

HOPE GIVERS: PT 5. MINISTERS OF LIFE

What do you associate with this word; Priest. male? Gowns? Holy? Minister? Anglican?

The Bible makes a profound claim that arcs across it from beginning to end. We are priests. I think this is a fundamental truth, that has been ignored. Israel ignored it, the early church got it, but then lost it for centuries until the reformation and there is a huge danger that the church today has lost it again.

God Called Israel as a people to be a nation of priests. **Exodus 19:6.** They were to lead lives that would be a light to the nations. They were not chosen because they were any better than any other nation, but so that God's purposes could be worked out through them. They were to care for one another, worship only God, and not a whole multitude of gods, they were to create a community where the poor were cared for, the foreigners welcomed, and where there was justice for all. This was to show others who God was.

Now it is important to remember the context. For 400 years, the people had been in slavery. Then 3 months after God says. I have rescued you from slavery. Now I am calling you to be priest. From slave to a priest is radical change

From this point on we read of certain persons serving as priests for the nation. For centuries, priests were the representatives of the people before God. The priests offered sacrifices to God for the people. Only the priests went behind the curtain into the most sacred place—the holy of holies. Priests as mediators between the people and God became the Old Testament way. But the nation failed to live up their calling and God sent them into exile. Now this passage in Isaiah is calling Israel back to be priests. Isaiah 61:6 This is a kingdom passage so this is referring to us.

After Isaiah, the rest of the OT goes back to talking of priests as individuals. The only mention of priests is that Jesus continually clashed with them. Paul never talks about priests at all. (Possibly because of the negative association.) But he does talk about the saints all the time. He addresses the church as the saints, holy and set apart which is priestly language.

Hebrews talks about priests a lot. (45 times) He says that Jesus became our High priest. 2:17, 3:1, 4:14-15, 5:5,9,10, 6:20, 7:16, 27, 28, 9:11, 10:11, 12, 21

Peter though spells it out clearly He wrote to Christians who were being persecuted in Asia Minor reminding them they were to be obedient to Jesus Christ. Then he reminds them of who they are. 1 Peter 2:5 1 Peter 2:9-10. Then we get to Revelation. This idea of us being priests is repeated again. Rev 1:5-6, 5:10, 20:6

The power of the early church was that fact they got this. Priestly deeds were not limited by gender, age, or social status. Peter reminded the crowd at Pentecost that God would pour out his Spirit on men and women, young and old, slave and free (Acts 2:17-18). God did not just give a few people special anointing. It was not just the male priests. It was everyone.

But within a few centuries priests had become prominent as the heads of the church. There is nothing about this in the NT at all. (only Pastors, deacons, elders.) But somehow things got distorted. Priests were men, the ones running churches, and then it was decided they could not get married and were the only ones who could give communion.

By the time you get to the 1500's priests were often very powerful. They had become the sole mediators between God and the people. They were the only ones who could offer communion and grant forgiveness from the confessional and absolution. Often they are very corrupt and led immoral lives. While some were educated, and so could teach from the Bible, which was kept in Latin, others had no education at all. One key practice was the church sold indulgences that would give you forgiveness.

The Reformation which birthed protestant churches came about when Martin Luther became deeply troubled by what he saw within the church. He stressed 3 key things. 1. Scripture is the sole source of authority. 2. Salvation was by faith alone. 3. Priesthood of all believers. Each individual, not just priest had total access to God, Holy Spirit and was equal to any one else. All believers served as priests.

Now we can listen to the distortions of the past, and say; we have it right now, we believe in the priesthood of all believers. But I am not sure we have fully grasped this and here are seven reasons why I say this.

We believe we are not good enough. This is the first reaction of many people if I told them to be a priest or minister. But no one is good enough. Christ died for your sin and in God's eyes you are perfect. There is not some standard that we have to reach in order to be good enough. God has taken your weakness, your failings, your sin, your brokenness, and he has absorbed it on the cross. This idea stops half of all Christians from doing anything. If God only used people who were good enough, he would not be able anything at all. God will use you if you are willing, not if you are good enough.

We put pastors on a pedestal

Everybody that has been bought up in a church knows the hierarchy. At the top are missionaries then ministers are the next best thing. When they visit someone, people are comforted. When they pray for someone, people are healed. When they speak, God speaks. They are anointed



ones, who never sin, or doubt, and they have perfect wives, marriages, and children. They have God's direct dial number. This has led to many pastors becoming unaccountable and then falling.

We have not allowed women to lead in the church.

Now we do in this church. However, until quite recently women have felt marginalized in church. Do we believe the Spirit of God falls on all believer and gives his gifts to all people or not. This is a far wider subject, I realize, but it is yet another way that we have not taken this theology seriously.

We fail to take responsibility for our spiritual health

Individually we are responsible before God for our spiritual health. No person can interfere with that relationship. It is not up to the pastor to spiritually feed you. You must learn how to spiritually feed yourself. You must read the Bible yourself, and not rely on others reading it for you on a Sunday morning. You must build your own relationship with God and not rely on the pastor. The role of church leadership is to equip believers, not to do everything for believers. Church leaders are to equip you so that you can grow to maturity which is When you can feed yourself and others.

We glorify ministry in the church We have created this secular spiritual divide. Many believers think that to work in the church is the ultimate rank because you are doing spiritual work. All we do we do for the glory of God. No role of service is higher than another. And ministry simply means serving God. Serve God wherever we are. WE are priests in our workplace by serving God, loving others, sharing about him and living holy lives.

We abdicate our responsibility to minister. We think the pastor should do ministry. Every day your primary calling is to serve God. You do not work for your boss. Primarily you work for God. He is your boss. You listen to him. You obey him. You honor him. You are a priest and minister and a servant of the Lord most high. Your role is to be a priest, representing God to the community, and the community to God. Your role is to give honour and glory to God in all you do.

You are a priest, set apart by God and for God. Your primary calling is to bring glory to God. Yet somehow we abdicate our role, and think that the paid pastor is to do this. You are a minister of hope and life.

We ignore the privilege of access. We take so casually the fact that we have been given access to the very throne room of God. That is a privilege beyond description. We have direct access into the very presence of God. This is the God who is perfect, all powerful, all mighty, all knowing, is holy beyond measure. This is the God who in the OT his presence filled the temple and the people fell prostrate to the ground. This is the God who is before time and after time,

who was there at the beginning of the universe and will be there at the end.

We have total and unrestricted access to God, who welcomes us as his children. And yet often do we ignore this incredible access or casually take for granted this access.

The idea of the priesthood of all believers was and is a foundational belief for the Baptist church. It is what historically set the Baptist church apart from Catholic church and other denominations. Every person could read the word of God themselves and could come to their own view. Believers were not under the authority of the church. Every believer could hear the mind of God, and so every member could have input into church decisions, not just a special few. There were and are no priests or reverends in a Baptist church. A person might be called to lead, or teach, or pastor, but they were not set above someone else.

There is a real danger that people in my role actually perpetuate these falsehoods. We put on a false spiritual front. We make out that only we can do ministry because we are the only ones trained. We don't equip others for fear of being made redundant. We seek privilege because it makes us feel good. We make church center around us.

Let me summarize this chapter

Jesus is going to come and minister grace and hope to all who are struggling. He will take the mess of your life and make something beautiful out of it. You will be God's beloved, whom he delights in. You will become like an oak, solid and strong, and giving glory to God. You will be joined by people from all nations. You will become a priesthood, serving me in all you do as you go about your lives. As you do this, you will become people who transform cities that the enemy is wreaking havoc on. New life will spring up everywhere as God's kingdom grows.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- What hinders you from seeing yourself as a minister?
- Discuss each of the 7 indicators that we have not grasped the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers? Do you agree with them? How relevant are they? How does Central fare?
- Brainstorm to find 7 indicators that would show a church has embraced the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers? How does Central fare on these?
- Baptist church structure is designed to value this doctrine. How does it compare to other church forms of government? What are the pros and cons?
- Read the summary of Isaiah 61 given. Is it accurate? Does it inspire? Challenge?
- What will you take from this series on Isaiah 61?



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