**Priesthood of the Believer**

**Intro –** In the years from the 4th century AD onward, the church became very man-organized and man-centered. It grew away from the simple, powerful church which Jesus started into a monstrosity of huge buildings, unbiblical rites, and professional clergy. In the process, the role of New Testament priest was taken out of the hands of the “laity” and concentrated in a relatively few professional priests. Today we will look at the priesthood which each believer was intended to fulfill, perhaps learning how to regain that which was lost.

**Exodus 19:6** – God told Moses to tell the nation of Israelites that they (all of them, and each one individually) would be a kingdom of *priests*. *A priest is someone who connects sinful man to the Holy God*. Before Jesus, there was no way for a human being to have anything to do with God. After Adam fell, man was separated from God due to sin. The Lord communicated with man by appearing to a small number of carefully chosen people, starting with Abraham. Later, Moses, and others, like Daniel, had personal visitations from God or his angel. The only way which the average Israelite could know about God was through one of these men. They fulfilled the role of *priest* by connecting sinful Israelites to God. They did this through teaching, i.e., using the demonstration of God’s power and prophetic words. Notice that God’s intent was to use ALL the Israelites as priests, not just the ones consecrated for the service at the tabernacle. No doubt God wanted each Israelite to teach his neighbor and brother to know the Lord (**Jeremiah 31:34**), thus connecting them to God. This was the first hint of *the branch group* or *house-church* activityin the entire Bible. The Israelites came into contact with few foreigners during this period, so their only clientele for ministry would have been fellow Israelites. Since the Tabernacle was yet some years in the future, they obviously were to meet in their tents and connect their brothers and sisters to God. We typically look past this priestly house ministry and focus on the tabernacle and its consecrated priests, seeing it as some kind of present day pattern for the church. God never meant for us to imitate the structure of the tabernacle. It was the next level up from the meeting of neighbors in a family tent, probably a “type” of today’s congregation meeting. **Isaiah 61:6** says the same thing as Exodus 19, i.e., that each Israelite would be a priest. They would be envied by the nations and be treated royally. The Israelites fell far short of that intent, sadly.

**1 Peter 2:5-6 –** This amazing scriptureshows that the church which Jesus is building is indeed a kingdom of priests. Each and every believer is a priest, with a priestly ministry! What on earth is this “priestly ministry?” Here we learn that we offer up sacrifices. Three things at least are spoken of as sacrifices in other New Testament Scriptures: 1) changed, redeemed lives given as a *living sacrifice* (**Romans 12:1**), 2) *the sacrifice of praise* from our lips **(Hebrews13:15-16**), 3) *prayer*, associated closely with incense (**Rev 8:3-4**). Incense was a costly sacrifice used in the tabernacle.

**The changed lives** come from our teaching ministry to people around us, probably mostly Christians. It is interesting that the early church had no evangelism program. The life they had *in their homes* was all that was needed! That’s where they brought people who were being added. They lived out their lives in front of coworkers and foreigners and invited to their homes those who God was drawing. They didn’t have a church building as we know it today. As their circle of acquaintances grew, *congregations* formed (probably up to 200 people) and they just used larger spaces, like the upper room in Acts 2, in homes which had them. Occasionally Christians across an entire city would gather to hear an apostle, probably like Paul in Ephesus. *.* There were no denominations. There shouldn’t be any today. We call this a *celebration.* The Israelites probably experienced a similar dynamic when they marched to a new location or went to war. It was a relatively rare occasion for the whole nation to interact together on anything.

**The sacrifice of praise** is not just singing a few songs or shouting “Hallelujah!” occasionally. It is probably less *sung* and more *said*, especially in communication with the poor, with whom we share our goods as a sacrifice. Our culture has majored on the congregation meeting, with its relatively impersonal sermon-listening and singing, as a substitute for sharing love in a home. We shun involvement, because involvement means expense.

**Prayer** is mostly about getting to know someone and their need. The actual request part is the smaller task. We have it flipped around. It is not hard to take some time to pray for others. It IS a sacrifice to get to know them and the depth of their need. Jesus was face-to-face with most of the people He prayed for. Many he knew nothing about. He could not pray for them! He had given His ability to know everything to His Father during His time on earth. This is just like us!

**Concl** – Jesus is restoring the believer to his priesthood. It starts by dedicating your home for God’s use.