

Missional Metaphors Pt. 3: Priesthood

Preached @ Harambee Church by Caleb Mayberry on February 22nd, 2009

Introduction:

Who am I? This is a question that probably all of us have asked at some point. One of the roles that scripture gives us is priesthood. We are priests. What does this mean, how does this play into our identity and how does that identity work into how we live our lives? In the 3rd and final part of the Missional Metaphors series, we are going to look at how our identity in Christ changes who we once were and as a result become priests of God or worshipers with a new desire to proclaim the excellencies of God to the world around us. In order to do this we are going to answer four questions: First, who are we? Second, what's our purpose? Third, what does living out our purpose look like? And lastly, how do we begin to do this?

Question 1: Who are we?

Naturally, without Christ we are evil people. Scripture tells us that no one is righteous and that we have all turned away from God to do evil. (Romans 3:9-19). We've rejected God and have turned away to worship false gods. (i.e. money, sex, power, ourselves) As a result we've seen the tragic consequences of a world that despite flashes of good remains on a whole a very troubled place with constant wars, violence, extreme poverty, and greed and hate run amuck.

But if we call ourselves Christians, we understand this is not the full story. God did not give up on us, but he chose to love us! While we were rebelling against God, God chose to save us! ((Romans 5:8) Jesus Christ has freed us from sin and made us a kingdom and priests (Rev 1:5b-6). And this completely alters the way we answer the question: "Who are we?" We are no longer sinners alone, but we are a people loved by God and purchased by his blood. Yes, we still sin, but sin does not define us. We have been given a completely new nature (2 Cor 5:17), because God has granted to his chosen one's repentance and faith (Acts 11:18, John 6:65)

In 1 Peter 2:9a we see the substance of our new identity.

1. We are a chosen race, and a people (verse 10). Once we were not a people. Now we are a people. We are a real team. We are nothing if we haven't been chosen by God. To be a people and a family is a huge deal. If you are just an individual you will die, because we are not meant to live as individuals, but rather as a community, a family, a people. Without God, we are homeless, and we really don't have any true family.
2. We are a royal priesthood - This is the key metaphor of our identity in this passage. We, as Christians, are now part of a priesthood. Some people have a negative view of priests. But if we understand certain presuppositions to be true, then we understand the need for priests. Priests serve in a mediatory function. That is, they are appointed by God, to be able to approach God directly. We see in the Old Testament a clear distinction in the access to God by priests and by non-priests. Without priests, the nation would lose most of their connection to God. However, now as priests we all have equal access to go to God at any time.
3. We are a holy nation and kingdom. We have a domain and we have a king. Why do we have such a strong desire to be affiliated with a kingdom? For some it's the kingdom of America. For some it's the Kingdom of Mac. For some it's the kingdom of the Yankees or another sports team. You rep your kingdom, you are proud of your kingdom, because you believe you belong to the best kingdom. You get pride and joy from your affiliation with what you believe is the best. But we have been chosen to be affiliated with the best kingdom. God's kingdom. This kingdom will not fail us like all man-made kingdoms eventually will.
4. We are God's possession - We are not our own. This is a good thing because we are possessed by a sovereign almighty God that loves us and knows what's best for us. Therefore, it's a good thing that he owns us, because he will ensure that we have the best possible life.

Question 2: What's our purpose?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-5: God has changed our identity, and as a result we now offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. That's what a priest does. Romans 12:1-2 (the spiritual sacrifice of our life is worship) And so the metaphor of priest, is first and foremost a metaphor of worship. God has made a way for us to go directly to God as his priests and worship him! Once upon a time, there were few priests, and if you wanted to go to God you had to go through the priest. But because of Christ, this is not the case. We now have direct access to God and the ability to worship him freely. Because we are no longer our own, but are now God's possession and God's priests, our purpose is now to worship or glorify God. (1 Cor 10:31, 1 Cor 6:19b-20)

Question 3: What does living out our purpose look like?

Read 1 Peter 2:9. Here's where the metaphor of priest meets mission. While we have been saved by Christ and now delight in God and seek to worship him, we cannot ignore the fact that there are many in the world that do not delight in God. They are in the same predicament that we were once in, children of wrath. God's wrath continues to be upon those who have not come to trust in Jesus Christ. And therefore God's love compels (2 Cor 5:14) our worship to go outward into the proclamation of the excellencies or goodness of God. While we are thankful that God has made us priests, we must not forget that we are not just priests for ourselves, but we are priests for the world as well. The world needs priests! The world needs to see and hear the excellencies of God!

Read 1 Peter 2:10-12 - There is something about the way we live on a daily basis that serves as a witness to the world we live in. Jesus says that the world will know we are Christians by how we love one another. (John 13:35) Another scripture cementing the missional aspect of our identity as priests of his Kingdom is actually found in Rev: 5:9-10. Here we see the worship of people of tribes, languages, nations, and people juxtaposed with God making us a kingdom and priests. God's vision for his kingdom is meant to cross cultural, linguistic, tribal, and national boundaries. Part of our responsibility as priests of his kingdom is to participate in making that Revelation vision a reality.

Concluding Question: How do we begin to do this?

If you are truly a believer then I believe you've probably already seen evidences of this in your life. Success or acceptance by God is NOT predicated on you sharing the four spiritual laws or telling someone to repent and believe every day at work. God's word promises us that he will build his church through the church and nothing will stop it. He promises us that his church will bear fruit. Bearing fruit is not optional for Christians, but it is in fact an evidence of our being Christians. The fruit in proclaiming the excellencies of God as priests in our various contexts may look very different than what you think. I really don't believe it's as much about opening up your bible at a company meeting and proclaiming, "Thus says the Lord!", than it is about us living our lives and working our jobs and treating others in a way that is markedly different from the rest of the world. The way we live in the daily routines of life through what we say and do speak volumes to the work that Christ has done in us.

We don't have it all figured out, but this I do know. We have a new Identity in Christ and as a result our hearts are changed to begin living out the rhythms of life differently. We eat, celebrate, listen, bless, and play differently because we are now being informed by God's story in every aspect of our lives. And so we are compelled as priests and worshipers, not by guilt, but by love, to proclaim the excellencies, goodness, and praises of God for his glory and the world's joy.