



## Maranatha Sunday Morning

*Created to be an Eternal Priesthood*

### I. God's Plan for a Faithful Priesthood:

God wants a family; He wants worshipers and wholehearted lovers and He has a well thought through solution to get all of this from His people; that is to bring us together into a worshiping priesthood for all eternity. We are going to look at that longstanding plan, how it has manifested in the past and God's promise about how it will be the universal reality for believers in the future.

#### A. The Universal Initial Intent for the Priesthood:

Initially God told the nation of Israel (2.2 million people) to consecrate themselves as priests and to come out to Mount Sinai. They were being invited into priestly communion with the Lord.

*"you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..." And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow... because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people (Ex. 19:4-11)."*

#### B. The People Rejected this Version of the Priesthood:

But this call was too much for them. When the intensity of God's presence descended on the mountain they stepped back from the mountain and told Moses that he should go and commune with God and become a priest on their behalf. The people did not realize what was available to them, they rejected the priesthood for themselves and opted for representatives instead of all being able to serve God as priests.

*"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 and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."...The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was (Ex. 20:18-21)."*

#### C. The Priesthood was then Established:

God wants faithful priests; He wanted the entire community of the people of God to be that for Him but they were unwilling. It was only after they rejected His invitation for the whole nation to be priests that God established a priesthood as a remnant of what He had initially intended.

*"This is what you are to do to consecrate them, so they may serve me as priests...bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and*

*wash them with water. Take the garments and dress Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself and the breastpiece. Fasten the ephod on him...Put the turban on his head...Take the anointing oil and anoint him...Bring his sons and dress them in tunics...tie sashes on Aaron and his sons. The priesthood is theirs by a lasting ordinance (Ex. 29:1-9).*

D. The Priesthood was a 24/7 Reality:

God gave commands to Aaron, the high priest, and all his descendants after him about the absolute foundations of the priesthood, which they were inheriting. They were to man the altar of God's presence night and day ensuring that the fire on the altar kept burning.

*"the fire must be kept burning on the altar. The priest shall then put on his linen clothes, with linen undergarments next to his body, and...carry the ashes outside the camp...The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it. The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out (Le. 6:8-13).*

E. The Priesthood was their Inheritance:

The Lord called being a priest inheritance enough, because their lot was the worship ministry, their lot was that they got God in an intimate and unprecedented way. As a result, they were not allotted a land inheritance as all of the other tribes were. The Lord called the priesthood the most privileged position in the nation.

*"The Lord said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites (Nu. 18:20)."*

*"the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi...to stand before the Lord to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name, as they still do today. That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their fellow Israelites; the Lord is their inheritance (Dt. 10:8-9)"*

F. The Priesthood was a Gift to them:

When God identified that He would have priest's minister to Him and bestowed on them the regulations of the priesthood He was giving the priests unique access to Himself. God calls the priesthood a gift saying that it was His present to them that they would be called to bring Him offerings as their occupation.

*"I myself have selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the Lord to do the work at the tent of meeting...I am giving you the service of the priesthood as a gift. Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary is to be put to death (Nu. 18:6-7)."*

G. The Priesthood was God's Way to Draw Near:

As a brief recap; the priesthood was God's idea as a way to draw near to His people. It was a gift to those to whom it was given; it was actually

their allotment in life, their inheritance. Further, it was supposed to be a constant offering made to Him and therefore a costly reality of faithfulness lifted before Him.

## II. A New Priestly Order:

Did you know as New Testament believers we were supposed to be a priesthood? I don't know if we are really thinking about this but after and through Jesus' life and sacrifice God established a new priesthood. Jesus' sacrifice changed things in every way including with regard to the previous priesthood. In the establishment of a new institution called "the Church," Jesus instituted a new priestly order that was to take the place of the former.

### A. A New Priesthood was Needed:

The author of Hebrews tells us that the Old Testament priesthood was insufficient to adequately deal with the problem and declares that the Word testifies that a new priesthood was always inbound.

*"If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron (He. 7:11)?"*

### B. The Old Priesthood is Over:

That priesthood and the covenant that it was included within were obsolete and so it was done away with. But the below verse tells us that there is a new covenant and with it a new priesthood.

*"By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear (He. 8:13)."*

### C. A New Priesthood has Come:

There is however a new priesthood. We have been called holy priesthood and God refers to us in that same way as He did in His initial invitation of the tribes of Israel to be His "special possession." God here sets us aside for Himself, we are to Him a royal priesthood, His special possession.

*"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession (1Pe. 2:9)"*

### D. Jesus is Our New High Priest:

Titles have meaning; and Jesus ascended to Heaven and now serves there as the High Priest over all believers. A High Priest is a priest over something; over a priesthood. Jesus' role in this regard is to be the High Priest over the New Testament Priesthood. This is really how Heaven sees this title.

*"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess (He. 4:14)."*

### E. This New Priesthood Lasts Forever:

Being High Priest is His role forever, His position and all that this means

is an unchangeable eternal reality. God assigned Jesus to be the leader of an eternal priesthood, and us to be those who would serve God forever in this priestly order.

*“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It (our hope - Jesus) enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever (He. 6:19-20)”*

F. We've been Granted Priestly Access:

In the New Covenant, we get cleansed of our sins and purified and then we are given access to the throne room of God; the holiest place. This privilege was formerly only permitted for the high priest in the Old Testament, and even then only once a year. Through Christ we all have been brought near as priests; elevated to the most high position of honor and now granted the greatest priestly access of drawing near to Him.

*“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain...we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance (He. 10:19-22)”*

G. John Saw this End Time Priesthood:

The Apostle John in giving an introduction to all of the end time revelation he saw. Where he is trying to encapsulate the whole purpose of what he encountered, trying to help us see the end of all things and where all of this is headed, he says we were made to be a kingdom of priests at the beginning of the Book of Revelation.

*“The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place...Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it...from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth...and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Re. 1:1-6)”*

H. The New Testament Priesthood is a 24/7 Reality:

If we didn't have all the New Testament verses addressed to the corporate Church about praying without ceasing, we might be tempted to downgrade this New Testament Priesthood to symbolism. But like the priesthood that God had formerly established under Aaron that was to be a continuous offering so His New Testament Priesthood is also to be an unceasing reality. Among other things, Jesus and His apostles were instructing a New Testament priestly order to uphold the priesthood.

*“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1Th. 5:16-18).”*

*“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up (Lk. 18:1).”*

*“Be always on the watch, and pray (Lk. 21:36)”*

*“be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people (Eph. 6:18).”*

### **III. Our Identity as Priests Before God Forever:**

From the beginning God desired that His people would be set aside as a corporate priesthood. This isn’t a side issue in God’s heart, it is who He made us to be. Now that we are clear that God put into order a new and modern priesthood lets take that down to the impact on us as individuals. We are priests; it’s our identity; a significant part of our identity that we have perhaps not given full attention to in generations past but which is prophesied to be how we will view ourselves in the future. In fact, God identifies us as priests before Him forever.

#### **A. The Priesthood is Our Identity:**

We cannot escape the fact that we have been identified as a priesthood now. We were created as an eternal priesthood, meaning that forever we will be priests before God offering up continual praises and ministering straight to His heart.

*“because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood (He. 7:24)”*

*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1Pe. 2:9).”*

#### **B. We are Called a Kingdom of Priests:**

Previously we looked at the verse below mostly approaching it from the standpoint that it was John’s vision of the future, a promised future reality. But now let us look at this verse as it pertains to who God says that we are – our identity. We are a Kingdom of priests. God designed things in such a manner that as followers of God we are of a new order, a priestly order, we are called a kingdom of priests. This means that whether or not we operate in the function of priest (based off of whether we use our time praying), we are positionally called priests before God.

*“Jesus Christ...who loves us and...has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen (Re. 1:5-6).”*

*“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, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:5-6).”*

*“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth (Re. 5:10).”*

#### **C. Priests Run Night and Day Priestly Orders:**

To put it plainly; priests run priesthoods. The primary role of the priest in the Bible is to serve the Lord night and day in administering the

various responsibilities of the priesthood. God laid out the duties and functions of the priesthood and it was the job of the priests to sustain it.

*"The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out (Le. 6:13)."*

*"The Lord said to Moses, "Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him. They are to perform duties...at the tent of meeting by doing the work of the tabernacle...They were responsible for the care of...the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering...The chief leader of the Levites...was appointed over those who were responsible for the care of the sanctuary...They were responsible for the care of the sanctuary on behalf of the Israelites (Nu. 3:3-38)."*

*"In keeping with the ordinance of his father David, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their duties, and the Levites to lead the praise and to assist the priests according to each day's requirement (2Ch. 8:14)"*

D. God Defined His House as a Priesthood:

When Jesus reiterated the words that God had said regarding His house being a house of prayer Jesus is speaking into the life and calling of the New Testament Church; He is essentially saying that the Church is going to be some version of a priesthood because that's what went on at the house of prayer; priests ministering to the Lord through prayer and worship.

*"It is written," he said to them, "My house will be a house of prayer (Lk. 19:46)"*

E. God Sustained the Priestly Ministry:

God has never been content with merely a historical example of the house of prayer or even a building called it; He wants the reality of it. The way that God saw to this and administrated the house of prayer in the Old Testament was through the priestly ministry. God's zeal still burns for His house of prayer; this is why He carried over the priestly ministry into the genetics of the New Testament Church.

F. God Intends for the Priestly Ministry to Continue:

Jeremiah gets a profound word about God's future plans for the priesthood; not only does God proclaim that the priesthood will continue He says that He is going to do something that will greatly expand the priesthood so that it would be impossible to count the number of priests who minister before Him.

*"This is what the Lord says: 'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant...with the Levites who are priests ministering before me—can be broken...I will make...the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars in the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore (Je. 33:20-22)."*

#### IV. Priesthoods Offer Sacrifices:

By definition priests offer sacrifices, this is what priesthoods are built upon, without sacrifices being offered there is no reason for a priesthood. Priests stand in the gap between God and the rest of mankind to make petition on behalf of that land, they do so by offering up sacrifices to make wrong things right and fellowship with God. God often relents because of the sweet fellowship He receives from those standing in the position as priests before Him.

*"I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one (Ez. 22:30)."*

##### A. The Old Testament Priests Offered Animal Sacrifices:

The initial priesthood was organized to stand in in God's presence at all times. Their job was to worship Him and intercede on behalf of the people through offering up the sacrifice of animals. This was the system that God ordained and it was the way they worshiped God.

*"Then the priest is to sacrifice the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from their uncleanness. After that, the priest shall slaughter the burnt offering and offer it on the altar, together with the grain offering, and make atonement for them, and they will be clean (Le. 14:19-20)."*

##### B. Jesus Annulled the Old System:

The Old Testament priesthood was incomplete so Jesus offered Himself as the once and for all final offering to atone it's requirements. But instead of doing away with priesthoods Jesus replaced it with another one. The New Testament Priesthood is a new priesthood with a new and better sacrifice.

*"Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (He. 10:11-12)"*

*"If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law (He. 7:11-12)."*

##### C. But Sacrifices Must Continue:

Priests offer up sacrifices and this new priesthood is no different, but now under Jesus' leadership the offerings look different. To have completely done away with the old system would have made sacrifices unnecessary, but God didn't remove it He replaced it, meaning that the sacrificial system wasn't done away with it was redefined.

D. The New Sacrificial System:

As New Testament believers we have been called priests, and priests must offer sacrifices. The sacrifices of the New Testament Priesthood are real, but instead of the blood of animals, grain and the like the new sacrificial systems calls for spiritual sacrifices such as worship, thanksgiving and praise and intercession.

*“you 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 (1Pe. 2:5).”*

*“But 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 (1Pe. 2:9).”*

V. **Embracing this Priesthood:**

If all of this is real then we need to decide what it means for us. Specifically, what does this mean for our lifestyle, what is the lifestyle of a person in the New Testament Priesthood supposed to look like in the day to day? This is a vast subject, the fullest version of which is far more elaborate than we want to get into in this session. This section is going to simply help identify the broadest strokes of what the priestly lifestyle looks like.

A. Living Out the New Testament Priesthood:

As members of the Body of Christ, Jesus' Church, we are called carry out the functions of the priesthood under New Testament regulations; that is that we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices and declare His praises. While we may not have previously given this much thought, the New Testament priesthood is currently in effect and this requires that there would be those who would see themselves as priests and take this calling seriously carrying the priestly duties in modern times. I believe that this is what Paul had in mind as he repeatedly gave the New Testament Church the corporate call for us to be devoted to the place of prayer together.

*“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful (Co. 4:2).”*

B. Priests Serve Together to Lift Up Offerings:

The priesthood is a corporate responsibility where the weight of the ministry is shared by all of the priests. It is therefore a corporate offering to the Lord requiring unity, structure and selfless service.

*“At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name, as they still do today (Dt. 10:8).”*

C. Priests Lives are Tied to the Temple:

God is everywhere, we can worship Him everywhere, and we should. But the whole premise of a priesthood is that we do it together in a common place with a common practice of worship. In the scripture the priesthood was tied to the physical temple, and before it tied to David's tabernacle and Moses's tent. The priest organized their entire lives around that

temple and what went on there so that they could wholeheartedly perform their duties as priests.

*“Those who were musicians, heads of Levite families, stayed in the rooms of the temple and were exempt from other duties because they were responsible for the work day and night (1Ch. 9:33).”*

*“He gave him instructions for the divisions of the priests and Levites, and for all the work of serving in the temple of the Lord (1Ch. 28:13)”*

D. Priests with Other Responsibilities:

As soon as God expanded the priesthood to all believers this immediately meant that this New Testament priesthood was a universal reality, meaning that it is in no way limited to those who are full time staff at a house of prayer. You are those who are responsible for the care of the sanctuary regardless of what other responsibilities you might have.

*“They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering, the curtain, and...were responsible for the care of the sanctuary (Nu. 3:31-32).”*

1. Not on full time staff at a house of prayer:

You don't have to be on staff at a house of prayer to live like a priest. You are a priest; it's all about the way you spend your time and process your decisions.

2. Other full-time roles:

Plenty of people building priesthoods have other full-time jobs, others who are stay at home moms and others who are full time college students. They realize their priestly responsibilities are not tied to their occupation but they carry the call to care for the sanctuary.

3. You are not your job:

We are far too accustomed to identifying ourselves by our job. But you are priests, you're not a nanny, a construction worker, a florist or a barista. That's what you do; what you are however is something all-together different; you are a priest designated by God for God.

4. You are priests:

You are a priest by God's design. He wants you to draw near to Him along with other priests in the function of a New Testament priesthood.

*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood (1Pe. 2:9)”*

E. Embracing Our Identity as Priests:

If your identity is first a worker, a parent or even a minister to people then you will prioritize your life and time around activities that strengthen that as your identity. If you identify first as a priest you will live out of that reality first and life will clearly reflect that identify.

*“you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth (Re. 5:9-10).”*