

Preparing to Be a Priest

Learning to Teach and Serve

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To begin, I want to go back in thought to last week's sermon in which I mentioned briefly that when we are preparing for a journey we must make sure we have a road map to make sure we get to wherever it is we want to go. In an overall sense, much success has been blunted because of poor preparation. If we do not have a map, we are poorly prepared, and we have to do a great deal of wandering around in order to find the proper direction we need to go.

We also all understand that each festival contains teaching within it that pertains to some aspect of God's Work. "God is working salvation in all the earth." Of course, we understand that the Holy Days give us the pattern of what it is that He is working out. Step by step we see these things unfolding.

He is not saving us just to prove that He can do it, nor is He saving us just to give us eternal life. There is a reason why He is saving us. He is saving us for a great purpose. We know, in an overall sense, that great purpose is that He is going to re-establish His government on earth. You can be sure therefore God is preparing for that event.

We know He is following a plan that is outlined by His festivals. We also know that Jesus said in John 14, "I go and prepare a place for *you*," so not only is He preparing in an overall sense for the re-establishment of His Kingdom on this earth, He is following a plan for each and every one of us as well in order that we be prepared. God is not going to be caught by surprise when suddenly Jesus says, "Is it time for *Me* to go?" No. He is preparing for it, and He is faithfully following a plan established by His purpose.

We need to think of this in relationship to you and me. Since we know these things, are *we* following a purpose to get prepared for the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth?

Whenever you project forward to the Kingdom of God, to the Millennium, what do you picture yourself doing? Whatever it is you picture yourself doing, are you consciously preparing for it, or is the Kingdom of God going to sneak up on you? Do you have anything definite in mind so that you can yield to the Potter who is shaping us? Do you not think the shaping the Potter is doing would be far more effective, would go more easily, would be faster if we knew in advance, at least in a general way, how we can yield to Him because we know where He is headed?

I think that I am not going to be too far wrong if I say to you that when we think of the Millennium we think of it in terms of rulership. We think of the Kingdom of God in terms of governing, of ruling. We may think in terms of the Parable of the Talents when we are given cities over which to rule. We think of Jesus saying this in Revelation 2: 26: "And he who overcomes, and keeps *My* works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations." Revelation 3: 21 says, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with *Me* on *My* throne." This

again is a symbol of rulership. We might think of Revelation 5:10: "And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Now, re-think that last verse. It also says we are going to be priests. Are you actively preparing to be a priest? This is a part of what we are being prepared for that we have a tendency to denigrate to second place. It seems to be overshadowed by the thoughts of ruling. But the verse says "kings *and* priests," and so we have to ask ourselves, "Are we consciously, actively preparing to be a priest?"

We might say, "Well, I thought being a priest went out with the Old Covenant, and that today we have ministers." That is true. Today we have ministers, but are not those verses that have to do with being a priest still applicable today, especially Revelation 5:10? That has very much to do with what we are to be preparing for today. There are other New Testament verses that have to do with being a priest as well.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.

I Peter 2:5 You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

That verse says that the very reason we have been called is to be a royal priesthood, and that we are to be offering up spiritual sacrifices. What that means to me is that even now we have priestly responsibilities. It *is not* something that is off in the future. Indeed, it is just as important *now* that we be a priest as it is that we rule properly. I can guarantee you that if we are not practicing being a priest right now, we are not going to be prepared. Everyone of us knows we have to practice *ruling* according to God's way right now. We also have to practice being a priest right now.

What does a priest do? What kind of functions does a priest perform? Is there any possibility that what we are doing today in this age has anything to do with preparing us to function in the world tomorrow as a priest?

Everyone of us knows that a priest offers up sacrifices to God, but is there more? We can learn a great deal from the arrangement of the various courts around the Temple in ancient Israel that Solomon built, and that Herod rebuilt. We are familiar with that because we have read histories and we have read descriptions of the way that was situated.

If you were an Israelite man, let us say, and you were approaching the Temple of God in Jerusalem, there is a path you would have to follow. The first thing that you would come to would be what is called "the Court of the Gentiles." You would pass through the Court of the Gentiles. Incidentally, that was as close as a Gentile could get to the Temple. He could not proceed inside the Court of the Gentiles. But an Israelite man could go through the Court of the Gentiles, indeed *he had* to go through the Court of the Gentiles. There was no way that he could get close to the Temple without going through it.

Inside the Court of the Gentiles was the Court of the Women. In this case, if you were an Israelite woman, you could go through the Court of the Gentiles, and you could proceed then

into the Court of the Women. An Israelite man could do that too, but he could not proceed inside that, because inside that was the Court of the Priests. In order to proceed into the Court of the Priests you had to be a priest.

Now a priest, in the carrying out of his responsibilities, was actually allowed to go up to that area just outside of the Temple proper. If he was on duty then, he could actually go inside the Temple and into the Holy Place, but only if he was carrying out his responsibility.

The high priest, one time of the year, on the Day of Atonement, had the responsibility, and indeed the very grave privilege, of traveling through the Holy Place and into the Holy of Holies to make his offering before God. That was a teaching vehicle that we would understand, that the average person did not have access to God at all.

What I want to do is use this illustration to help us understand a very important aspect of your and my future. Once the Israelite reached the Court of the Women, he then had to call upon a priest to represent him before God. The priest then functioned in that position. The term "mediating" or "mediator" appears in the Bible, and that is what a priest did. He "mediated" between the Israelite and God.

There are four things that we can learn here about a priest, and actually three of them are spin-offs of the first one, which is this:

1. A priest had access to God that the other people did not have. Now because he had access to God, we therefore understand that the priest served God personally. Think of this in relation to the world tomorrow, but do not detach it from today. Remember, you are a royal priesthood.
2. The priest ministers to others.
3. The priest was actually ministering to the average Israelite who came to him whenever he represented him before God.
4. He therefore had to have something to give. He had to have something to give to the Israelite, and he also had to have something to give to God.

We will see these things more specifically as we move along. What we are going to see then are practical applications of these functions to us today as a Christian. Now before we do that we are going to look ahead a bit into the Millennium through a couple of scriptures to get an indication of our need to get prepared for this function that we are going to perform.

Let us go to Numbers 29: 12. Numbers 28 and 29 give a listing of the sacrifices—the offerings—that were required on each one of the festivals of God. Numbers 29: 12 is talking about the Feast of Tabernacles.

Numbers 29:12-13 And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation: you shall do no servile work, and you shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: And you shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord: thirteen young bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year; they shall be without blemish.

That is typical of what God requires on every one of the festivals except for one thing, and that is the number of sacrifices required. We all agree that the Feast of Tabernacles is a type, a symbol, of the Millennium, of the rule of God on earth. What we are seeing here is a requirement to give offerings during the Feast of Tabernacles. What is so interesting is that the Feast of Tabernacles has more sacrifices required than all the other Holy Days combined. I mean, *way more* than all of the others combined. I did not take the time to total it up, but just a quick guess would be two to four times more than all of the others combined.

Since the Feast of Tabernacles represents the Millennium, and the priest is a representation of what we do, and a priest's major responsibility is to make offerings on behalf of the people before God, does that not give you some kind of a picture of how big our responsibility is going to be in the world tomorrow? There will be more sacrifices, more priestly work for you and me during the Millennium than at any other time in God's plan.

Physically, the priests offered animals. I do not want to get us zeroed in on that. We are not going to be sacrificing animals. It is the concept here of what a priest does. Incidentally, during the Feast of Tabernacles there were 172 animals sacrificed in the seven days. My concern here is what is involved in the concept of priesthood so that we understand sacrificing. A priest does a lot of it, and during the Millennium there is going to be an awful lot of sacrificing that the spiritual priesthood is going to be doing.

Let us go to the book of Obadiah.

Obadiah 21 And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

First notice the last phrase: "and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." You put that together, beginning with verse 17 ["But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions"], we are talking about a millennial circumstance.

God's Kingdom is going to be on earth, and He says "saviours," plural, are going to be on Mount Zion, and they are going to be judging. That ought to open some eyes. We know that a ruler judges, but "saviors" are going to be judging as well. I think that we all are somewhat familiar with Micah 4:5. We will not turn to it, but it talks about each person worshipping or operating in the name of his god. This certainly gives the indication that it is not talking about the Father or the Son there, but *others* who are also God. There is a principle here.

Let us turn to the book of Nehemiah. Just remember *saviors, judging, Millennium*, we are putting some things together in the book of Nehemiah. This is not millennial, but it is a recounting of the history of Israel. Nehemiah is actually praying here, and he is recounting what happened in the past.

Nehemiah 9:27 Therefore you (God) delivered them into the hand of their enemies [when Israel sinned], who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble when they cried unto you, you heard them from heaven;

and according to your manifold mercies you gave them *saviours* who saved them out of the hand of their enemies.

As Nehemiah is recounting in his prayer to God, those saviours he was referring to were people like Gideon, Samson, Ehud, Joshua, and Moses. God gave them leaders that He in turn inspired, in order to deliver Israel from the terrible circumstance they were in. I want you to put the thought of Obadiah, verse 21, into the Millennium and our responsibility as a king and as a priest, into the concept of *saving*, into the concept of *judging*, and into the concept of *teaching* (which we will see in a minute), and what is involved in what God is doing.

Remember Obadiah again, and many other places in the Bible how that God shows that Israel is going to go into captivity at the beginning of the Tribulation. They are going to be scattered all over the world in slavery. They are going to be regathered, and they are going to be brought back to Israel, weeping, in a repentant state. But then what happens? Who is going to be their saviors? Who is going to be their deliverers? Who is going to be judging them? Who is going to be teaching them?

You see, all praise, honor, and glory of all the functionaries carrying this out, of course, begins in God. But why do you think He is preparing you and me? He is not going to do it all Himself. He is going to follow the patterns He established in the past, only He is going to do it with those who are *greater* than Joshua, *greater* than Gideon, *greater* than Samson, *greater* than Ehud, *greater, greater, greater, GREATER* even than John the Baptist! He is going to do it with leaders, with saviors, with king-priests who are just like Him. Indeed, they are His sons.

James 5:20 Let him know, that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

James 5:20 actually brings the function down to the present because it tells us there that if one turns a sinner from his way, he covers a multitude of sins. He is explaining in that verse that there is the possibility for us to play a role in actually helping to lead someone out of a very difficult sin.

Are you beginning to get a concept of what God has done in the past? I want us to understand that God follows the patterns He establishes, and that He is not going to deviate from these patterns. The reason He will not deviate from them is He established the patterns so that we can understand the kind of function that we are going to play in the World Tomorrow.

Isaiah 30:19-21 For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: [He is regathering people out of their captivity.] You shall weep no more: [Jeremiah tells us they come back weeping.] He will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry; [Remember Nehemiah, that when the people cried out to Him, He rescued them. He sent deliverers. He sent saviors to them.] When He shall hear it, He will answer you. [How did He answer their prayers? He answered by sending a Moses. He

answered by sending a Joshua. He is going to follow the pattern. What is He going to do in the world tomorrow?] And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not your teachers be removed into a corner any more, ['The Moses' will not die. The Joshuas will not die and be replaced by somebody inferior. The Gideons will not die, and so forth.] but your eyes shall see your teachers: [This is an expression of longevity because they are going to be eternal.] And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk you in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left.

We see added here to the function of these saviors these king-priests teaching.

We can learn still more about the function of a priest from the Old Testament. Just to anchor us in the New, and the purpose that God is working out, be reminded that in the book of Hebrews the apostle Paul used the Aaronic priesthood as a type of the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. From that we can draw an understanding that even as the Aaronic high priesthood had priests serving under him, so Jesus Christ, in the Melchizedek priesthood, is also going to have a priesthood serving under Him. So neither Aaron nor Jesus Christ served alone. They had those functioning under them, assisting them in their office, and doing things very similar to what the High Priest was doing, only on a lesser more specific level.

In Hebrews 9, after describing some of the furniture that was in the old tabernacle, it says:

Hebrews 9:9 Which was a figure [a type, a symbol] for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.

It carried out through a pattern that God was establishing so that we could understand *our* function when the *real* purpose began to be worked out.

Hebrews 10:1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

In Galatians 3:24 we find where this function under the Old Covenant is made very clear.

Galatians 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.

We are supposed to learn those things because the patterns are established there.

The primary function of a priest then is to assist people in accessing God. There is a reason for

this, and that is so there can be *union* with God. The priest does this through being a mediator, reconciling between God and men, and being a teacher of a way of life in order to improve upon the reconciliation built at the beginning.

I am going to say that again: The primary function of a priest is to assist people in accessing God. He does this so that there can be union with God. The priest does this through being a mediator, reconciling between God and men. The key word here is "reconciles." A mediator reconciles. He brings together. In this case he brings together God and men. A secondary function is that of being a teacher of the way of life in order to improve upon the reconciliation that has been established. We see a 2-step function here: (1) So that there can be union with God so they can be one, and (2) the reconciliation is built upon to improve the relationship. It requires, then, teaching. A priest not only reconciled, but he also counseled Israel so that Israel would be able to get through the trials of life.

You might recall we read in Obadiah 21 that these saviors were going to judge. Also recall in my sermon last week I said to you that God is judging us, not to lose us, but He is judging us to correct us. He evaluates where we stand, and from this learns what *He* needs to do, and what *we* need to do in order to make the union better, stronger. Are you beginning to get the picture clear about what a priest is going to do? We are going to be kings. We are going to be priests. We are not only going to rule, we are going to carry out the functions of one who mediates and builds upon the reconciliation through teaching.

Leviticus 1:3-5 If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering: and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

Verse 7 mentions the sons of Aaron, the priests, once again. In verses 9, 11, 12, and 13 it again mentions the priests. From this we see a pattern established, that the average Israelite functioned in his relationship with God through a priest. Now answer this for yourself: Is it any different today? Do you not function in your relationship with God through a priest—through our High Priest who sits at the right hand of the Majesty on High—who is King-High Priest? Our relationship with God functions through Him.

What we are seeing in what God is doing is not only the expansion of His family for the purpose of ruling, but also the expansion of His family for the second aspect of our work, which is to be a priest. As we prepare for the one, we also have to prepare for the other as well.

You might recall that symbolically the church is the Temple. Let us bring the Temple back into this picture of the living God, and that under the Old Covenant the very object of the Temple's existence was, above all, the place of sacrifice. God listed that the average Israelite's relationship with God functioned at the door of the Temple *through* sacrifice, which the priest

handled.

In I Corinthians 3:17 Paul refers to the church as the temple of God *collectively*, as an entire body made up of many parts. In II Corinthians 6 Paul refers to the *individual* as the temple of God. In the biblical analogy, the pattern is being broken ever more finely. In the Old Testament we have a building established as the place of God's residence. In the New Testament we find that the body collectively—the church—is the house in which God lives. We also find that each individual is also the house in which God lives. Remember Jesus said, "We will take up our abode in him."

Let us feed something back into this again, and that is that above all, the Temple is the place of sacrifice, and it is the priest who functions, operating these things. You see how this beautiful picture is being woven together. You are a priest. You are the Temple. *You* are the place of sacrifice. *You* are the one doing the sacrificing. All of it is being done in relation to God.

Our English word "priest" actually has its roots in a Latin word. It came out of the Latin. It did not come out of the Greek. It did not come out of Hebrew. It has a brief, but interesting background. It comes from the Latin word which you will recognize immediately: "pontiff." The pope is the pontifex maximus. He is the high priest. Pontiff means "bridge-builder." That is literally what it means. The high priest is the bridge-builder between man and God. A priest is a bridge-builder. What that describes is a priest's function. He aids the Israelites in accessing God. He proves to be the bridge between the two. He is the mediator.

According to *Webster's*, "Sacrifice is an act of offering to deity something precious. It is a gift to God. It is the destruction or surrender of something for the sake of something else." That is clear enough, but sacrifice is a much-abused term because it is, unfortunately, most frequently associated with the death of a victim. When we think of sacrifice in biblical terms, we think of an animal having its throat cut and blood spilling out.

We think of Jesus being beaten until He is bleeding from every portion of His body, and finally having a spear stuck in Him, and blood and water coming out, and He dies. That is not wrong. I am not here to tell you that is wrong. It may even come to mind that Jesus Himself said "Greater love has no man that he should lay down his life for his friends." We immediately think of death, but I wonder: is that all He meant within the framework, within the scope of that concept?

Our usage of the term "sacrifice" has to broaden to include the thought of the offering of life for the offering of a life *lived*; that is, conveying the concepts of dedication, of devotion, and commitment to service. Either way then that one wants to look at it, in the taking away of life (that is, in death), or the giving of one's life in devotion, there is no more precious gift than the giving of one's life.

There is no doubt that a priest serves. Jesus is High Priest, and He certainly serves the heirs of salvation; however, if a priest gives up his life in death, his service ends. It can go no further. What God is primarily interested in is living priests who serve through the sacrifice of time, energy, gifts, and service, that their lives as a function are dedicated, devoted to doing those things.

In the Old Testament ritual the sacrifices were an expression of a religious truth that is not brought out until we get to the New Testament in which it is not the slaughter of a victim that we see, but rather the giving of a life in some form of service, whether to God, or to man, or to God and man at one and the same time. A sacrifice is a means of giving a gift to God, and there is one reason, and one reason only, why sacrifices are given to God. Sacrifices are given to God, (I extract this from the Bible), "in order that there might be fellowship with God." That is so clear.

Why did Jesus Christ give His life? That is the only reason why sacrifice to God is given. Sacrifice then, in the Bible, is shown to be either a basis for, or a means by which, fellowship with God can begin, or to continue a fellowship that has already begun. In the giving of a sacrifice, in the doing of it, there is then the unstated consciousness that fellowship with God is not an unbroken union, but one that needs to be renewed. There is a reason why this is so.

II Corinthians 4:16 For which cause we faint not [we do not lose heart]: but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

Do you see what that is saying? Once fellowship with God is established, and it is established through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that is not enough. The fellowship has to be built upon. In order for it to continue it has to be renewed day by day. In other words, the sacrificing has to continue. Our relationship with God then is not constant, because we are not unchanging as God is. Our attitudes fluctuate. Our faith increases. Our faith decreases. Our love, joy, and peace increase and decrease in their intensity. Now sacrifice plays a major role in all of these factors because these things are not constants with you and me, and so they have to be renewed day by day. Sacrifice plays a major role in that, whether it be the sacrifice of Christ, and, whereas we are going to see our own personal sacrifice as well. So then a conclusion is that a sacrifice is then seen either as a means of reconciling or a means of strengthening that which already exists. They are seen as a necessary means of becoming or continuing at-one-ment with God.

Let us add another factor to this. In the Old Testament the gifts are arranged in the order of their value. An animal was of greater value than a vegetable. Consider Cain and Abel's offering. Abel gave one that was acceptable. Cain gave one that was unacceptable for that circumstance. It might have been acceptable in a different circumstance. In this circumstance, you see, it was arranged in order of priority. In Leviticus 1, 2, and 3, they are arranged there. A bullock is of greater value than a ram. Do you see that? There is a principle here.

Let us step up even higher. The offering of a son is of greater value than the offering of an animal. When Isaac was offered by Abraham that was far greater value than the offering of a lamb, or a ram, or a bullock. In this case God was not going to accept anything less than the best. In the case of Abraham and Isaac, it had to be the offering of what was nearest and dearest to Abraham's heart. From this we learn that it is not just the value of the gift, but the relative cost to the giver to which God reserves the greatest importance of all. And so in this case, a widow's two mites can be a greater offering than all of the silver and gold the wealthy were able to give. From this we can extract another principle. The greatest gift of all is

self-sacrifice.

John 10:17-18 Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Brethren, even as Christ, you have received the same commandment from our Father. Jesus set the perfect pattern in this, and this is what the New Testament teaches for all of His followers. This, incidentally, is exactly what the Old Testament also teaches as well. But what we see here clearly, taught by Jesus, is that His death was wholly voluntary, and yet at the same time completely and totally in accord with the Father's will.

In brief then, He suffered and died because He willed to do it. He did it in order to show that He was in agreement with the Father's purpose. Therefore, the whole plan that Jesus carried out was motivated by His love for the Father. The word that is translated "power" here means that He was not a helpless victim. He had both the right and the power to become the instrument of reconciliation between men and God, and that is the way He went. He set His will to do that. What this means is that Jesus then saw His whole life as an act of obedience to God. God had given Him a task to do, and He was prepared to spend it all the way to the end, even if it cost Him His life, and it did.

II Samuel 24:24 And [David] the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which does cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

From this verse we can extract a principle that from it we can understand, at least in part, the reason why God said David was a man after His own heart. When David was preparing to build the Temple he purchased what is now the Temple mount from a man by the name of Araunah. Araunah certainly knew who David was. When David the king came to purchase his land, Araunah wanted to give it to him. He not only wanted to give him the land, he wanted to give him animals to make offerings to God, and David rejected the offer. From