

Enjoy your priesthood!

Revelation 1:4-6

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Bethany Church

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On one occasion when Jesus traveled with his followers, they ran out of food. This was serious for two reasons. First, there were no Kwik Trips serving the travelers. Second, to get around, sugar was needed, not gasoline. One didn't pull into a service station, check the oil, examine the tires, clean the windshield, refuel the car and pick up a snack. Instead, you wiped the sweat from your forehead, shook the dust from your hair, checked your sandals and took some food. That was your transport energy; and there was none of that for Jesus when he arrived near Samaria. It was hot and sticky. The noonday sun scorched the earth as Jesus rested by a well. He was all alone because he had sent his disciples into the nearby town to get food. A woman showed up to draw water. She was broken and held in contempt by her neighbors, so she had come to the well when it was hottest to avoid people. Jesus asked her for a drink. The request surprised her because of her identity as a Samaritan and her disreputable lifestyle. She was cohabiting with her sixth man. In their conversation Jesus brought inner healing to the woman, and that juiced Jesus. When the disciples returned, they urged Jesus to eat because they knew he'd need the energy; but he refused. He said, "***I have food you don't know about***" (John 4:32). Jesus was reenergized and ready to go because God had just used him to bring this woman freedom. Jesus enjoyed that. Jesus enjoyed his priesthood. It was food to him. It was his gas. It was his sugar.

All of us feel good when we help someone out. Whether it is giving some driver directions, assisting an elderly person across the street, or helping a child learn something new,

or comforting someone who is hurting, it feels good to contribute. We were made in the image of a creator, not a consumer. We feel good when we produce and contribute, just like our creator. However, there's something even more rewarding than just contributing.

Although our flesh is mortal, our spirits are immortal. We are not mere mortals. Consequently, we hunger to do things that last, that are immortal. In our hearts is the desire to write history. In our spirits is the hope to make an eternal impact. We want to do something significant that outlives us. Yet, there is even a deeper more consuming hunger.

Our deepest hungers come from our identity. Our purpose is rooted in our identity. A fireman fights fires. A farmer produces crops. If you are a parent, you care for children. And if you've been restored to your heavenly father by Jesus Christ, you are a priest. If Jesus' Spirit is in you, you have the spirit of priesthood. John wrote:

All praise to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us. He has made us his Kingdom and his priests. (Rev 1:5-6, NLT)

Jesus makes us priests. He does so in two basic ways. First, he makes us priests by loving us. Since priests represent God to people and people to God, a priest must know God as well as people. One does not know God until one knows God's love; for as John wrote, "**God is love**" (1 John 4:8, 16). Jesus was the picture of God's love to us. He was full of God's love. According to St. Paul, "**God poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit**" (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit is not a concept. He is the presence of God. When he is welcomed, we experience love. When we are baptized with the Spirit, we are drenched in love, immersed in love, overwhelmed with love. We are filled with love. That experience makes us witnesses of God so that we can represent him to others. Second, Jesus makes us priests by not only loving us, but by freeing us from our sins through shedding his blood. As recipients of love, we are able to share love. As beneficiaries of forgiveness and freedom through Christ's death, we are able to

see the deception and help others reconcile with God. When our eyes open to Satan's deception and we are actually released from guilt, when we are certain of eternal life and drawn by love to know God better, we are formed as priests by the Spirit of priesthood, the Spirit of Jesus. In our deepest nature flows love from God and love for God. We become a kingdom ruled by God's Spirit of love and a priesthood that helps people reconcile with God.

Peter wrote:

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. (1 Peter 2:9, NIV)

Peter describes us as "chosen," "royal," "holy" and "belonging to God." Furthermore, we have a purpose. We are to declare the praises of Christ who qualified us as priests by calling us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Notice the sense of community. We are a people, a priesthood, a nation. We are not merely individuals. We have a corporate identity. Peter is even more explicit about our relationship. He wrote:

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. (1 Peter 2:5, NIV)

God brings us together like living stones that fit together in order to house God's merciful activity for humanity. God draws us into teams. For us to live as a priesthood, we must work together. Moreover, Peter writes that we "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Priests offered sacrifices on behalf of themselves and others. This would suggest that the prayers of priesthood and work of our lives bring God's favor and mercy to humanity. Each of us may have different roles on the team in accord with our gifts, but there is nothing like doing that priestly work and seeing destinies changed forever.

There is nothing like rocking babies in a church nursery when you realize that the destiny of that child and her family will be altered forever because of your part and care in this priesthood. There is nothing like smiling, greeting and caring for someone's comfort and needs as an usher when you realize that those acts of service will help someone hear God's voice and fulfill his purpose on this earth. There is nothing like knowing that you are living out your purpose and changing the fortunes of humanity. It's food. It's energizing.

Our nation is at war, and some of our best and brightest aren't coming home. Nicky Gumbel tells of one such soldier who was in the throes of death on the battlefield of a previous war. His friend asked, "What can I do for you?" The young man asked his fellow soldier to get a message to an older man. He had him write down the name; so when the friend returned home, he looked him up. He told the older man that the dying soldier wanted him to know that he what he had taught him in Sunday School helped him die. "God, forgive me," was the response. "I thought my efforts were futile and gave up teaching long ago." In truth, little was more important than him teaching Sunday School. He just didn't see it. Gladys Mounter, however, did. She was my neighbor, partner in prayer every Tuesday, helped with nursing home and hospital visitation; and at age 90 she still taught Sunday School to fifth and sixth graders. She had taught some of their grandparents. At age 90 they were still her children, and nothing made her more alive. There's nothing, absolutely nothing, like fulfilling your priesthood. To do what you've been endowed to do, to change the course of humanity in doing it, you eat food that others can't even imagine. Will you hear the call, embrace your gifts and enjoy your priesthood? The applause will come from all creation. The trees of the field will clap their hands for you.