

Royal Priesthood

Sermon 10 May 2009

Melville Junction Church

- In most religions around the world and throughout history, different religions have set the more spiritual people apart to be priests or shamans.
- These people have then been expected to maintain some sort of spiritual purity so that they can access god or the spirit world on behalf of the rest of the people.
- Hinduism - Brahmin, Buddhism - Buddhist monk, Muslim – Imam, Jewish faith – rabbi. (Slide 1-4)
- In Christianity we have, depending on your denomination; ministers, pastors, rectors, elders, bishops etc? (Slide 5)
- Is that correct? **No**
- What is a priest?

A person whose function is to make sacrificial offerings and perform other religious rites as an intermediary between deity and worshipers

We believe all Christians are priests in God's house

We believe the body of Christ will only be built up when each believer plays his or her part. We affirm that every believer, irrespective of age, culture or gender, has the ability, opportunity and responsibility to minister to God and to people, both in the church and in the community. We will encourage and equip believers to minister and create an enabling environment where all can participate in ministry out of their strong relationship with God. In all of this we will be guided by our conviction that, like Jesus, we should look always to serve, rather than be served.

- Where do we get this value from and what does it really mean?

1 Peter 2: ...⁴As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ⁷Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone", ⁸and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. ⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

- What is it saying?
- That God has in his love and mercy given us Jesus and as we believe in Him and draw closer to Him, we will be distinguished as His people, His family and royalty in His kingdom. We all will be priest, proclaiming His name to the rest of the world through our lives.
- In order to truly understand what this means though, we need to go back to Exodus. (Slide 6)
- At this point, God has chosen Moses to lead His people out of Egypt.
- They have gone through the Red Sea, into the desert following a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
- Supernatural provision of food and water(manner, quail & water from a rock)
- They journey for 3 months until they get to Mt Sinai

Exodus 19-20

³Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

- Let's compare with 1 Peter 2

Exodus 19	1 Peter 2
out of all nations you will be my treasured possession	A chosen people, a people belonging to God
kingdom of priests	a royal priesthood
a holy nation	a holy nation

Exodus 19....

These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." ⁷ So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. ⁸ The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD. ⁹ The LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you." Then Moses told the LORD what the people had said. ¹⁰ And the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes ¹¹ and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹² Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death...

Exodus 20

The Ten Commandments

¹ And God spoke all these words: ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything
- ³. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God,
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother,
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony
10. You shall not covet

- So God speaks the 10 commandments to the whole nation of Israel, not just to Moses up the mountain.
- But I love this next part...

¹⁸ When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

- They gave up their priestly status
- Rightly so, because they feared The Lord
- So let's start making sense of this, you have a picture in your mind of what this might have looked like.
- Imagine being there.

✚ Let me tell you a funny story about my brother at the mighty men conference I went to 2 weekends ago.

✚ He was not a he had just made a first time commitment the night before Angus Buchan collapsed. He was not really sure what he had committed to but he was there with us.

✚ They called all the men together so that we could pray for Angus as we waited for the helicopter to come and fetch. While we were praying though, these most incredible thunder clouds appeared suddenly from nowhere. The sky went dark and eerie.

✚ My brother (Rory) grabbed me by the arm and pointed to the sky, gesturing what is this.

✚ I will never forget the look in his eye though as I looked up into his face that was gripped by fear.

✚ At that moment I realised how we have lost that awe, that fear, the realisation that the God who has called us to Him should be feared, not just loved.

- There are 3 things that I want to pull out of this passage to help us grasp it.
- The first thing is this

1. God is the one who chose; God provided a way and chose the nation of Israel to be His people. Not out of any action of their own but because He is God. ('You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.)

- God is the one who through His power and mercy rescued his people out of Egypt and brought them to Mt Sinai.
- God laid the corner stone (Jesus) in Zion so that whoever believes and has faith in Jesus may be redeemed.
- Nothing that we did caused God to do this for us.

✚ I have an apple here; I am going to randomly throw it to someone. You did nothing to deserve that apple. It could just as well have gone to someone else. I gave it to you out of the goodness of my heart.

✚ Why am I harping on about this?

✚ Too often we, like the nation of Israel come to the belief or understanding that we somehow how received this status as Gods chosen people because we are so special.

✚ You might start to think that you got that apple because you are better looking, smarter and more deserving than the person next to you.

✚ What does that do, it create a sense of self righteousness.

✚ Self righteousness only detracts from the fact that the only reason we can present ourselves righteous before God is because of Jesus alone.

✚ If you feel that you deserved that apple because you are such a good person, you are less likely to share it with those around you who don't deserve it.

✚ If you feel in some way superior to those around you, you will tend to separate yourself from them instead of living among them.

➤ So can we repent of our self righteousness in prayer...

➤ Pray

2. God wants us to be his family, heirs and priests in this world but He requires a level of commitment and obedience from us as well. (⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession)

- What God is saying to Israel here is that in order to be my kingdom of priests you need to obey the 10 commandments and the law.
- 1 Peter 2 says that for us to maintain our status as a royal priesthood we need to jump through 3 burning hoops backwards?

- Just checking if you are still awake.
- No, we need to believe in Jesus.
- The word believe here (*pisteuō, pist-yoo'-o*) means - to *have faith* (in a person or thing), that is, *credit*; by implication to *entrust* (especially one's spiritual well being to Christ)
- We need to have faith in Jesus, seems simple?
- James 2:14-26

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?

- Essentially what we come to realise is that if we truly have faith in Jesus then we will obey His commands which break down into 2 categories:
 - Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and body (Commandments 1-4)
 - Love your neighbour as you love yourself (commandments 5-10)
 - That is the challenging part, loving our neighbour. It does not come easily.
 - It means getting messy; getting involved in peoples lives inside and outside of the church.
 - Sharing each other's difficulties, enjoying each other's success and dreams.
 - As we work out what it means to entrust our spiritual well being to Jesus.
 - ✚ That apple I just gave you, you can look at it. You can polish it, you can display it to others.
 - ✚ But, unless you eat it you will never know how good it tastes. It will never be able to nourish you in the way your body needs.
 - ✚ When you taste it and see how good it is, you will want to share it with others. You will want them to know how good it is.
 - So if that is you today, you sit here with Jesus polished on your shelf with all your books, but have not tasted His goodness in a while I want to pray for you.
 - If you are sitting here and you have not yet put your faith in Jesus, but you want to start a journey with Him today...
3. We are all priests, but this is far weightier than we understand. (Have them wash their clothes ¹¹ and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down ... shall surely be put to death)
- Let's explore this a bit.
 - We see the nation of Israel giving up their priestly status out of a fear for The Lord, remember that a priest is someone who mediates between God and man. In this case it seems to be between God and the other nations of the world with Israel as mediator.
 - After the 10 commandments, Moses goes up the Mountain to get the rest of the Law from God.
 - A large part of law focuses on the rituals that the now set apart priestly class need to do to consecrate themselves in order to come into Gods presents.

- They had to sacrifice a bull and 2 rams along with fine flour and oil. (Ex 29)
- Then they needed to wash their bodies in a certain way.
- Put on special Garments (Ex 39)
- They would then need to sacrifice a bull and 2 rams every day as a sin offering, burnt offering and a wave offering.
- There is endless detail on how these things need to be done.
- All the way through Exodus into Leviticus chapter 10 where we see Aarons sons (Nadab & Abihu) killed because they bring unauthorised fire before The Lord.
- We might be sitting here wondering why is all of this was so necessary.
- Why is God so serious about these seemingly petty rituals?
- The rituals and sacrifices are the way in which God made it possible for us to be cleared of our sin so that God could be in the presents of man.
- Let's use the apple example again.
- You have that apple but it has toxic pesticides on it.
- You cannot eat it unless you wash thoroughly.
- If you don't wash it thoroughly, you will surely die if you eat it.
- Toxin and your body are not compatible in the same way God and sin are not compatible.
- The analogy is weak here, so don't hear me saying that God is like a toxic apple.
- I am just trying to state it as a fact that we are not able to come before God in our sinful state and survive.
- Because God in His holiness cannot be in the presents of sin.
- This is a whole other sermon so I won't go there now.
- What we take for granted today, the ability to come freely to God is a big deal.
- The sacrifice that Jesus made once and for all has replaced all of those rituals and as long as we have faith in him, we can present ourselves sinless before God.
- This God, the God of Jacob
- We can approach God boldly as we read in Hebrews.
- So let us not take this task of priesthood lightly.
- It is huge, it cost so much yet it is something we just take for granted.
- Our role as priest is to hear from God and communicate with Him.
- To communicate from people to God and from God to people.
- People both inside the church and outside the church.
- Every day, every moment of everyday you are priests.
- The commission to serve as priests is one that carries with it all the legal authority implicit in the title
- 1 Peter 2 puts it like this:

¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

➤ Let's Pray