

Lesson 9: Spiritual Privileges—Part 1: Union with Christ and Access to God

1 Peter 2:4-5, **“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 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.”**

As we come to Him, a living stone rejected by men. Let’s begin our time together by visiting the Old Testament to see where this ‘stone’ language comes from. The year was approximately 600 B.C., young Daniel was standing before King Nebuchadnezzar. He was standing there because the King had had a terrifying dream, and no one was able to interpret the dream for him. God had made the dream known to Daniel, and so he stood there, about to tell the King the interpretation of his dream—an interpretation that Daniel knew he wouldn’t be excited to hear.

We read Daniel’s words to the King in Daniel 2:31-45. We see, especially in verses 44 and 45, that Daniel is referring to the stone cut out a mountain not made with hands. This was a kingdom that will come and will have no end. Isaiah similarly spoke of a stone in Isaiah 28:16, **“Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’”** In Psalm 118:22 we read, **“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”** Deeply imbedded in Israel’s history was the conviction that they were God’s promised kingdom—that Jerusalem was God’s saving city and that the temple stood at the center of God’s activity in the world.

Then came Jesus into the world. When the God-Man began His ministry, He took all of that OT imagery of the stone passages and committed the unpardonable sin of applying them to Himself instead of Judaism, the city, or the temple. Then one day, Luke 20:1-18 happened. The leaders of Israel demanded to know what authority Jesus had to teach as He did! Jesus provoked them further by quoting that He was the rejected stone of God! He alluded in Luke 20, back to Psalm 118, and linked Himself to the stone of Daniel 2. On that day, Jesus claimed ownership of all of Israel’s prophetic stone imagery. He proclaimed that in Him are all the promises of God fulfilled. It was ultimately the Jewish leaders and the Jewish people who demanded Christ’s crucifixion. The Jews were awaiting a Messiah, and they rejected that it was Jesus. Their sinful judgment had them make false conclusions about Jesus, leading to their rejection of Him. They hated His message, they hated His life. They saw Him as weak and foolish. Certainly this rejection of the cornerstone can be applied to everyone who has rejected Christ for those same reasons ever since.

When we come to Jesus, not Jerusalem, we come to the “living stone”. When we come to Jesus, not Judaism, we come into God’s kingdom. When we come to Jesus, not the temple, we become God’s “spiritual house” and “holy priesthood.” This was a world-shattering claim to the ears of the Jews! Their temple was the center of their worship. If God were to be present anywhere in the world for them to access Him, it was at the temple. The **“holy priesthood”** to the Jews were those honoured ones who had the privilege of standing in the very presence of God. And yet here is Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, claiming that in Christ these truths are transferred over to every follower of Jesus. Because of the indwelling Holy Spirit in every believer, the church has become God’s people, and His dwelling place in the world.

It is by **“com[ing] to Him”** as our text says, that believers enter the realm of spiritual privilege. The Greek word for “come” denotes an intimate, abiding, close-knit fellowship with Christ. The word implies the movement of the entire inner person into the experience of intimate and ongoing communion with

Christ. Christ is **“in the sight of God chosen and precious.”** The Word of God tells us in a myriad of places how this is so. In Matthew 3:17, **“And behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’** God the Father is One who has elected (see the word ‘chosen’ in our text) and ordained Christ. The choosing can be seen in, but not limited to, texts such as Deuteronomy 18:15-16, **“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’”** Isaiah 42:1, **“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”** Jeremiah 23:5-6 is another wonderful text, **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”** Micah 5:2, a passage we think over every Christmas season at least, **“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”** Turning our attention over to the New Testament, we see the electing plan of God in Christ in Acts 2:23, **“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”** Galatians 4:4-7, **“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”** So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” Ephesians 1:22-23, **“And he (the Father) put all things under his feet (the Son) and gave him (Jesus Christ) as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”** Notice carefully the electing language of Hebrews 3:1-2, **“Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him.”** Just a few chapters later in Hebrews 5:4-5, **“And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’”**

Not only does Peter mention that Jesus Christ (the Son of God, the eternal second person of the Trinity) was chosen by God, he next mentions that He is also precious to God. The Greek word used for precious (entimon) means “costly, highly prized, rare”. The closest example of the word precious being used is in Peter’s first chapter, verse 19, **“But with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”** There is nothing more precious in all of creation than the One through Whom all things were made. The blood of Christ itself isn’t the object of worship, it has nothing to do with the chemical composition of it. It’s the precious Christ Himself that we worship! It’s the gracious, merciful, free and atoning work of Christ for unworthy sinners such as us that is precious to us. It’s the indwelling Holy Spirit within us (who opens our dead eyes and hearts) who enables us to even estimate the preciousness of Christ at all!

The title of this lesson (and the next two) is spiritual privileges. In this lesson we’ll examine two privileges: Union with Christ, and Access to God. The first privilege we have already begun to examine, as we’ve considered how Jesus Christ is the living stone, the cornerstone. Now we will see our union with Christ from 1 Peter 2:5, **“You yourselves like living stones.”** When sinners come to Christ, they too become living stones, because they share in the life of Christ. In John 17:21-23, Jesus speaks about the unity, the coming together into one, that Peter speaks of here, **“that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you**

have sent me. **The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.**" As Paul wrote, we are all in the process of being changed more and more into Christlikeness, the process theologians call sanctification, 2 Corinthians 3:18, **"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."** There is a maturing process that happens at different rates for believers, some grow quickly, some grow ...not so quickly. Some have decades to grow, some only have hours to grow before being taken home to glory. But there is always one direction that we all grow in, and that is towards Christlikeness. And there are many purposes for this growth, one being the health and well-being of the body of Christ, of which each Christian is a vital member. Paul speaks about this in Ephesians 4:15-16, **"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."** Even John wrote about this union in his first epistle, 1 John 3:2, **"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."**

We see that the first privilege that we have as Christians is union with Christ Himself. Once we were dead in sin, at enmity with God. Now, we have life in Christ. We are all living stones, being built up into a house, with Christ as the chosen cornerstone, Ephesians 2:19-22, **"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."** This is the death and life that Paul's hope was in, Colossians 3:3-4, **"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."**

The second privilege that we have, which we will spend a great length of time now devoting our attention to, is our access to God. How often do you meditate on the truth that the access to God that you have is a privilege? Do you know that unredeemed people have no access to Him? Do you remember what Jesus said to the unregenerate person standing before Him at judgment? Matthew 7:21-23, **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"** That's a chilling passage! Let's forget about the person who's lived their life purposefully against God. Jesus isn't referring to the atheist who's suddenly found themselves before the Lord, He's talking about a person who has lived their life under serious doctrinal error. This is a person who has convinced themselves that they're His child, and they're not. They call Him Lord, they work in His name, but Jesus says He doesn't know them. There are insiders, and there are outsiders. Listen to Revelation 22:14-15, **"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."** Who is an insider and an outsider is left up to the electing and regenerating work of God. Paul says that those in Christ were the ones who were outside, who were brought inside, Ephesians 2:13, **"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."** Do we see how being an insider is a privilege? It's not about us! It's definitely never about us getting what we deserve, it's

quite the opposite! The privilege of the believer in Christ is that we get exactly the opposite of what we deserve! On the cross, we give Jesus our sinful rap-sheet, and He gives us His holy resumé. We get the privilege of drawing near to God through Christ, Hebrews 10:19-23, **“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”**

We have the privilege of being built up as a **“spiritual house”**. The writer of Hebrews also spoke of this in Hebrews 3:6, **“But Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”** But not only do we have the privilege of being a living stone within His spiritual house, we also become a member of the **“holy priesthood”**. There are some rather major misunderstandings about the word ‘priest’, and what it means today. When we look back at the Old Testament, we see that a priest was designated as the intercessor between sinful people, and holy God. The priest (being sinful himself) was not free to commune with God but had to be ceremonially clean. The high priest was only allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies once per year, and even then, there were strict requirements and qualifications that needed to be met, unless the high priest face serious consequences. The priestly line was the Levitical priesthood, none other were permitted to be priests. The rebellious Korah and those with him had the idea that they would become priests, and God destroyed them for their effort in Numbers 16. King Saul took it upon himself to do a priestly activity, and the Lord took his kingdom from him, 1 Samuel 13:8-14, **“He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, “Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.” And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”** In 2 Chronicles 26:16-21, King Uzziah likewise usurped the role of the priesthood, and the punishment was very severe, **“But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor, and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, “It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God.” Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of incense. And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead! And they rushed him out quickly, and he himself hurried to go out, because the LORD had struck him. And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king’s household, governing the people of the land.”**

For us today, living under the new covenant, there are no limitations to the priesthood, because all believers are now priests. We all have the privilege of access to God. There are three Old Testament passages that offer significant parallels to the characteristics of the priesthood of believers today, they are: Exodus 28-29, Leviticus 8-9, and Malachi 2. We will look at portions of each momentarily. In the Exodus passage, we read of God setting the standards and principles of the office of the priesthood, as well as its functions. In the Leviticus passage, we read the description of the inauguration of men into the priestly office. Then Malachi 2 sets forth the contrast between an apostate priest, and one who is God-ordained. From these three portions of the Old Testament, we will attempt to glean six characteristics of the OT priesthood that have great relevance to our lives as New Testament priests today.

Starting with the Exodus passage, we can draw our first parallel in noting that God is sovereignly electing the priests, just as He still is today. Exodus 28:1, **“Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.”** Parallel that truth with the words of Jesus in John 15:16, **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”** Christians are not priests today because they “invited Jesus into their heart”, or “decided to follow Jesus”, all believers were chosen and appointed by God into priesthood. Another parallel that is connected to the thought of our calling from God is tied to where we were called from, let’s parallel them this time in the reverse order, beginning with the NT in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, **“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”** Paul reminds us that God didn’t choose the wise, the intelligent, the successful, the powerful, the noble. He actually chose the foolish, the weak, the low and despised, the things that are not...that’s you Christian. The same was true in the Old Testament, God chose the priesthood from the tribe of Levi, known for its sinful violence (Gen 49:5-7).

Our first character parallel is that the priesthood is chosen by God from irreputable sources, based upon nothing but God’s gracious choice, certain because of nothing intrinsic within the person. The second parallel deals with the marvelous truth that God cleansed the chosen one from sin before they embarked into the office of priest. We’ll learn of this by reading a rather lengthy chunk of Leviticus 8:6-36, **“And Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water. And he put the coat on him and tied the sash around his waist and clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him and tied the skillfully woven band of the ephod around him, binding it to him with the band. And he placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden plate, the holy crown, as the LORD commanded Moses. Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them. And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him to consecrate him. And Moses brought Aaron’s sons and clothed them with coats and tied sashes around their waists and bound caps on them, as the LORD commanded Moses. Then he brought the bull of the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull of the sin offering. And he killed it, and Moses took the blood, and with**

his finger put it on the horns of the altar around it and purified the altar and poured out the blood at the base of the altar and consecrated it to make atonement for it. And he took all the fat that was on the entrails and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with their fat, and Moses burned them on the altar. But the bull and its skin and its flesh and its dung he burned up with fire outside the camp, as the LORD commanded Moses. Then he presented the ram of the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. And he killed it, and Moses threw the blood against the sides of the altar. He cut the ram into pieces, and Moses burned the head and the pieces and the fat. He washed the entrails and the legs with water, and Moses burned the whole ram on the altar. It was a burnt offering with a pleasing aroma, a food offering for the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses. Then he presented the other ram, the ram of ordination, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. And he killed it, and Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. Then he presented Aaron's sons, and Moses put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. And Moses threw the blood against the sides of the altar. Then he took the fat and the fat tail and all the fat that was on the entrails and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with their fat and the right thigh, and out of the basket of unleavened bread that was before the LORD he took one unleavened loaf and one loaf of bread with oil and one wafer and placed them on the pieces of fat and on the right thigh. And he put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons and waved them as a wave offering before the LORD. Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering with a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD. And Moses took the breast and waved it for a wave offering before the LORD. It was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination, as the LORD commanded Moses. Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his garments, and also on his sons and his sons' garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments, and his sons and his sons' garments with him. And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and there eat it and the bread that is in the basket of ordination offerings, as I commanded, saying, 'Aaron and his sons shall eat it.' And what remains of the flesh and the bread you shall burn up with fire. And you shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination are completed, for it will take seven days to ordain you. As has been done today, the LORD has commanded to be done to make atonement for you. At the entrance of the tent of meeting you shall remain day and night for seven days, performing what the LORD has charged, so that you do not die, for so I have been commanded." And Aaron and his sons did all the things that the LORD commanded by Moses."

Every single part of the cleansing ceremony, from the washings (v.6), the sin offerings (vv. 14-17), the burnt offering (vv. 18-21), the consecration and wave offerings (vv. 22-29), all of those things indicated the same truth: No one could come towards God as a priest unless they were first cleansed from their sin. We see this paralleled by Jesus in the Upper Room with the disciples in John 13:8, "Peter said to him, 'You shall never wash my feet.'" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Paul said in Titus 2:13-14, "Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." And then a few verses later in 3:5 he wrote, "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."

The Lord calls the priesthood in both the Old and New Testament. He washes the priesthood, preparing them for service in both the Old and New Testament. Now let's see that the Lord clothes the priesthood. Exodus 28:40-43, **"For Aaron's sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty. And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh. They shall reach from the hips to the thighs; and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die. This shall be a statute forever for him and for his offspring after him."** The linen undergarments covered from the hips to the thighs, this symbolized sexual purity upon those men who (like you and I) were not pure before the eyes of the Lord. Beyond sexual sin, the truth of the matter is that those Old Testament priests (and us as well) were guilty of every kind of sin and needed a covering of every kind. The priestly garments that they wore symbolized the priests unique call to righteousness, virtue, and godliness. When a lay person would see a priest of God, dressed for service, they would conclude that this person was set apart by God for service.

While we don't have a specific dress code today for the priesthood of believers (there are appropriate standards of dress that believers should follow, I believe), we are nevertheless still clothed by the Lord today. Today, filled with the Holy Spirit of God, we are clothed in righteousness. Romans 4:5, **"And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness."** Then a few verses later in 4:11 Paul writes concerning Abraham (and all who are in him—New Testament believers), **"He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well."** The lastly a few verses later in 4:22 Paul writes again concerning Abraham, **"That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness."** But the words **"it was counted to him"** were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1:30-31, **"And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"** It's because of Him! Christ Jesus is the One who clothed us in righteousness, sanctification and redemption. It's the wonderful gospel exchange we know in 2 Corinthians 5:21, **"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."**

The Lord calls, washes, and clothes the priesthood. Now let's note that God anoints the priesthood in both the Old and New Testament. Leviticus 8:30, **"Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his garments, and also on his sons and his sons' garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments, and his sons and his sons' garments with him."** If you've ever spilt oil or blood on your clothes, you're aware that it's never coming off again. The symbolism of sprinkling them with both oil and blood was to symbolize the spiritual truth that the Lord was ever with them in both power and presence wherever they went. In the same way, we as the priesthood of believers in the New Testament are divinely anointed too. We are anointed with the Holy Spirit of God who will be with us in power and presence wherever we go, John 14:26, Jesus said, **"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you**

all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” Later in John’s first epistle, he reminded the recipients of his letter, 1 John 2:20, **“But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.”**

The Lord calls, washes, clothes, and anoints the priesthood, He also gives the priesthood access to Him that all else do not. In the OT, the priest alone had the special authority to go where none others could go and do what none others could do before the Lord. And so today, NT believers today have the spiritual privilege of entering before the throne of the Lord from any place, at any time, in prayer. While all people on the Earth are God’s creation, and He therefore cares for them, and wishes that none would perish, they do not have access to pray and be heard by Him as His redeemed priesthood does.

Another shared characteristic of the priesthood in both Testaments is that God prepares both for service. Leviticus 8:33, **“And you shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination are completed, for it will take seven days to ordain you.”** Before Aaron and his sons could function as priests, God required them to spend a time of heart preparation represented by the seven days, Ezra 7:10, **“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”** In the NT, we read of Paul’s preparation in Galatians 1:15-17, **“But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.”**

After Paul came to Christ, he possessed all the requirements to be of exemplary spiritual service to the Lord, and yet he went away for a long time of heart preparation. Ministry to the Lord must never be entered into prematurely or naively. There is a call upon us all (even the 99% of us in this room that are not, and never will be Pastors). We are all called to lead people to Christ, in our families, our church, our friend groups, our workplaces, our neighborhoods. We must therefore be active in the call to serve self-sacrificially. Jesus said in Luke 9:23-24, **“And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”** Paul pleaded with the Romans in Romans 12:1-2, **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

One last characteristic shared between the priesthood of the Old and New Testament is that God calls the priesthood in both Testaments to obedience. Leviticus 10:1-3, **“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace.”**

We’re not explicitly told what act of disobedience Nadab and Abihu did. Perhaps they used fire that was somehow unacceptable because it didn’t come from the sacred place ordained by God? Leviticus 16:12-13, **“And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of**

sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.” It could have been that they used incense that was not made according to the divine recipe, Exodus 30:34-38, **“The LORD said to Moses, “Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. You shall beat some of it very small, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you. And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the LORD. Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people.”** They might have simply become drunk in celebrating their ordination to the priesthood, Leviticus 10:9-11, **“Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.”** Regardless of the specific sin of Nadab and Abihu, we get the message from all the passages we’ve just read (and more) that the Lord is very specific about the way in which He is to be worshipped, and He expects obedience.

The same is true with the New Testament priesthood today. There is a call and expectation for obedience. Peter admonished us in the first chapter of this epistle in 1:14, **“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.”** The servant of the Lord today must be someone who has a high regard for scripture, Titus 1:9, **“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”** The servant of the Lord must be someone of integrity, Ephesians 5:8-10, **“For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”** The servant of the Lord must also leave an impression upon sinners in need reconciliation that they are ambassadors of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, **“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

The prophet Malachi embodied all of these traits, Malachi 2:6-7, **“True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.”** It’s likely that Aaron was the model that Malachi molded himself after. Malachi served in a dark day, and so do we. We too are privileged to be messengers of divine truth in this age. We would do well to model ourselves after those great men and women of the faith, so we’re ultimately molding themselves after the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many pages ago at this point, we read about the spiritual privilege of our union with Christ, and now we’ve spent quite a few pages talking about our privileged access to God as priests. Let’s close this first

of what will be three lessons on spiritual privileges by talking about one more privilege that builds upon the last, that being our spiritual sacrifices. Our home text reads in 1 Peter 2:5, **“To offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”**

The primary role of the Old Testament priest was to offer animal sacrifices on behalf of the sins of the people. The frequency and requirement of the sacrifice varied, but the purpose of every sacrifice was to point to the ultimate substitutionary sacrifice for the sin of all of God’s people in Jesus Christ. As priests living on this side of the cross, it is no longer necessary for us to carry on the pictorial sacrifices of the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews makes the cessation of the acts of the Old Testament priesthood quite clear, Hebrews 8:13, **“In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”** Then in Hebrews 9:11-15, **“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”**

As NT priests, we have the same responsibility as the OT priests did to worship and sacrifice according to the prescribed standards of the Lord. What that looks like for us today is living a life under the Lordship of Christ, where our every thought, word and deed is held captive to obedience to God according to His Word. Our prayer life ought to be one that has been shaped by the Word of God, so much so that our will is expressed in conformity to the will of God. It was Jesus who taught His disciples in the Upper Room in John 14:13-14, **“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”** When Jesus says that He’ll do anything that’s asked in His name, He isn’t binding Himself to answering every foolish and self-serving prayer offered up by anyone who binds His name to some heavenly legal contract. He means that He’ll answer any prayer that’s offered up in accordance with His will. When the sinner’s prayer from the heart is in alignment with the heart of Christ as expressed in His Word, He is delighted to answer that prayer. Christ is delighted to answer the prayer that glorifies Him. NT priests (believers) must be conformed to the image of the Lord they submit to. This life of following Christ is what Paul called a living and holy sacrifice in Romans 12:1-2, **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

This holy and living sacrifice begins when a believer humbly lays down at the feet of God in submissive service. As much as the unbeliever is prostrate before the throne of sin, the believer ought to strive to do so before the throne of God at all times. New Testament priests ought to be those who offer to God everything that they are in life, everything that they possess, and everything that they hope for. That is the total commitment, the spiritual sacrifice of a priest.

Another spiritual sacrifice that both OT and NT priests ought to make is the sacrifice of praise. Hebrews 13:15, "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." How are we to offer this praise? I believe that the one who feeds on the Word of God, and grows to understand who God is more and more, will have an abundance of things to praise God for. We ought to praise our God who is forgiving, Psalm 86:5, **"For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you."** We praise the God who made everything, Psalm 90:2, **"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."** We praise the God who is just, Psalm 92:15, **"To declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."** We praise the God who is holy, Psalm 99:9, **"Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!"** We praise the God who is eternal, Psalm 102:26-27, **"They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end."** We praise the God who is faithful, Psalm 117:1-2, **"Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!"** We praise the God who is good, Psalm 119:68, **"You are good and do good; teach me your statutes."** We praise the God who knows everything, Psalm 139:1-6, **"O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."** We praise the God who is everywhere at all times, Psalm 139:7-12, **"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you."** We praise the God who is great, Psalm 145:1-9, **"I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made."** We praise the God who is the eternal and one true God, Isaiah 44:6, **"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.'" We praise the God who is all wise, Romans 11:33, **"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"** We praise the God who is the Sovereign King over all, 1 Timothy 1:17, **"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen"** To ponder on these thoughts, and to let the truths of them impact our hearts so much so that we desire to burst forth in praise is an act of spiritual sacrifice to our great God. How much time do we spend with the Lord simply praising Him for who He is?**

Another spiritual sacrifice that we ought to be in the business of, is the sacrifice of our funds, what Hebrews 13:16 tells us, **"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."** Sharing is a specific good work that the writer of Hebrews names for us to do. Giving of our resources is a beautiful sacrifice to God. Giving sacrificially is one way that we demonstrate to the Lord that we understand that every single thing that we have in our lives is already a gift from Him. God

owns everything, and so we should think of everything that we have, as everything that the Lord has. What if we realized that the money we have in our bank account isn't even ours? Would it change the way we prioritize and dream about the future if we thought about God's kingdom first before every purchase? Every single day, we make thousands of choices, and I'd dare to say that most all of those choices could be weighed, and decided, based upon glorifying God. 1 Corinthians 10:31, **"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."** Regardless of the task, as inconsequential as you'd think eating lunch might be, do it for the praise of God. As Paul commanded the Colossians in 1:10, **"So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."** Many times we think about 'giving' as a last resort, to give from what's left. In our secular culture, investment experts recognize that people have spending problems, and are terrible savers. A common proverb that I read quite regularly is "Pay yourself first". The thought behind the teaching is to ensure that you put away for tomorrow first, and then spend the rest as you will. What the modern proverb insinuates (to my agitation) is that "you" are the most important consideration in your life. Do you realize sinner, that your heart is beating right now because God is allowing it too? Do you realize that your brain has the capacity to think as it does, your muscles have the ability to perform as they do, because God is graciously allowing those things to happen today? At any moments notice those things can, and will, stop. So when payday comes, remember that it's only by God's grace that it does. The Christian's priority ought to be to pay the Lord first, and then there is biblical wisdom in putting away for tomorrow.

Paul encouraged the saints in Corinth to give generously as the churches in Macedonia did. 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, **"We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints."** It's godly to give, not just when you have plenty, but even when you have "little" (and I quote "little" because those among us with "little" are rich to most in this world). Spiritual maturity is a heart that is not stirred up by thoughts of riches. A spiritually mature heart is one that is quite content with having enough resources to live, while being able to bless those around them and advance the kingdom of God. The apostle Paul modeled such a heart for us in Philippians 4:10-20, **"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."**

Another spiritual sacrifice that we make to the Lord, is to devote not just our assets to those around us, but also our love and time too. Jesus commanded us in Matthew 22:37-39, **"And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is**

the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.**" In John 13:34-35 Jesus said, **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."** Paul commanded one of the marks of a true Christian be, **"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."** (Rom. 12:10) Paul again speaks of this selfless love in 1 Cor. 10:24, **"Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."** There are rules, that is to say there is a definition, to properly loving someone. How we love someone is not according to our subjective understanding of the word. Paul is careful to articulate what loving your brother looks like in 1 Cor. 13:4-7, **"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."** This love for one another isn't natural to us, we're taught to love by God (1 Thess. 4:9). We're to learn from God, and imitate this love to others as a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to the Lord. Ephesians 5:1-2, **"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."**

The final spiritual sacrifice that we'll examine today is that of prayer. Much like love, prayer isn't natural, it isn't easy, and it isn't up to us to determine how it's done. Jesus was careful to teach us in Matthew 6:6, **"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."** There is a heart attitude of prayer. Jesus isn't speaking against public prayer, but against putting on a public display of piety for fleshly gain. There ought to be a time of personal, private intimacy with God, a sacrificial time spent outside the knowledge of all other people, so that none can reward the effort made. How often should we pray? Scripture teaches us that we're to pray at all times, Ephesians 6:18, **"Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints."** Who are we to pray for? We learn of this in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, **"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."** We would never draw the conclusions about how to pray, and how often to pray, and who to pray for, outside of the teaching of God's authoritative Word. And this act of prayer is a spiritual sacrifice that we're to do.

These spiritual privileges are quite a thing to behold! It's good for us to pause and reflect on just how good God has been to us, a people totally undeserving of His mercy and grace! As we begin our reflection upon the privileges that are ours in Christ, I can't help but think about Psalm 103, perhaps a fitting closing thought for these lessons:

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."