

Why God wants you for a priest!

Jeremiah 33:14-26

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I have a 98 year-old uncle who, at the end of every encounter, offers a blessing: “The Lord be with you.” Whether it is a friend, a waitress, a clerk, a nurse or a “chance” meeting, whether it is a Moslem, Jew, Hindu, or atheist, he ends his time together with the words, “The Lord be with you.” He’s convinced that is the best wish and the best blessing one could have. I agree. The Apostle Paul wrote:

If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else? (Romans 8:31-32, NLT)

Living in God’s presence and favor was the aim of the Israelite community. Then their prayers would be answered. Then their concerns would be cared for. Then their land and work would be blessed. Then their enemies would be frustrated and defeated. Then they would enjoy life, health and peace.

When Peter explained the life and ministry of Jesus to the first non-Jewish audience, the family and friends of a Roman officer named Cornelius, he explained:

*You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, **BECAUSE GOD WAS WITH HIM.** (Acts 10:36-38, NIV)*

God had abandoned us to the tempters we follow and the deadly consequences of our sin, but Jesus brought redemption and peace because the favorable presence of God was with him all the time and everywhere. The presence of God makes all the difference. The withdrawal of God is seen in our abandonment to a lifestyle of sin, our ignorance of God's love, wisdom, and power, our lack of protection from evil, our scarcity of provisions, and our prayers soliciting no response.

The Jewish people in Jesus' time believed their occupation by Rome was a judgment that the prophesied Messiah would remove. Jesus lived and ministered in that judgment and did not fulfill their hopes for another 1900 years when in 1948 the nation of Israel was reborn. If you don't think Jesus was involved, remember that the leadership and support of the Christian communities in Europe and America were instrumental for the Jews to regain their homeland. Nevertheless, God was with the Jewish community in the life of Jesus and then in the life of his church in Jerusalem and the surrounding area. So don't think, "If God was with me, I'd be healed of this disease." Remember that you are part of a diseased community even as Jesus was part of a people dominated by Roman enemies. The righteous and the wicked are all affected by the blessing and judgment of their communities. Indeed, we will no longer experience death when we no longer live among evildoers. Consequently, we are living in a brief period when evildoers have a chance to repent. That includes everyone of us.

I began this message sharing my uncles' blessing because that is a role of a priest. In most relationships, we don't need a priest. You don't need a priest to approach me, maybe an interpreter if we speak a different language or a counselor if we have differences that resist reconciliation. However, a priest is made necessary when we can't be near someone without instruction and according to the Bible the removal of judgment. Priests who served the God of

Israel found that their personal liability for judgment must be removed for them to approach God. Otherwise approaching God is like nearing a state trooper at 30 mph over the limit (like 95 mph on US 52). You might desire their help, but you probably won't get the response you hope for. In approaching God those things that are tantamount to going 30 mph over the limit must be removed. Those attitudes and actions that destroy one another and parts of God's creation make us liable for judgment; and they cannot be ignored in the presence of the judge responsible. Neither can our past record, like 40 unpaid parking tickets, be ignored in a traffic court. It doesn't matter if you read only Swahili and think the tickets are promotional. That is the foundational truth behind the elaborate teaching and practice of priesthood in the Bible. We are often that clueless when it comes to our sins as witnessed by our sordid history of racism, sexism, castes and classes.

Jesus, however, did not suffer the social blindness of his people. He did not suffer from unbelief, pride or emotional distance from his heavenly father. He completely depended upon God for his grasp of reality. In his life, he became our blessing; and in his death, he became our escape from judgment and our road to fellowship with a holy God. As you and I repent of our independence from and rebellion against God and look to his sacrifice, we are released from eternal judgment. Immediately, we become priests that can help others gain release from eternal judgment. However, Jesus did not confine his work to removing eternal judgment. He removed the temporal judgment individuals and groups suffered by healing bodies, enlightening souls, evicting demons and feeding the hungry.

In the sermon insert, you can see that Peter calls us priests. The new song of heaven calls us a kingdom and priest who serve God and rule the earth. Jeremiah's prophecy unveils God's promise to multiply the priesthood serving God into a countless number. I argue that when by

faith we are baptized into the name of Jesus, we are baptized into his priesthood. We carry that identity. A cursory look at the Bible reveals that some priests of God were commended and others faced devastating judgment. That is our situation today.

Through repentance and faith in the atoning work of Christ, you begin a holy communion with God. You begin to leave the gloomy darkness of guilt, confusion, resentment and despair and taste the wonderful light of love, forgiveness and hope. You stop consoling yourself on the way to death and begin to live each moment on a journey to triumph. You increasingly move from a life steeped in unbelief and fear to a life of wonder, confidence and conviction.

You move from a life where few prayers are answered and few answers are expected to the work of a priest that increasingly removes the cause of unanswered prayer and persists until you know the will of God. Each priest is outfitted with different gifts so that you work in different realms and relationships. Some of you work in transportation, some of you work in production, some of you work in healthcare, some of you work in raising small children, and some of you work as seniors enjoying other seniors. You are placed there so that blessing comes to that realm. You are placed there to remove darkness and judgment from that realm. You are there so that God frees the people in that realm.

I want you test your priesthood this morning. Approach your Holy Father admitting that you suffer from the sins of unbelief and pride. Ask the Lord Jesus to remove your guilt through his sacrifice and feed you with his faith and humility. Ask him to empower you through His Spirit so that you can live in enlightened obedience as his ambassador and his fellow priest. Ask him to release forgiveness and truth as you serve him in your relationships and responsibilities.

Now as members of this church family, each of you has a priestly responsibility here. The well being, of this people and all who God calls them to reach, rests upon your response.