

“The Heart of Worship: Priesthood” (Week 5)

(1 Pet. 2:9-10)

- **What if Jesus was a visitor this Sunday?**

- The Apostle Peter wrote to the Church: **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Pet. 2:9-10)**

The Heart of Worship is *Priesthood*. That’s *our part* in all of this, our *lifestyle* as God-worshippers. But it’s so easy for us, in all our activity, to subtly exchange the call of *priesthood* for *performance*—and that’s when we begin to lose *the heart*.

- It got me thinking of when leaders seek out “church consultants” to evaluate their ministries, especially “guest experience” on Sundays. You might even get a “church spy” to come, like a “secret shopper,” and report back everything they found. *How were they greeted? How easy was it to find their way? How safe was the environment for kids? How friendly was the congregation? How was the music and preaching? How was the follow-up?* You get the idea. More often than not, it’s a pretty rude awakening.
 - During my first year at the previous church we served, our Conference had a Church Consultant on staff who helped guide our whole region. She was coming through town and I asked if she’d visit our worship and send her feedback. She said, “*Are you sure?*” and I was like, “*Bring it on!*” Monday morning, I got an email with 57 and 1/2 bullet

points. Things like: *the doors are not in the best location; you need a second projector; the greeter at the door handed out bulletins but there wasn't much hospitality; you really need some broader participation in that praise team.* Most of them were valid, we had a lot of room for growth at that time, and by God's grace we saw a lot of growth over the years that followed. (By the way, the *one* positive comment I remember was, "*the young woman who gave the announcements was awesome, her energy was infectious, you've got to use her more!*" That was Emily Layser, of course).

- These things are very pragmatic and helpful in their fashion—I'm all for being intentional with *everything* we do, we should do it all to the *best* of our ability for God's glory. But I wonder if sometimes, our mindset gets stuck on "best practices" of the hospitality industry to create the "greatest guest experience ever"—if we can be as good as *Disney World* we're onto something! The target we're aiming at can shift from making Disciples and reaching the lost (which was Jesus' priority), to a consumer-driven-culture of bigger stages, bigger buildings, bigger budgets—as if that's *the point*, rather than just a means to an end.
- An American pastor visited churches in Northern India where the church was multiplying *exponentially* among a previously unreached people group. He wanted to find their "secret sauce." He expected some incredible hospitality teams, and found it was "so, so." Their coffee was pretty bad. He thought, *it must be the preaching!*—the sermon was "OK." The music was "average." He couldn't figure out what was going on. Then he started talking to the people, he realized that every single member of that small church came to worship with the sole-focus that they were going to *practice and share* everything they

heard between the end of that service and the next Sunday. That small church had already planted 5 other churches in its short existence. It wasn't the "guest experience"; it was a group of believers *completely* bought into practicing and sharing the Way of Jesus in their everyday lives. That simple church is part of the "Bhojpuri Movement." In just 30 years, that region of India has gone from about 10,000 believers, to *over 25 million*. I wonder what our church consultants would do with those churches?

- And I wonder something else: what if *Jesus* showed up one Sunday as our secret church consultant? What if He walked through our parking lot, came through those front doors, sat in the front row, and sat through our worship service? I wonder what He would notice that we're blind to; I wonder who He'd be paying attention to that we might be ignoring; I wonder what He'd want to say and do that we never get to because we're so focused on doing other things? *I wonder*. But then again, we don't *have to wonder*, because...*Jesus is here, His Word is here*. I've been in church ministry long enough to know that we can get so focused on *performing* our tasks that we don't leave much room to pay attention to what Jesus is *really doing* in the room. I'm constantly reminding myself that in all of my planning and preparation, in all of our ministries and activities, we need to be doing it *with Jesus*—not just doing it *for Jesus* and asking Him to bless our plans. All this is why I want to talk about *priesthood* today.

- **The Priesthood of All Believers**

- Listen to the Scripture again, this time in the Message translation: ***“But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God’s instruments to do***

his work and speak for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.” (1 Pet. 2:9-10 MSG) You are a *chosen people*, a *royal priesthood*, a *holy nation*, that you may declare His praises. Like all the other themes we’ve studied in this series, the concept of *Priest* plays a key role throughout the Bible. What Peter says here to the church was first said to the people of Israel. In Exodus 19, after they were rescued from Egypt, and God was preparing to give the Law to Moses on the Mountain, He told the Israelites that they were a *chosen people*, a *royal priesthood*, set apart from the nations in order to reveal God’s glory *to the nations*.

- What is a priest? **In Scripture, a priest is basically a mediator between God and people. A priest represents God to the people, and the people to God.** A priest is a little bridge between heaven and earth. Jesus is referred to in Hebrews as *the Great High Priest*—He is the *ultimate* and *perfect* mediator between God and Humankind—fully God *and* fully Human, both the minister *and* the Sacrifice. Now we are His people, we bear His Name and carry His presence, *we continue in His ministry together* in the world. *We are* a royal priesthood, mediating between God and the world He loves to extend His redemption throughout the earth. This is our purpose, to be bridges between heaven and earth—not by our own power or cleverness, but by His Spirit working through us. The Bible Project puts it like this:
 - When I was a young pastor figuring out what this role was all about, my mentors helped me to understand that there is a *priestly* element to my pastoral call—that people would view me as a representative *of God*. Do you know where I realized that the most? Hospital visits. When I,

little David Layser, went in, as a *pastor*, to visit someone sick, someone in crisis, I got it: I was there to represent the presence of God, I was there as an ambassador of Christ. They looked to me, they looked at me, and associated me with God—that was my role. *Sheesh*. But what was even more mind-blowing was when I finally realized this: my job as a pastor is to help *everyone in my church* realize that *they are called to serve that same purpose in this world*. Every single disciple of Jesus is part of His *kingdom of priests*. We are *all* chosen, consecrated, set apart, filled with His presence, to go into the world as *mediators* between God and the people He's pursuing, as bridges between heaven and earth.

- This might blow your mind a little bit, but it's actually right there in our mission statement: **"Connecting people with Jesus and the new life He offers."** That's *priesthood* language right there! We exist, every one of us, in every dimension of our lives, *to connect people with the God of the universe—the creator, and redeemer, of all things*. That's Priesthood.
- How would it change our lives if we viewed everything like this? How would it change the way we show up at our work, the way we view our home-life, the way we parent, the way we neighbor, the way we go through our daily lives, *if we remembered that we are priests* in this world? That we bear the image of God, we carry His presence, we get to extend the reign of the Kingdom of heaven in all we do?
- **Living "Godward"**
 - To bring it full circle, *how would it change the way we worship and serve on Sunday mornings?* One of the things our worship team has been talking about is what it means to sing and play *upward*. As

musicians and worship leaders, it's natural for us to think about the people out there—we want to serve you well, we want to give our best, we want to connect and inspire. But sometimes we end up singing more *to the people* instead of singing *to God*. **A priesthood mindset means we're ministering to the people *and* ministering to God—and it's God first.** When a worship team and congregation start to sing *upward*, directly to God, engaging *His presence*, instead of focusing on the song or the experience itself—that's when something in the “atmosphere” changes. It changes because God always keeps His promise that *He will draw near to us if we draw near to Him* (James 4:8). Our music, every element of worship, is meant to be a bridge between heaven and earth—this whole gathering is meant to be a *Priestly* experience where we *genuinely connect with God*. It's that simple and that profound.

- Here's the really cool thing: we don't just *sing and play* upward, we get to *live* upward. The poet Fanny Howe said, **“I just try to live toward God. I just try to live and think toward God's coming to the world.”** You can *live toward* a lot of different things. You can “aim your song” in a lot of different directions—you know what I mean? But being a saved and sanctified disciple of Jesus means you are a *priest*. And being a priest means *you live your life, you sing your song* UPWARD, HEAVENWARD, GODWARD. And when you do that, whether it's in a worship service, or a hospital room, or a grocery store—*God. Draws. Near.* The Kingdom is revealed, the atmosphere changes. Because God's purpose is to reconcile heaven and earth, and for some reason, He's invited us to be part of that plan.
 - So here are the big questions: Have you realized that **it's not just the people on stage who do the ministry, but all of us are ministers, here**

on this earth to *serve God* and *serve others*? What would it mean to look at your everyday life through the lens of *Priesthood*, to let God use you as a bridge between earth and heaven? And how can we begin to view every part of life as an opportunity to connect people with Jesus and the new life He offers?

- You see, worship is where we come together to just *practice* being His priestly people, so we can live that out every day of the week. The heart of worship is not a performance, or an experience—it's a *lifestyle*. I guarantee you will not figure everything out at once—you just have to find your next faithful step. What is that step for you today? Let's pray about it right now.