

A Priest that Prays



By David Butts

When we think of a priest, we usually think of one who is in a special relationship to God, able to approach Him on behalf of others. It's not a wrong concept—especially if we stay away from the idea that the priesthood is only for a select few with special training. According to Scripture, every believer in Christ has been made a priest through Jesus: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

If we are to walk in all the privileges and responsibilities of a priest in the kingdom of God, we must understand what it means to be a priest. It is especially important to understand this when we see that Jesus Himself is a part of that priesthood, and in fact, is our great High Priest. The book of Hebrews really focuses on the priesthood of Jesus and, consequently, helps us to see our place in God's house as priests.

As a priest, Jesus has a ministry of prayer that we would do well to emulate. "Because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:24-25). "Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34). The current ministry of Jesus is prayer. It is what He is doing now. As a priest, His role is that of intercessor. The good news for us is that He is praying for us.

It is important to understand that as priests of God, all Christians are now called to priestly intercession. The Apostle Paul calls us to intercessory prayer in 1 Timothy 2:1. Also, in Ephesians 6:18, he tells us to "keep on praying for all the saints." We are to join Jesus in His current ministry of intercession as we assume our roles as priests of God.

The writer of Hebrews gives us great encouragement in our intercessions in the following passage: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19-22). This passage shows us that a priest has the right place from which to pray. It is in the Most Holy Place. In the Tabernacle and the Temple, the Most Holy Place was the most sacred spot on our planet. It was where the High Priest of the Jews entered once a year to pray and offer atonement for the people. It was the place of the Presence of God.

Can you imagine living as a Jew in the Old Testament period and each year watching the High Priest enter the Temple, knowing he would go into the Most Holy Place to meet with God, and that you would never be allowed such a privilege? Only the

High Priest . . . and even for him, it was a once a year privilege.

Because of the blood of Jesus Christ, we have become priests with the amazing privilege of entering into the Most Holy Place as often as we would like. As we pray, we come into the Presence of the Lord and make our requests. Most Christians are unaware of the awesome responsibility as well as amazing honor given to us through this free access into the Lord's Presence.

We can also see in Hebrews 10 that a priest has the right attitude in prayer. We are to have confidence and assurance as we pray. This is not because we are something special, but because our Lord Jesus is someone special. It is through Him that we enter into God's Presence. We are invited in to make our requests and intercessions known. Hebrews tells us to draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. James tells us that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. How that truth ought to cause our faith and confidence to grow as we pray!

We can have the confidence that the Lord is listening and preparing to answer every prayer prayed according to His will. The Apostle John instructs us: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

A priest also has the right model to follow. Jesus, our High Priest and Intercessor is our model. We are commanded to follow in His steps. The disciples were so impressed by the power of His praying that they asked Him to teach them to pray. His response was not to preach a sermon on prayer, but to give them a model prayer. In a sense, Jesus said, "Here's an outline. Make sure you include these items in your prayer. Make sure you pray about Kingdom issues." We pray best as we

follow the teaching of Jesus on prayer.

Priests of God! The Lord Himself is calling you to make a difference in this world by standing before Him as an intercessor for others, releasing His power into their lives. One of the best examples of priestly intercession in Scripture is found in the book of Numbers. The people of Israel were grumbling against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. God sent a plague that began to kill the people. Remembering that incense represents the prayers of the saints, allow this passage to stir your heart: "Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the Lord; the plague has started.' So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped" (Numbers 16:46-48).

As priests of God, we are to stand between the living and the dead. We make the difference by bringing the needs of people into the Presence of a holy God through intercession. It is time for the Church to take seriously the call of God to be priests that pray.

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