrificial animal. How wonderful it is with us that this is what is taking place in regard to our lives, in regard to our sinful past, in regard to our sinful thoughts, our sinful deeds, our sinful nature. It's good to know that there's been complete clearance that these matters have been dealt with and that they've been dealt with to God's infinite and eternal satisfaction. The blood here was taken and we know that the blood satisfies the eye of God and the blood was sprinkled with a view to meeting God's needs. But the blood was put on the altar and it purified the altar and it was poured out at the bottom. But following the sin offering, in verse 18 we have the burnt offering.

[00:32:15] And this is the aspect of Christ's death which is going up to him as a sweet smelly chain. Not only as to our past has that been closed in Christ's death, but as to our present acceptance, we're accepted in all the values of Christ's death. Again they laid their hands on it and the blood was sprinkled on the altar. The inwards and the legs were washed in water and this speaks of the intrinsic purity that was found in Christ and everything in his life that was for the pleasure of God. And then it was burnt wholly upon the altar. The whole round for the burnt offering was burnt on the altar, burnt sacrifice for a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the Lord. [00:33:05] So once again we're reminded of the preciousness of Christ to God, of the way in which he glorified God in his death, the way in which infinite glory was brought to God through the precious shedding of Christ's blood, through that self-sacrifice, through him giving up his life. He did it in obedience to the Father and he could say, speaking as if the work was complete, I've glorified thee on the earth, I've finished the work which thou gavest me to do. So we have God's pleasure found in Christ but that acceptance is transferred to us. This is something, beloved, that gives us liberty when we come into God's presence. Very often Satan would trip us up and remind us of things that we've done and inconsistencies in our life, all the sorrows of the pathway and well, he'd say to us, you're a pretty poor Christian and what are you doing coming in to worship the Lord? [00:34:19] But you know it says, let a man examine himself, it doesn't say examine himself and stay away, it says let a man examine himself and so let him eat. Connection with the Lord. The work of Christ, the fact that Christ has

made sin, shows the absolute claims of God's holiness. The intensity of his suffering, as we look at Calvary, certainly we can see that we can never make light of sin. We can never make light of sin, but we can see that the sin question has been entirely dealt with, it's our meeting, our failure, our need, but then in the burnt offering we can take account of what Christ's death is for the pleasure of God. [00:35:07] How eternally satisfied God is and what pleasure he takes in his sin. And then following that the ram of consecration was brought and in connection with the ram of consecration we're told that the blood was put again in Aaron and his sons, because when he's mentioned in connection with his sons, it's the priestly family, it's not looking at Christ in his perfection in his own right, but it's looking at us as priests. And the blood in verse 24 is put on the tip of Aaron's son's right ear. So the blood goes on the ear. What do we hear? What things do we listen to?

The ear get way into the mind. Are we taking in impressions of Christ? Are we seeking to come under the word of God? Hearing good things? Hearing pure things? Hearing about God's interest? Or do we hear just of anything and everything that's going on all around us? [00:36:21] Let's remember, beloved, that God is a claim upon us and as of the priestly family the blood has been put on our right ear, on our ear and on the thumbs of our right hands. What we're doing, our actions, our activities, do they meet with the Lord's approval and again upon the toe of our right feet. Speaking of our pathway, where do we go? What places are we found in? Is it ornery to the Lord in what we hear and what we do and where we go? So all this is very important in connection with the consecration of the priest. [00:37:05] Then we're told that the ram of consecration was put into Aaron's hands and into his son's hands and he waved them for a wave of offering before the Lord. This is very important when it comes to our worship, the ram of consecration again being a picture of Christ. This is the substance of our worship when we come together in worship. We bring Christ and we wave it before God. There are two types of offering. There's the heave offering and that's heaved up to God. It's directly to God as it were and there are times when we address God in worship and thanksgiving. But other times it's heaved before God. The thought of waving before is the fact that it's done in God's presence. It's done before him. Very often we do that. We sing about the Lord Jesus. We sing about God's love expressed in him and we're rehearsing what Christ has done and his work in the presence of the Father and this is pleasurable to him. [00:38:07] There are many details here about not only the way in which the priests are associated with Aaron, not only about the way in which they're purified, washed and the way in which the blood is applied to keep us right in our practical walk, but then there's this matter of what is put in our hands. Christ has put our hands in order that we might offer him up in worship. He's the substance of our worship. Another point here is that it was for seven days, a complete period, and this is something which should characterize us throughout our whole lives. This then is what's had in mind in connection with the priesthood, in connection with the fact that we're worshippers, in connection with the fact that it's our privilege to go into God and to present God before Christ. That's one aspect of our walk. The other aspect is that we're workers. The Levites had the charge of the things of the tabernacle and they came under the authority of Moses and Aaron.

[00:39:26] That's an important point for us in regard to our service, that we don't just serve in an independent manner, but that we serve as under the eye of earth.

There's this point about the Levites in chapter 3 of Numbers. They were taken in place of the firstborn from among the children of Israel.

[00:40:11] The firstborn were sheltered by the blood. They were redeemed by blood in Israel. When in all the land of Egypt there was mourning, there was a great cry throughout the land, all the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain. But the firstborn from amongst the Israelites were sheltered by blood. And

God here says in this chapter 3 that the Levites were to be taken in place of the firstborn males. In Hebrews chapter 12 we as believers are referred to as the church of the firstborn ones who are enregistered in heaven. We want to say that God has a claim upon us. He has a claim upon us because the blood of Christ was shed for us. [00:41:11] We've been purchased. In the Acts it speaks of the church of God which he purchased with the blood of his own. We want always to remember that we belong to God in this way. So these Levites were taken from amongst the firstborn. We find there was a discrepancy in the number because of those that were redeemed there were 213 of the firstborn which were more than the Levites.

The total firstborn that had come out of the land of Egypt was 22,273. The number of the Levites was 22,000. So there was this 273 that were over and above for whom redemption money of five talents each had to be paid. [00:42:09] And that 273, the number that were missing raises a question as to whether there are any missing in the service of God.

Every male from a month old and upward shall now number them. And we've been born again. We've been numbered as it were from birth. We've been saved to serve. But when we get over to chapter 4 we find that they were numbered again but they were numbered for actual service in verse 46. Those from 30 years old and on to 50 years old that came to do service of the ministry. [00:43:09] So we are saved to serve. Potentially we are available to God as a result of a new birth, as a result of God's working in our lives. But actually, sadly, sometimes we are not active in serving the Lord in the way in which we should. This numbering of the Levites and the different way in which they are numbered would raise the question with us, are we available for God's service? So there's a service of God that goes on. In the assembly we can think of evangelists and pastors and teachers as we have it. We could link up Gershon, Kohath and Mirari with that. But it also says in Ephesians that it's in view to the work of the ministry. These gifts in the assembly are given for the perfecting of the saints. With a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ. [00:44:14] And we see that these special gifts are given in order that others might be encouraged and that others might be helped to fulfil their function in the body of Christ and the work of the ministry onto the edifying of the body of Christ. So there's work for all of us to do. In that sense, we're engaged not only in worship, but we're engaged in the service of God. We're saved to serve. And each of us has to get before the Lord and we have to ask that question. And we have to ask that question that Paul asked, Lord, what will thou have me to do? And then as I said, the nation, the tribes, the males in Israel were to be warriors also. And that's something that we have to do. [00:45:01] We have to put on the whole armour of God in order that we might be able to stand in the evil day, having done all to stand. To be clothed in this armour because we're told that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal Lords of this darkness, against spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenlies. It's not a matter of being taken up with men or with events as they affect us on the earth. What we've got to see is that behind all of these things, there are spiritual authorities and powers of darkness. And so we need to be on the alert. And as soldiers, we mustn't be off duty. We need to take the whole armour of God and it's really defensive combat here. It's in order that we may be able to withstand in the evil day and having accomplished all things to stand. [00:46:11] We need to take a stand, we need to seek to defend God's interest and we need to be true to what he would have us to be in the detail of daily life. In our local circumstances, he desires that we would be faithful to him. Well now, that's only a very... Help us to be true to him and to enter into these things in more detail. For his name's sake.