

UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD

Scripture Reading:

Hymn: 913

1 Pet 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Rev. 5:9 And they sing a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have purchased for God by Your blood men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Rev. 5:10a And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God.

I. The whole body serving being the greatest recovery today - 1Pet. 2:9:

- A. The loss and the recovery of the priesthood:
 - 1. God securing the place of rest through the priests.
 - 2. God calling the Israelites to be a kingdom of priests.
 - 3. The Israelites having failed, the priesthood becoming the special privilege of the tribe of Levi.
 - 4. In the New Testament, God intending the church to be the kingdom of priests.
 - 5. The church today not having arrived at God's goal yet.
- B. The way today being for the whole body to serve.
- C. The whole body taking the gospel as our center.
- D. Realizing the glory and grace of serving God.

II. The history of the priesthood and its changes:

- A. God's salvation being to obtain a kingdom of priests – Exo. 19:6.
- B. The degradation of the Israelites Resulting in a kingdom of priests becoming a tribe of priests – Exo. 32:1-29; Num. 8:5-19.
- C. In the New Testament, God's desire being for the church to be a kingdom of priests. – 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6.

III. All redeemed ones needing to serve God:

- A. All the saved ones serving God.
- B. A person needing to forsake everything to serve God as soon as He is saved
(1 Cor. 12:18) Matt. 19:22.
- C. The whole Body consecrating, ushering in a thorough service.

IV. The universal priesthood of the New Testament – Rev. 5:9-10a; 1 Pet. 2:5:

- A. Everyone preaching the gospel – Matt. 28:19.
- B. Everyone attending the home and group meetings – Heb. 10:24-25.
- C. Everyone prophesying for the Lord – 1 Cor. 14:26, 31.

Reference: *The Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry*, Vol. 2, Messages 47, 61; *New Testament Priests of the Gospel*, Chapter 3.

Excerpts from the ministry:

THE WHOLE BODY SERVING BEING THE GREATEST RECOVERY TODAY

We have to see that if the one-talented ones do not rise up to serve, there is no way for the church to go on. The priesthood is a universal priesthood. This is the greatest recovery of this (20) century. Many people think that the matter of service is the work of a few people, but true service is that in which the whole Body is involved (1 Pet. 2:9). As long as this matter is not fully recovered, we have to go on speaking.

The Loss and the Recovery of the Priesthood

The priests are the ones who serve God. Those who serve God are called the priests. They may do a lot of other works, but none of those works can be considered true service. Only one thing is true service, and that is to dwell in the temple. In the Old Testament, there was the tabernacle. After the tabernacle, there was the temple. Within the temple, there was the dwelling of the priests. The book of Psalms mentions seven or eight times the matter of dwelling on the house of Jehovah. The work of the priests was to go to God on behalf of men and to go to men on behalf of God. In order for God to be among men, to dwell with men, and to find rest among men, He has to have the priests. Only when God secures the priests will He find a resting place.

The holy place and the priesthood are the twofold requirements of God. The work of the priests is to serve God, and the holy place is the dwelling place for the priests; it is also the dwelling place of God. Melchisedec was a priest of God. But he was alone, and he could not satisfy God. What God wants is a kingdom of priests. This is why He called out a people and brought them through the Red Sea into the wilderness. The purpose was to secure for Himself a kingdom of priests (Exo. 19:6). In God's eyes, God's people and the priesthood are one and the same thing. God desires that the whole nation of Israel be a priesthood. As long as a person is one of His people, he should be a priest. This is why Moses told Pharaoh, "Let my people go, that they may serve me" (Exo. 8:1; 9:1). Every one of God's people is there to serve God. As such, every one of them should be a priest.

The law is God's testimony. What the law gives to man is what man ought to give to God. The law is God's testimony for Himself. Whatever God says to man, man should say the same thing to God. The law says that the children of Israel should be a kingdom of priests. Yet before the law was passed on to the hands of the Israelites, while it was still in the hands of Moses, the Israelites had fallen and had worshipped the golden calf. After Moses came down from the

mountain, he ordered all the men to kill their own brothers and sisters. The Levites did according to what Moses said and killed over three thousand people. As a result of this, God chose the tribe of Levi to be the priests (Exo. 32:1-28; Deut. 33:8-10). Originally, it was a kingdom of priests. Now only one out of twelve tribes was to be the priests. From that time on, apart from the tribe of Levi, no one had the right to be priests. In the book of Judges, even when men had money, they could only hire the Levites as priests for them; they themselves could not be priests. In the Old Testament, one king tried to be a priest and was smitten with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-20). All those who serve according to their own will, will be smitten. To serve God is both a privilege and a right.

What the Israelites had lost is today regained by the church. God desires that the church today be the kingdom of priests. Peter said that we are a royal priesthood and a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5). In Revelation, the apostle John said that we are all priests (Rev. 1:6). All the gold and silver are for the temple and the tabernacle; they are not for the golden calf. No one should worship a calf, not even the golden calf. A man has to learn to execute God's judgment and to deal with the golden calf. Only by this dealing will the real service be produced, and only then will the "Levites" rise up.

Today not everyone is serving yet. Only when the priests and the people become one entity is there the church. Our service today is only the service of three or five people; it is not the service of the whole Body. We have become the Jewish nation of today, with only one tribe serving, while the other eleven tribes rely on the service of the Levites. Other than the "Levites," no one else is qualified to serve any longer. Yet God's desire is that the whole Body would serve.

The Way Today Being for the Whole Body to Serve

My co-worker brothers, no matter how prevailing your ministry is, how many gifts you have, and how useful and strong you are, as long as you replace others' service, you are a Nicolaitan! Not only do you have nothing to boast of; you have to confess your sin instead. Personal godliness not only does nothing to build up the church; it actually tears down the church. The way of the work, the proper way, is to help every brother and sister to do the work himself or herself. It is not a question of much service or little service. It is a question of everyone serving. Unless we are all serving together, we are not the church. This is our way today. It has to be the church that is working. It has to be the church that is preaching the gospel. It has to be the church that is saving the souls. No matter how well you work, as long as you are replacing others, you are one of the Nicolaitans. With you there is only the ministry; there is no

church. Even if you are a so-called spiritual giant or a revival evangelist, if you do not bring in the service of the whole Body, whatever you do, you are a failure.

The Whole Body Taking the Gospel As Our Center

The gospel is our occupation. Everything else is done on the side only. We have to take the gospel as our center. Our occupation is only to keep ourselves alive and to sustain our body to live on this earth; the purpose of our occupation is for the gospel. The real preaching of the gospel is done by the whole Body. The preaching of the gospel by three or five cannot be considered the real preaching. What we need today is for the whole Body, that is, everyone, to preach the gospel. If the brothers and sisters see that the church is a Body, they will not be individualistic any longer. The most blessed and happy thing is to give oneself to the gospel. Only when our money is with God will we be joyful. Many people may have too many material riches with them. This is why they are not happy. If they would lose some of what they have, their joy will increase. This is a great matter. The question is not whether one's occupation is high or low. The question is: "What are we here for?" Some work in their jobs, while others take care of their families at home. But everyone has to give his all for the gospel. (*The Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry*, pp. 338-342)

Realizing the Glory and Grace of Serving God

Brothers, how should we answer God's call? In the old days, men tried to usurp the priesthood. Today, the priesthood is in our hands already. Are we going to cast it aside? What the Israelites had lost was lost; they could not recover it any longer. Are we going to make the service of God something cheap in our hands? For some, service to God is a matter of granting God a favor. But we have to see that for God to allow us to serve Him is His grace and favor on us. When a man does not see the glory of serving the Lord, he calculates everything. But when he sees the glory of serving Him, he would kneel before God to beg for this service. Recently the newspaper said that China Textile Corporation is issuing new shares. When the stock market is up, everyone wants to buy. As long as they have money, they would put it into the market. Do we see the glory of serving God today? Those who see it will surely give their all for it. (*The Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry*, pp. 342-343)

THE HISTORY OF THE PRIESTHOOD AND ITS CHANGES

God's Saving the Children of Israel to Make them a Kingdom of Priests

God said explicitly that He would make the Israelites a kingdom of priests (Exo. 19:6). The priests are those who wait on God and follow God. No one else is able to come as close to God as the priests can. Their job is to serve God. The Israelites were to be a kingdom of priests; the whole nation was to be priests.

The priests' eating, their living, and their slaughtering of the bulls and the goats were all for the purpose of serving God. The proper profession of the priests was to serve God; everything else was a sideline. They were not working as teachers, doctors, or in any other professions. Exodus 19 tells us that God intended that all the Israelites, old or young, great or small, male or female, were to be the priests.

The goal of God's salvation is to gain the priests (Rev. 1:5-6a). The blood of the Passover lamb delivered the Israelites with the goal of obtaining and ushering in a kingdom of priests. The greatest calling and also the greatest grace is that men can serve God as priests. As many as there were who left Egypt, the same number were to serve God. As many as there were who reached Sinai, that many should swerve the Lord. (*The Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry*, pp. 461-462)

The Degradation of the Israelites

Resulting in a Kingdom of Priests Becoming a Tribe of Priests

At the bottom of the mountain, the Israelites worshipped the golden calf and sinned against God. As a result, Moses told the people to kill their own brothers. However, only the Levites obeyed Moses' words, and they killed three thousand people (Exo. 32:1-29). The loss of three thousand men was not the greatest loss. The greatest loss was that the people could not all be priests any longer. Originally, it was twelve tribes who were to be the priests. Now only one tribe was left (Num. 8:5-19). Originally, it was to be a kingdom of priests. Now it became a tribe of priests. The Levites did not care for human feelings or sentiments, and they stood on God's side. As a result, they gained the priesthood. Here we see that some had forsaken their priesthood. They had forsaken it through the worship of the idol; they established another worship.

In the New Testament,

God's Desire Being for the Church to Be a Kingdom of Priests

Eleven out of twelve tribes were kept outside the tabernacle, and only the tribe of Levi was admitted into the tabernacle. This lasted until the New Testament, when Peter said in his first Epistle, "But you are...a royal priesthood" (2:9). Now everyone becomes a servant of God.

At the end of the New Testament, in A.D. 95, when John was about to die, he said that we have been made “a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (Rev. 1:6). God's intention toward the church today is for everyone to be a priest. We are a kingdom of priests. What the Israelites had lost, God is recovering through the church. Through their unfaithfulness, the Israelites lost the priestly kingdom. God's intention today is for every Christian to be recovered to be a priest. (*The Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry*, p. 463)

ALL REDEEMED ONES NEEDING TO SERVE GOD

At present, among God's children there seems to be a common phenomenon that only a certain group of people are serving. However, God's word says that everyone who belongs to God is a servant of God. When the Israelites were in Egypt serving as slaves, they did not have any freedom. God delivered them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea for the purpose that they would serve Him in the wilderness (Exo. 3:18). The number of people under the blood was the number of people who left Egypt. The number of saved ones was the number of serving ones. When the Israelites left Egypt, they brought all the gold and silver with them (Exo. 12:35-36). Hence, as many as there were who were redeemed, that many served God in material offerings, and that many followed the tabernacle. It was not just a minority who served. Both in the Old Testament and in the New as well, there was not a distinction between the serving ones and the non-serving ones. Only degraded Christianity makes a distinction between the serving ones and the non-serving ones. (*The Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry*, p. 461)

All the Saved Ones Serving God

Any service that is not in the nature of a priestly kingdom is wrong. The church has been selected out of the world already. There cannot be a further selection within the church. As long as there is no sin, no fall, and no golden calf, God forbids any further separation. As many as there are who are redeemed by the blood, that many should serve....Service should include the same number that salvation includes....The problem today is that God is not satisfied even when ninety-nine percent of the people are serving. God wants everyone to be serving. We do not believe that a majority of the people should serve, while a minority of the people do not serve. Neither do we believe that a minority of the people should serve, while a majority of the people do not serve. Service is not the work of the ministers, or the work of a few evangelists. Why do we speak so much about the Body service? It is because it is a matter that belongs to all the brothers and sisters.

A Person Needing to Forsake Everything to Serve God As Soon As He Is Saved

God's word tells us that we are those who have received God's mercy. But what should we do now? Christianity thinks that a man is first saved through the Lord's blood and by His grace, and then goes on further to forsake the world. As he advances further, he drops everything to serve God. This is degraded Christianity. According to God's word, as soon as a man is saved, and as soon as he steps into the entrance, the Lord tells him to take up the cross (Matt. 16:24). Either a man does not become a disciple, or he has to be one in an absolute way. The Lord sets the price clearly right from the beginning for every saved one. The first day they come, they see the tomb. The first day they come, they are asked to forsake the world. We cannot lower down the gospel, and make the gospel no more the gospel. The Lord never lowers the price to attract customers. The gospel is the least expensive thing there is. Yet at the same time, it is the most costly thing there is. If we are to be saved, we have to be saved in a clear-cut way. Only those who have paid a high price can feel the joy.

The Whole Body Consecrating, Ushering In a Thorough Service

Today (service) responsibility is on the whole Body. When we read 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, we see that service belongs to the whole Body; it is not a service of three or five special people. For this reason, we asked all the brothers and sisters to hand themselves over. What the Lord wants is absolute service. We hope that every brother and sister can get through in this matter. The Lord wants such an absolute service. Not only the co-workers need coordination in their work; every brother and sister needs to be coordinated also. (462-466)

THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Everyone Preaching the Gospel

The priesthood that God ordained for everyone is one in which all the saved ones are priests. Moreover, the foremost offering in the New Testament is the offering of the saved sinners to God. This is the first function of the priests of the New Testament.

For this reason, after the coming of the New Testament age, God revealed to the last priest of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, that he was not to offer up bulls and goats anymore. Instead, he should offer up sinners in Christ. After this, the Lord Jesus came. He was also a real priest. He continued to bring sinners to salvation. The Lord Jesus also sent out disciples to preach the gospel. First, He sent out the twelve (Luke 6:12-16). Then He sent out seventy (Luke 10:1-24). After His resurrection the Lord said to the disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing

them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:18b, 19). The Lord sent us to all the nations to preach the gospel to every man, baptizing them into Himself, and offering them up as sacrifices to God. In the Epistles Paul also said that he “should be a minister of Christ Jesus to the nations, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that the offering of the nations might be acceptable, having been sanctified in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:16). Paul was a priest of the gospel of God. He offered up the saved Gentiles as offerings to God. (*The New Testament Priests of the Gospel*, pp. 40-41)

Home and Group Meetings

In Colossians 1:28 Paul said, “Warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man full-grown in Christ.” To be presented full-grown is similar to being picked as ripe fruit in an orchard during harvest time. This whole process of growth is included in the home meetings, the group meetings, and the district meetings. In the end, through these different meetings we will be perfected step by step until we can finally be presented to God full-grown. (*The New Testament Priests of the Gospel*, p. 43)

Prophesying for the Lord

Today we have to see that we are all New Testament priests. Everyone needs to preach the gospel. Everyone has to attend the home meetings and group meetings. Everyone must prophesy. When we prophesy, we have to exercise our spirit. There must be not only the revelation and the light; there must be the inspiration also. In this way Christ will be spoken into others. Only when all these things are put into practice can the universal priesthood be realized. (*The New Testament Priests of the Gospel*, p. 43)

Questions:

1. 1. According to the Bible, describe briefly why the whole Body has to serve.
2. 2. According to the Bible, describe briefly the history of the priesthood and its changes.
3. 3. According to the Bible, describe briefly why all the redeemed ones should serve God.
4. 4. According to the Bible, describe briefly what is the universal priesthood in the New Testament?