

A Holy Priesthood

1 Peter 2:4-5, 9

4 As you come to him (the Lord Jesus), a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

(1 Peter 2:4-5 (ESV))

9 . . . you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

(1 Peter 2:9 (ESV))

In the message last week, we began to examine the meaning of this special calling that is here described as a “Royal and Holy Priesthood”. And as we continue to study these words carefully, we find that perhaps nowhere else in these scriptures is our role as the “Body of Christ” better defined for us. Listen again to verse 9 . . .

9 . . . you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 (ESV))

Folks, these words sound so very much like that which God envisioned for His first “chosen and beloved family”, the Israelites. And now here, we find that He is doing the same with us, with you and me, those who have believed in Him and have received the blessed salvation that He has provided through the Lord Jesus. Listen again!

9 . . . you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 (ESV))

And no, it is not as some of our confused fellow believers contend, that now God’s first family, the Jews, have been “replaced” by us, the “Church”. We are simply being added into, adopted into, His beloved family, becoming brothers with His first family members. And here, as we join into God’s beloved family, we are being given a very expressly defined ministry and calling, that of being a “royal and holy priesthood” serving in amongst our brethren in the faith, and also in amongst a crooked and perverse generation of people whom God loves and wants to also be saved.

May we begin by considering a simple, though not at all complete biblical definition of the role of a “priest”? . . . A “priest” is a person, a man or a woman, who is chosen by

God and who is charged with the extraordinary responsibility of “standing in the gap”, in-between their fellow men and our omnipotent and holy God. And not because God is a threat to them and wishes to do them harm, though yes, He can be a threat to them if they reject Him and turn away from His salvation. But rather, God desires to be a Savior and a Loving Father to them. And they need a “priest” to intercede for them and to lead them to His throne.

The duties of a priest are many, but principally, a “priest” is called to represent “who God is” to the people. As these words put it . . .

9 . . . that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 (ESV))

And then also, a priest is to intercede for the people before God, to “stand in the gap” and

5 . . . to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5 (ESV))

The first occasion in these scriptures where we see a priest at work was as Abraham was returning from defeating the armies of the King of Elam, and rescuing his nephew Lot from captivity. Along the way of his return, seemingly from out of nowhere, suddenly appeared a man whose name was Melchizedek, a man described as being the King of Salem and “priest of the Most High God”. Listen!

1 . . . Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. 3 He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. (Hebrews 7:1-3 (ESV))

As these words imply, being a man without an earthly father or mother, with no beginning or end of days, and resembling the Son of God, this is understood to be one of the first manifestations of the Lord Jesus in what is called His “pre-incarnate” being. Here, by His appearing, He reminded Abraham that it was by the power of the Most High God that he was able to have victory over his enemies, and that one-tenth (a tithe) of all the increase they had acquired must be given back to the Lord.

Then the next and most clearly given instance of God’s calling of men into the role of “priesthood” was as He divided out the new “Promised Land” and the future responsibilities to the tribes of the twelve sons of Jacob. There God called eleven of the

tribes into the very ordinary roles of daily life. But for the tribe of Levi, God defined a different and very special responsibility of being “priests” to the other eleven tribes. As “priests”, the Tribe of Levi would not be allotted their own portion of the tribal lands, but would instead intermix themselves in among the other eleven tribes, building the churches of their day, synagogues and temples, teaching God’s laws and His truths to the people, being His representative to them, and then making intercession for their sins before God’s mercy seat.

And as priests, their duties and responsibilities were many, some of which involved the shedding of blood of sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people they represented. Among those priests was one who was designated to be a “high priest”. And his special duties involved the taking of the blood of the sacrificed animals from the outer sanctuary of the temple into the innermost sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, and there, He would make intercession for the people’s sins.

As the High Priest, his intercession was made on behalf of not only the repentant sinners who had come to the temple with their sacrifices, but also for himself and all of the other priests who ministered daily to the needs of the people. There before the mercy seat of God, the High Priest “stood in the gap”, pleading for mercy and grace for the people and for the forgiveness of their many sins.

Why was that necessary, and why are such priestly duties still so very, very necessary today? After all, is not God a God of “love” who only desires the very best for each of us? . . . Yes, He is a God of love and so very, very much more. But God is also “Holy”, “Holy” beyond any measure we can imagine or understand. And in His holiness, He has devised “laws”, “laws” that define the boundaries of “Holiness”, of right and wrong, of good and evil. And because He Himself is so “Holy”, He cannot permit any form of “unholiness”, or wrong behavior or evil to abide in His presence.

Unfortunately for all men and women, we in our human condition are inherently evil and “unholy”. And we all do very wrong and evil things. Listen to these words from Romans 3,

10 as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Romans 3:10-12 (ESV))

Simply put, this is why we all need a Savior. And this is why we all need an intercessor “priest” to stand in the gap for us. And this is why we ourselves are called to be intercessor “priests” for others.

The Old Testament Levite priests interceded by offering up the blood sacrifices of animals to signify the people's repentance and atonement for their sins. But those animal sacrifices were only a foreshadowing of the real sacrifice for atonement that God, in His holiness would require. And that is what we find in the New Testament gospels. There, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, would become God's chosen sacrifice. But why so! It was because, unlike the blood of animals which only "covered over" the sins of the people, the blood of Christ was able to actually wash away, to "take away", to completely remove sin from the hearts of men and women, eternally cleansing and making us holy and acceptable to God.

John the Baptist described Jesus by saying,

29 . . . "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!
(John 1:29 (ESV))

Jesus was the "true Messiah" because He was not only the perfect sacrifice for our sins, He was also the "priest", the "Great High Priest", who interceded, who "stood in the gap" and kept the "wrath of God", which we so fully deserved, from being put upon us, and instead to be put upon Himself. What a wonderful Savior, Jesus is!

But folks, for us, His "chosen people", His sacrifice of atonement there on the cross was only the beginning step of His Plan. Just as in the days of the Levites, when God needed many, many priests to minister His saving Plan out among all of the people of Israel, so also does God now need many, many priests to minister the saving atonement of Christ out to all the people of the world, beginning with you and me and our own families, and then on out to all the nations of the world.

All along the way of Jesus' daily ministry, He was training and equipping His disciples for this "Priesthood". And now through their teachings in these scriptures, we also are being called and trained up into the same "Royal and Holy Priesthood".

And as we have been saying over these recent weeks, there is so very much yet remaining to be done, and we have been designated to get about doing it. Christ has appointed you and me into a "Royal and Holy Priesthood" to succeed Him and to carry forward all that He has begun.

And He has especially equipped and "anointed" us for the task. He has not only "filled us" with the Presence and the power of His Holy Spirit, He has also, "poured out" His Holy Spirit upon us, "anointing" us with Himself and with all that we will need to carry out our blessed calling as "priests".

Described here in our scripture passage with the words . . .

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5 (ESV))

And verse 9,

9 . . . you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 (ESV))

As you and I come to Christ and as we receive His blessed salvation, we immediately become one to the “living stones” spoken about in verse 5, an interwoven part of the structure of His “spiritual house” the “church”. But not only are we a stone within the structure of His church, we were also immediately ordained into the “priesthood” of His church, and immediately set apart to offer up “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through the Lord Jesus.

A tall order, yes, but a relatively easy one if we will simply surrender ourselves to the task! Just as God did in those earliest days with the people of Israel, He is now doing with you and me. Just as He called the Israelites out of their darkness and separated them out into their own nation and Promised Land of “Light”, so also, He has chosen you and me and has called us out of our darkness into His marvelous light.

But may we understand that God has not done this marvelous thing for us for our benefit alone. As His “chosen race, His royal and holy priesthood”, we are to also spread His provision of “Light” on out to everyone else with whom we have to do. Verse 9,

9 . . . you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 (ESV))

And look what else He has done! We are not just menial workers hidden within a big organization of millions. We are “especially chosen” and have been adopted into His “Royal” family. As we have studied so often here lately, you and I truly have become “Sons of God” and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14-17). And as sons, we are a “Royal Priesthood”, a Holy and separated people, set apart unto God for His purposes. In other words, we are no longer simple sojourners on the earth, trying to “feel our way” through the realms of “darkness” each day, confused and suffering to just survive. We have been “bought with a price”, Christ’s own blood, and pulled out from our broken

condition; and we have been resettled into God's "kingdom", filled with "light" and "promise". And we have a job to do! And we need to get about doing it! We are
9 . . . a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 (ESV))

And these are our "marching orders". We are to begin immediately and we are to continue all the remaining days of our lives, to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light".

How do we do that? First, we must know that "witness" and "testimony" are so very important within our calling as "priests". And not, just to be and look like "good Christian people" who do good things. That is a right thing to do, but this "Priesthood" requires so much more. We are not only to act like we are part of the "royal family" of God; we are to actually "be" a part of that "royal family", "true sons of God" and willing members of His "priesthood".

We have a favored position within the courts of God. We are not only able to stand before Him and through prayers and supplications make intercession on behalf of our brethren and on behalf of the "lost" and broken souls of unbelievers, we are fully expected to be there daily, even hourly. It is our calling and our duty.

So then, may I ask you, "Do you intentionally set aside time every day when you get alone with God and pray? And for what, and for whom do you pray? Do you spend much of your prayer time praying for your own personal needs and desires? Do you pray for temporal things like your finances, your work life, your social life?"

All of those personal needs and desires are important and you do need to pray about them. But may I strongly exhort you to get on past the many needs of "self", and to get about this special calling that God has anointed you to carry out, the "Holy Priesthood", to diligently stand before the throne of God crying out and pleading for the needs and for the sufferings and for the "lost souls" of others?" You are

9 . . . a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 (ESV))