

Priesthood - Part 3

by Ron Bailey

The sermon explores the biblical understanding of priesthood, emphasizing God's call for His people to be a kingdom of priests through obedience to His covenant.

Duration: 47:10

Scripture: Exodus 3:10-12, Exodus 19:5-6, Exodus 24:3, Matthew 22:37-39, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 1:67-75, Romans 12:1-2

Topics: "Priesthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker expresses concern about the focus on external aspects of salvation. He suggests that the true suffering of Christ can be depicted in a film by creating a three-hour scene of absolute darkness, followed by the words 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' and 'It is finished. Father, into thy hands, I commend my Spirit.' The speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the depth of Christ's suffering and the freedom it brings to make our own choices. He also highlights the significance of obedience to God's commands and the covenant with His people, as seen in the story of Moses and the Israelites.

Transcript

I'm just, I'm almost kind of beyond words, just thinking of the way in which God is so utterly reliant. He depends on us, and he knows he can, because of what he's done. It really is just amazing.

We've been thinking about, well I've been thinking, I hope you've been following, I've been thinking about priesthood the last couple of days, and not that I've said each time, I think I've stood up to speak. Not Roman Catholic priesthood, or Greek Orthodox, or any of those things, but genuine Christian priesthood. A man or a woman becomes a priest, a Christian priest, not by the ordination of another man's hands, but because of something that God himself does.

And to me it's a very wonderful and exciting thing that God should appoint us, should plan that we should be priests for him. If you'd like to turn with me back into the Old Testament, the reason we're spending such a long time in the Old Testament of course is the word priest wasn't invented in New Testament times. It comes from Old Testament times, and there are pictures of priesthood that God had established in the minds of the people of Israel, so that when he began to speak of priesthood in times to come, they would know what he was talking about.

They would see some of the themes. The problem for many of us is that because we're not so familiar with the Old Testament, we haven't read it so well, we have to keep going back to it and reminding ourselves of just exactly what was in God's mind and what was being said. I'd like you to turn with me back to Exodus.

This time when God brought the people of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt to become his people. Up until this time God had given promises to individuals and individuals as they had responded to the revelation of God to them, had become carriers of those promises, although none of them received the promises in all their fullness. But at this point of history, God begins to gather for himself a people who will be his unique people, and this is why he brings them out of Egypt.

We're very excited I suppose when we think about it. He brought them out of Egypt, it says this in Deuteronomy, I think. He brought them out to bring them in, yet he had in mind the promised land.

But even when they were to come into their promised land, God had a purpose for them, and it's a purpose which is very easily forgotten. If I turn you now to Exodus chapter 19 and just remind you of the way this story begins here, maybe it will help. This is Exodus 19.

In the third month when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. And they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness, and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountains, saying to him, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel, and then this is the message that God gives to Moses his mediator.

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. That is a very significant statement. God is speaking to people who have witnessed his power.

He's not trying to convince people of things that they haven't seen. He is reminding them of something that they have seen. And he says to them, You have seen what I did to the Egyptians.

And just to make the point, I'll repeat it. You have seen how he bore you on eagles' wings. You have seen how God made a distinction between the Egyptians to whom he did this, and you to whom he did this.

To the Egyptians he had broken their power. He had destroyed their influence. For generations, four generations at least, the people of Israel have been in the land of Egypt.

They've been under foreign power. They've been under ever-increasing, harsh domination from a wrong king. Four generations.

That's up to great-grandchildren. It means that the generation that was now coming through had no memory of anything other than slavery and bondage. Maybe their grandparents told them about other days when they weren't bound and they weren't slaves, but they themselves had no experience other than the cruel, harsh reign of Pharaoh over their lives.

A knock at the door, last thing at night. Harsh laws that said you had to throw your baby boys into the river. And no possibility of choice.

No possibility of any other thing other than the will of Pharaoh. But now everything has changed. They have seen what God has done to the Egyptians.

They have seen this power that controlled them for generations absolutely broken, and they've seen Egypt and the armies of Egypt dead in the waters on the shores of the Red Sea. It really is important to understand that they've seen this. It's not a legend for them, not written in a book, they've seen it with their own eyes.

Now why am I making such a fuss about all this? Well, simply because if we're going to follow what God wants to do with us, God will need to be able to say to you and me in our spirits, you have seen what I did with Egyptians. You've seen what I did with the power that held you. You have seen how I have broken that stranglehold that the enemy had on the human race.

You have seen now that for the first time in your life you are genuinely free to make your own choices. Up until now you've been under another's will, another king, but at this point in time you have your opportunity, the first time in your history, the first time in living memory, you have your opportunity to make a different choice. You've seen what I did to the Egyptians.

Now, brothers and sisters, have we seen? Has God by his Spirit really given us a glimpse of what he did on the cross? I don't mean just the bare bones of it, I certainly don't mean Mel Gibson's thing. I'm not kind of against it necessarily, but I'm worried about it. I'm worried about it simply because I think it focuses on all the externals, and your salvation was not gained by nails and floggings and cruel beatings.

Your salvation was gained in absolute darkness where no one saw it. If you really want to do a film, I thought I might do this, I think I could write the script for this. If you really want a film for the suffering of Christ, all you have to do is create a situation in which you can have three hours of absolute darkness.

I think I could do that. And then at the end of the three hours of absolute darkness, you just need a few words. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? It is finished.

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. That's all we know of it. That's all we know of the sufferings of the Christ.

The other was just the beginnings of sufferings. The other was just the physical introduction. It's almost kind of setting our mind so that we can begin to get some feeling at least of what was taking place.

The pain of the cross, the suffering, was not the nails, not the floggings, not the beatings. The pain of the cross was the separation from his Father. That was suffering.

But have you seen it? Have you seen in your heart what he did there? Have you heard in your spirit this cry, it is finished? The power is broken. If you have, we can move on to the next bit. God says to these people, you've seen how I bore you on eagle's wings.

It always kind of amuses me, this is my peculiar sense of humour, this particular verse. I don't know whether they would have expressed their experience of having been born on eagle's wings. It had been fairly traumatic what had happened to them over the last few months.

But God says, I've been carrying you on eagle's wings. And then look what he says. He doesn't say in order to bring you to the promised land.

He says, I brought you to myself. That's why he did everything that he did. He did it so that he could bring them to himself.

No man can serve two masters. That's an absolute law, it cannot be changed. For generations they'd been under another master, so God broke the power of that master and brought them to himself.

And now through Moses he begins to speak. You can always do you know what God says. I don't want to get tangled up into Calvinistic and Arminian theories of the freedom of the will and all the rest of it.

I just simply want to tell you that when God tells you to do something, you can do it. If you have a wizard arm and he says stretch it forth, you can stretch it forth. If he tells you to walk on water, you can walk on water.

You don't have to worry about bondages of the will. Just listen to what he says. If he tells you to do something, you can do it.

Just do it. I sound a bit harsh, but just do it. You know they sometimes say now, I remember someone saying that he'd been preaching to some Roman Catholics on the Virgin Mary's only commandment.

Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. Okay, you have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, I'm not going to call it every word in this, but I want you to see how God has set the scene here.

I want you to see how he's brought them to a specific point in time. He couldn't have said this to them at any other point. He couldn't have said this to them before this time, but now he can say to them in this situation in which they have seen what God has done, in which they have experienced that God has brought them to a place in which they can meet with him, now at this point in time he says to them, now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar, that means unique, special treasure to me above all people, for all the earth is mine.

Now what is God thinking of that? If I were to say to you, before we go too much farther now, or if I were to have said to the children before they went there, I want you to design me a logo, or a symbol for Israel. What would you have chosen for Israel? Some people would have created a Star of David, or the two olive trees, or a dove. These are all traditional and authentic symbols of Israel.

I wonder what you would have chosen for your symbol of Israel. I want to show you in a few minutes' time that there's another symbol for Israel that's fixed in the heart of God, which is really very, very, well it's amazing in the way in which you see what God was thinking about it. But you'll see it coming through here now, he says this, and verse 6, and you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests.

You see, they had been thinking about their freedom, God had been thinking about priesthood. They had been thinking about being authentically God's people, being able to say God is mine, we are God's people, God is thinking about priesthood. Now I know he had to bring them out of Egypt, I know he had to deal with sin, I know he had to break the power of satan, but these are all steps towards a goal that God has in his heart.

And the goal that God has in his heart for this people is that they should be a kingdom of priests. Can you see it? It's here, in this little phrase that he uses. I often say when I get to this passage of scripture, this is for those who dabble with computers, this is an if-then statement.

You know, they have these kind of computer languages, and each line of the program tells the computer what to do next, and you can have a time when the computer makes a decision, and you say to the

computer, if, and then you give it some information, do this, and then, or else, if it doesn't do that, then do this, yeah? Computers are very stupid things, they're just very fast, and you have to explain to them every single step of what they must do. So, this is a canon, an if-then statement, and God says to these people this, verse 5, if, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, that doesn't just mean fulfill the instructions of the Ten Commandments, that means guard it. If you will cherish it, if you will embrace it, and hold it to yourself, if you will obey the things that I say to you, and you will cherish the relationship into which I bring you, and this is what God says, you then, there's the then for the if-then statement, then you shall be a peculiar treasure to me, above all people, for all the earth is mine.

The whole earth is God's, the whole earth is God's, but what God was going to do was take, I think I may have said this to you before, the word sanctify in Hebrew, Kaddash, really means to cut out a section for a special use. Have I ever said this to you before? I was with a family in Ireland a few years ago, and they were waiting for Dad to come in for his tea, but it was a bit late, so they decided that we would kind of start tea without him, and then we all sat down, and we gave thanks, and the first thing that the wife did was cut a great big section out of this big shepherd's pie, and put it on a plate, and she said, we'll put that in the oven, that's for your dad, and I said, that's a perfect illustration of sanctification. That's exactly what God did with this people.

He cut out a slice, a slice out of the pie, and set it apart for a unique purpose. He loves all the nations, he's got plans for all the nations, all the nations are his, but he's cut out this section for a specific purpose, and what's the specific purpose? They're going to be priests. That is the purpose of Israel.

They were specifically sanctified, set apart, to be a kingdom of priests. Not a kingdom of warriors, not a kingdom of teachers, not a kingdom of scientists, or psychologists, or artists. They were set apart to be a kingdom of priests.

This was to be their unique function and purpose, and God says to them here, if you will obey my voice, keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure to me above all people, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. Entirely set apart. I was saying last night for those who weren't here, but when they consecrated the priests, a little bit later on than this, in the book of Leviticus, when they consecrated the priests, when they'd gone through all the ceremonies, made all the sacrifices, done all the anointings, these priests of God, five of them there were to begin with, were then required to remain in the tabernacle.

They had to stay in God's house, as God's servants. The tabernacle, you know, wasn't a church, it didn't have any seats in like this, you had to stand in it, and the only one seat was where God sat. It wasn't a mobile church, it was a mobile palace.

It was where God reigned, and outside the throne room there was an area where the chief ministers, the chief servants of the king, were able to be available to him, to do his work. That was the holy place, and then beyond that there was the great courtyard with all kinds of other things. But these priests were to be his ministers.

They were to be set apart for God, and for seven days they were required to be in the holy place. It was a symbol that these people now belonged entirely to God. They had, in this sense, no other interests, no other responsibilities, nothing else that could distract them.

They were God's people for seven by twenty-four hours of seven days of a week, absolutely God's. And I mentioned last night that when a tragedy came that two of the priests were actually put to death because of their sin, Aaron was actually forbidden to mourn, because he must not be distracted. He was God's servant.

They had, this is part of the calling of being priests, that you are, well look how it's said here in verse six, you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests. I think one of the first things we said on the Friday night is that priesthood is God-facing. It's to be a priest unto God.

It's to have an attitude of heart that has God at the centre, that has God first and foremost, that does nothing without listening to him, waiting upon him. We use this language, don't we? You servants of the Lord that wait in the house of the Lord, that stand there, lift up holy hands. This is what they did.

I know they did lots of other little chores. I know they cleaned the lamps, and I know they changed the shoe bread, and I know they supplied the altar with its coals and with its incense, and did lots of other things. But primarily they were God's servants.

They were set apart to wait upon him. We've actually changed the name of our prayer meeting down in Reading. Now we don't have a prayer meeting anymore.

We have a time of waiting upon God. And it's not just kind of political correctness. I hope it's not.

It's really, I think the intention is, is to focus our attention upon the fact that when we are God's servants, the first thing you do is you don't come with a shopping list of things that you want God to do, situations you'd like him to change, problems here, there and everywhere. The main purpose of our gathering together is to be available to God, to wait upon him, like servants waited upon a master. In a job that I had a little while ago, and I worked for a bank for a while, it was a very different sort of pattern of life, mixing with the posh people with lots of money to spend, and they put me in different hotels at different times, and for me it was a brand new experience to see waiters who are in kind of five-star hotels waiting on you.

I don't know if you've experienced it, maybe you haven't, but it's interesting. If they do it properly, they're almost invisible, and they know just the moment you've finished that course and you're ready for the next one, and without a word from you, they silently serve you, just making the whole experience go wonderfully, and they do it because they never take their eyes off you. That the eyes of a handmaid are to her mistress, and the eyes of a servant are to his master, so our eyes are unto thee.

Waiting upon the Lord. It's a picture, of course, but it's a very profound picture. They don't rush into battles.

There's a good while, there's 12 months now before they even leave Sinai, before they head for the promised land. For 12 months now they will build the tabernacle. For 12 months they will learn what it means to be God's kingdom of priests.

For 12 months God will be the focus of everything. When that is all settled, then they will move on to do other things. This is his purpose, the kingdom of priests.

I won't go through all this, but I want to just make some certain points as we go through. In verse 7, Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. If you follow these next two or three chapters through, you'll find that Moses, the mediator of this covenant, is constantly up and down this mountain.

He is the middle man. God doesn't speak to the people, God speaks to Moses, and the people don't speak to God, they speak to Moses. And Moses is the messenger boy, and he's up and down this mountain, up and down, up and down.

He's the mediator, he is the living link between God and the people who are going to become a kingdom of priests. That's why last night, whenever I referred to him, I didn't refer to him as Moses, I referred to him as the mediator of the covenant. So that we would make the connection and understand that in the new covenant we have a new mediator.

We have someone who is a living link between God and man. One mediator, the man Christ Jesus. And this is all a picture of that.

So now Moses begins this pattern of going to God to listen to what God has to say, and then bringing those exact words of God to the people for their response. And it says here, verse 10, I'll read it again. Moses came and called for the elders of the people and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him.

And all the people answered together and said, all that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord. It's interesting this, that Moses calls for the elders.

Elders are people who sometimes are required to make decisions for other people, but this is far too important to be left to the elders. So although it's addressed to the elders, in fact all the people respond, all of them, all at the same time, with one unanimous consent, the answer is yes. We've heard what God has said.

What God has said is, if you will obey my words, if you will cherish my covenant, then you will be my special people. You will be a kingdom of priests. Go and tell them, says God.

So Moses goes down and he brings his exact words to the people, and the reaction of the people is, yes. All that the Lord has said, we will do. There's no doubt about it.

And then Moses begins this to-ing and fro-ing up and down the mountain. And we won't stick, we won't go through all the parts of it, but if you come to chapter 24, the chapters in between, chapter 20 is the chapter which has what we call the Ten Commandments in it, what Israel usually called the Ten Words. And then you have three chapters which are known as the Judgments, and these are applications of God's law and principles to different aspects of life.

So you have the words and the judgments, and that's important because, to see what happens here now. So, chapter 24. And he said to Moses, Come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship ye afar off.

And Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come nigh, neither shall the people go up with him. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. This is really very interesting, the way that God works this thing through with Moses.

I know we have kind of one person from a legal background here, at least. This is a very carefully executed legal process. Just what happens here.

The first thing is that God wants to establish with the people of Israel the general principles. There's no point in getting into the details until you've understood what the general principles are. It's like if you're going to buy a house.

The first thing you want to know is whether the person wants to buy it, wants to sell it. There's no point in getting into discussions about whether they're going to leave the lamps, and the plants in the garden, and that curtain, or this thing in the And so you've established the principle, yes, they do want to sell the house. So what happens here is, first of all, God, in the broadest possible terms, says to Israel, look, I want you to be my people.

The conditions of you being my people are that you obey the words that I give to you, and that you cherish the covenant that I'm going to make to you, would you? And they say, yes. The general principle, yes, that's exactly what we want. So now what happens is, Moses goes back to God, and he begins to receive from God the detail of the covenant.

He begins to receive the ten words of the commandments. He begins to receive all these judgments. So now Moses, as God's mediator, comes back to the people of Israel and says, okay, now here are the detailed conditions.

You said yes, now here are the detailed conditions. And here it is in verse 3, Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and that's the ten commandments, and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, all the words which the Lord has said will we do.

That's for the second time of asking. Do you know that language? In the Anglican church, when someone is getting married, they do something they call reading the banns. And three separate times, usually have to be separated by at least a week after this, they read the banns and they publish the intention of Miss so-and-so's spinster of this parish to be married to Mr. so-and-so bachelor of this parish, or something like this.

And they wait, because if there are any objections, then it doesn't go on to the second week. But three times they're given, people are given the opportunity to raise any objections to this intended marriage. And here you'll find that three times God actually comes to the people of Israel and gives them an opportunity of responding.

This isn't a quick response he's demanding. This isn't, and I'm not mocking this, this isn't like the evangelist saying you must decide now because you might walk out of this tent and a bus will knock you over. It's not that kind of pattern at all.

This is careful, measured dealing of God with his people. God wants them to know absolutely for sure what it is they're getting into. They're to know the terms of this covenant and know exactly what all this agreement is about.

So, now Moses repeats to the people of Israel all the words that God has given to him. The Ten Commandments and all those specific judgments. And they say here all the words that God has said to us we will do.

And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. First indication in the Bible here of someone writing. He's now putting it into black and white.

He's now actually writing down these words that God has given. You know that normally if you kind of have an agreement, a legal agreement, there will be at least two copies of it for each of the two parties. Well, there are going to be two copies of this as well.

There are going to be two copies of this document. One is going to be written in God's handwriting with his finger on stone. And the other one is going to be written in Moses' handwriting, presumably on papyrus or vellum or something like that.

These two are going to be agreed. Make sure they say exactly the same thing. And then they're actually going to be put together in the Ark of the Covenant.

The stone one's on the inside and the other one's on the outside by the edge of it. Lots of people don't realise that but I promise you it's true. Moses wrote all the words of the Lord and, well I'll show you perhaps in time.

Moses wrote all the words of the Lord and rose up early in the morning. Now look at this thing because something happens here that you might not have expected. In this legal process that's going on something happens that is really very significant but you might not have predicted it.

Moses wrote all the words of the Lord and rose up early in the morning and built an altar. I want you to notice that it was Moses who built this altar, it wasn't Israel who built it. Moses built an altar.

And then it says this, and 12 pillars according to the 12 tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel who offered birth offerings and sacrificed peace offerings. Now without going into all the picture language of all the offerings of the Old Testament, that of some, it speaks doesn't it in Hebrew as it says, it speaks of a high priest and it says, a high priest pertaining to God to bring both gifts and sacrifices for sin.

Do you remember that phrase? Comes up two or three times in Hebrews I think. So the role of a priest was twofold. It was to bring gifts to God and to offer sacrifices for sins.

And what we call the sacrifices later on in the first part of Leviticus, some of them are gifts. Some of them like the birth offering and the peace offering are not intended to be pictures of God taking away sin. They're actually pictures of people giving themselves to God.

They're pictures of people taking an animal, taking its life and then bringing that thing and allowing it to be consumed as a whole birth offering. And these offerings are known as the sweet smell offerings. They're not pictures of sin, they're pictures of people abandoning themselves to God, burning their bridges behind them.

They're all consumed with their givingness to God. These are the pictures. And these are the sacrifices that these young men of Israel bring at this point.

They're not bringing sacrifices for sin, they're bringing something which in its symbol is a picture of the whole of Israel giving itself to God as a whole birth sacrifice. Would this also happen? And I remember Mr. Knorr saying many many years ago that when Israel moved after 12 months around Sinai and they left, if you would have arrived there the next day, all you would have found was this altar and 12 pillars of stone around it. It is the symbol of Israel.

It is God's picture of Israel. The people who are identified and joined permanently to the altar. The people who stand and minister at the altar.

12 pillars of stone around the stone altar. A silent testimony. I don't know whether someone will ever discover it one day.

I know that some people have thoughts about it. Of this point when the people of Israel said yes. Yes.

And now they go through this picture of their absolute givenness to God and look how it follows on. And Moses took half of the blood, that's from these sacrifices, and put it in basins. And half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.

And he took the book of the covenants. Now you see now, he takes not his memorised words that God has spoken to him, now he takes the written document. And from the written document so that there can be absolutely no doubt that everyone knows what they are agreeing to, he reads in the audience of the people and they say for the third time of asking, all that the Lord has said will we do and be obedient.

That is three times they've said this. I don't know how long these events took. Quite a considerable time.

The people weren't rushed into this, there was no stampede, there was no emotional pressure put on them. This covenant was offered to them three times. And the implications of it were spelled out to them.

If you become my people, my kingdom of priests, you are going to be people and the whole focus of your life is going to be this altar. This place where you as my people give yourself to me. Where you wait upon me silently, without movement, without a sound.

Just my priests around this altar. Can you see this picture? Very, very powerful picture. I mean I know that some other pictures of Israel are powerful, I know that the two olive trees is a powerful picture, I know that the devil is a powerful picture, and the son of David and many other things, but this is God's picture.

This is the logo that God stamped on the scene at Sinai. When they left this was the only trace of an amazing agreement that had been formed between God and man. If you want to sum up what this whole thing is about, what I want to say to you now, please sum up for me, tell me what the whole relationship of God was intended to be about with Israel, well it's here and captured in this.

It's these people who are now God facing. These twelve pillars of stone that are gathered around this altar, available for God, his people. Verse 8, and Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people.

I said last night that when you have something like a bowl of oil or blood in the scripture, and it's sprinkled in two places, it's the bible's way of uniting those two things inseparably. It's like the same blood that now joins them, it's like, you know, it's almost like the picture, it's a bit gory, but you know when you did this when you were kids, you kind of became a blood brother with somebody else down the street, and kind of cut a little cut into your finger or something, and let the blood flow together. And the idea was, so I wouldn't recommend it now obviously, I don't suppose you'd recommend it then, but the idea was that there was some kind of join that would take place, some inseparable union that would take place.

And it's a bible picture, some of these things are deep into our kind of human psyche in the way that we don't understand things, but instinctively we know how things connect. And what happened here is that the blood of these sacrifices was then used to join the symbol to the people. It was sprinkled on the altar, and

it was sprinkled on the people.

So that forever on now, these people are the people of the altar. These people are joined inseparably to this sign. This is who they are to be.

They are to be unto God, a kingdom of priests. They are to be mine. And then you've got these amazing words in verse 8. Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, listen to this language, behold the blood of the covenant.

Does it sound familiar? This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. This is the mediator of the old covenant, declaring what this covenant is all about. It's about people coming into living continual union with God, to be his servants, those who wait upon him, to be separated from the world and its ambitions and its career structures and all those things, and to be people whose focus is God's, who are for him first.

Everything else is secondary. You know, you make decisions in your life, and if you make them properly, they save a lot of time because there are all kinds of other decisions that you won't have to make because you've made that one. Every decision you make actually narrows you.

Every obedience limits your opportunity for choice the next time around. Did you know that? You think about it. We talk about dedicating children to the Lord.

If I remember rightly, literally, the Hebrew word dedicate means to narrow, like you might kind of narrow and sharpen the point of something, like you would slowly hedge something in until it comes to the purpose for which it was created and made. When people are dedicated to the Lord, it is a narrowing process. It's a narrow gate.

Were you not told of it? Once you get through the gate, you'll find there's more room than you've ever dreamt of. It's glorious. It's a great, great space in God, but you'll have to come through the narrow gate.

You'll have to come through this thing that focuses you so that the only thing that matters is a right relationship with God. And we talk a lot about the New Covenant. Well, I do.

I don't know about you. I talk about the New Covenant all the time, but the New Covenant, you know, when God used that language, of course he could use that language because people knew what a covenant was. They knew it was an agreement between two parties.

They knew that life was lost and blood was shed in order to make the covenant effective. They knew that with a very solemn and sober moment, and not to be, as they say about the wedding in the Anglican scriptures, not to be done lightly or in advisedly, but with due consideration, very careful, thoughtful choices that are being made here. So, this is Moses, the mediator of the covenant, who brings these people to God and joins them to him in this amazing covenant.

And amazing as it was, it's only a picture. It's true, of course, it's historically true, but it's only a picture of the thing that was really in God's heart. Because God's heart was always on the New Covenant, and the new mediator, and Christ, and the blood that would be shed.

Why? Why were you saved? Saved to serve, isn't that what they say? Well, usually when people say that, they really mean saved to go on the mission field, or saved to kind of do scriptural evangelism, but as long

as you understand that being saved to serve means that you're serving him, that you're his servant, that you're his handmaid, you'll understand the implications of it. I know that time has gone, but just come with me very quickly to Luke's gospel, and let me show you a priest preaching the gospel to you. This is what I call, this is Luke chapter 1, and this is what I call the gospel according to Zacharias.

It's a prophecy. Luke chapter 1, verse 67. It's referring, of course, to John the Baptist's father, Zacharias.

Verse 67. And his father, Zacharias, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up and hoarded salvation for us in the house of his servant David. As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies.

Can you see the language of Exodus and all this? That we should be saved from the hand of our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant. The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant to us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear. Do you remember the message that God gave to Moses when he went to Pharaoh? Most people remember half of it very well.

Let my people go. They remember that half very well. But that's not the full gospel, that's only half the gospel.

Moses' full message was, let my people go so that they may serve me. That's why he wanted them. He wanted them so that they could be available to him, so that they could know him uniquely.

And having known him, then they would mediate that truth of him to all the nations. But they could not go until they had come. They could not preach until they'd heard.

They had nothing to say until they'd received the words that God had for them, so that they become his priests. And here it is, verse 74, that he would grant unto us that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him. That's to say in God's presence all the days of our life.

I love that little phrase at the end. Not in heaven when we die, all the days of our life. These are priests serving on earth.

These are people cut out of the great pie of the whole of mankind for a unique purpose set apart for God to do his will, to do his work, to be available to him. They have his name upon them. They're his to serve him.

And this is what the New Covenant is too. I know we often think about the New Covenant in terms of sin forgiven and the new heart, and all these are perfectly valid, true statements to make, but for our weekend I just want us to concentrate on this. That at the heart of the New Covenant is that God intended you to be a priest.

He intended you to live your life with God as its focus. He intended you to live your life available to him with your heart open, your hands empty, and looking to him to see his will, to see his desire to be his people. And it is a glorious privilege.

And as I was sharing things that I was saying to you this morning about the Lord saying that the priests, you know, the Old Testament priests who worked in the Tabernacle were barefoot. And although everything else was changed, that the walls and the ceiling of the building that they worked in were all kind of covered in gold and beautifully elaborate embroidery, the earth was unchanged. It was just the same earth inside as it was outside.

And in our lives you have to walk on the same earth that everybody else walks on. And you'll go through the same sorrows and pains and joys, but not in the same way. Because you're God's man, you're God's woman.

Every step that you take, every place where the sole of your foot lends in obedience to God's command, you stepping onto it makes it holy ground. Whatever God is speaking to us about in the way that he was today, whether, as the song says, there may be trouble ahead, there will be. I can speak to you with absolute certainty.

In the old jazz song, there may be trouble ahead, well, it's not absolutely true. There will be. But don't shrink from it.

Don't be afraid of what God has for you. Step out boldly. Step into this next thing that God has for you, conscious that you're his, his servant, his priest.

You're doing his will. You're his man. We'd be restored.

Let's pray.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/6/SID6604.mp3>

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