

A priestly nation (2)

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we've got these two passages this morning. The series that we're looking at really is called, What is the Church? We're thinking about what the church is and who we are.
- What does that mean for us? And what we're going to be talking about this morning is a distinctive, really, of God's people, of selflessness, of self-giving sacrifice.
- And I think it is becoming that attitude of self-giving, selflessness, self-sacrifice, it is becoming increasingly distinctive in our world.
- You know what, I'm giving up what you have for the benefit of other people. You might have heard me say before that one of the prevalent attitudes within our society is these mantras that people say now, You do you.
- You'll have heard that. You do you. Or I've got this one on a coffee mug just to remind me. It says, Love yourself first. I've got that one. Or another one is, Speak and live out your own truth.
- [1 : 0 6] There's these mantras that go around. However, it is the opposite, isn't it, to living to bless others. However, despite that being the advice that many people give, You do you.
- Love yourself first. Despite that being the advice, we still as a society really value acts of service. The military held in high esteem, rightly so.
- Even if you don't agree with reasons for war, The act of putting yourself in danger for someone else is thought of as really honourable. It was only a, I mean it seems ages ago now, doesn't it, since COVID.
- But we remember, it's not actually that long. It's only 18 months, two years. We remember, we saw the reaction across the UK regarding the medical staff. Doing long hours, difficult conditions, going above and beyond.
- 8pm, do you remember it? 8pm on a Thursday night. Everyone out there does, clapping, banging hands in appreciation of people being selfless. Going above and beyond.
- [2 : 1 1] Going above and beyond what was expected. Which is a strange tension to have, isn't it? It is a strange tension, because on the one hand, you have this attitude of, you do you.
- Look after number one. Love yourself first. But then on the other hand, you have this deep appreciation for people who don't live like that. Who live the opposite kind of mantra.
- There is a reason we value selflessness. It's because it shows something deep within our humanity that is actually a reflection of the living God.
- That is the reason, because God in himself is selfless. We see that most clearly when we consider the nature of Jesus' mission.
- Because he left heaven, his home, took on a human frame. Experiencing everything that we experience. Emotions, suffering and pain. And he would do that selflessly for us.
- [3 : 1 5] Because he loves us. Because we're made in his image. The reason we find acts of selflessness so admirable in our world is because of the humility that we see in Jesus Christ.

You might even say, you might say, that all the acts of sacrifice in some way that we see in our world today, in some way they point to him.

They tell of something deep, intrinsic in us that we understand. In this series, as I mentioned, we're thinking about what is the church. And in particular, in last week and in this week, we're thinking of one of the angles that the church, you might have noticed in verse 9 of the second reading in 1 Peter 2.

It had this long list of things that it said the church was. It's Peter, and he says to them, but you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

And we're thinking about what it means that we are a royal priesthood, a kingdom of priests. What does it mean? And therefore, what does it mean if the church is a kingdom of priests?

[4 : 32] What does it mean to be a priest, and does that have anything to do with being selfless? Just want a quick reminder, maybe from over the last few weeks, of two ways that God teaches us.

Quick reminder, one of the ways that God teaches us, which is the way that he teaches us here, is by using shadows of the Old Testament. We understand, don't we, a shadow.

When we see the shadow of a person, we don't see what the whole thing is. We see only part of it. We look at the shadow, but you can't see what the shadow is made of.

You only see partially. You can tell if it's a person or a tree. You can tell that difference, but you can't tell what type of tree or the person's features. You have to look up to the person or the tree or whatever it is to tell it in the detail of what you're actually looking at.

That is how the Old Testament works. The Old Testament is hundreds of shadows. Shadows, when you look up and Jesus comes, it has always been a shadow of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 44] It has always been pointing to him. When we read about the priests, the temple, kings, prophets, they are shadows of Jesus Christ. That he is the true high priest, the true king.

He is the temple. He is the word made flesh, the prophet. So what it does as we look, what helps us is, as we look at the Old Testament shadows, what it helps us is we glean something of what it means to be the New Testament church.

And so as we look at the priests, it helps us, as we look at priests in the Old Testament, it helps us to reflect on Jesus, the high priest, and then the priestly role of the church.

The reason we're thinking about sacrifice and priests together is because alongside teaching, which the priests did, we looked at that last week, the main job of the priests was to offer sacrifices.

Helpful illustration, what are priests? Priests are middlemen. Middlemen. You remember me saying this last week? They function a little bit like an estate agent.

[6 : 49] They function a little bit like an estate agent. An estate agent represents the buyer, the buyer to the seller and the seller to the buyer. The seller and the buyer never actually speak to one another.

They go through the middleman, the estate agent, and those parties that never really talk or discuss. Priests are like that. They're the middlemen between God and the people.

That is what priests, that is how they function. The regular needs of God's people were to be taught. The priests taught the word. They spoke as God's mouthpiece. They spoke to the people.

We heard that last week. But the other two big needs that God's people had were to pray. That's number one. And the other big need was to receive forgiveness.

To receive forgiveness and to be heard by God. To receive forgiveness. To have their sins wiped clean. To be made spiritually clean. And to be able to speak to God.

[7 : 48] God, in his kindness and his grace and his love and his compassion, made a way for the Old Testament people of God to receive all of those things. To be taught from the word of God.

To pray and to receive forgiveness. We have it in what is known as the sacrificial system, which was at the heart of all that. It was the priests who heard the confession from God's people of sin.

Their repentance, their praise. As the priest offered sacrifice. The everyday Israelites couldn't offer a sacrifice for themselves. It was the priest who did that.

Now that can all sound a bit heady. A lot of theological stuff to take on board. So rather than we overcomplicate this. Because it could get all heady.

Let me have an example of what this meant for everyday Joe Israelite. Everyday regular Joe. We'll call him regular Joe. What it meant that was Joe everyday regular bloke like us, who messed up everyday of his life just like we do.

[8 : 52] Who had arguments with his family and shouted. Who lost his temper with his kids. Who felt self-righteous from time to time and liked a good gossip. Everyday regular Joe Israelite.

Everyday regular Joe did not have Jesus to look to who died in his place. He didn't have Jesus to look to as a once for all time sacrifice in his place.

Regular Joe Israelite had to provide his own sacrifice. Depending on what regular Joe did, he would have had to select an animal from his own herd of animals that he owned and that he cared for.

It had to be the best animal that couldn't have anything wrong with it. An animal that he could have used for himself. He could have eaten it. It would have fed his family. He could have sold it and made money.

He had to sacrifice all that. What he could have done with this animal. Regular Joe would take the animal for. Go the money he would have made or the meal he would have eaten.

[9 : 49] He would have sacrificed it. Presented the animal to the priest. Confessing his sins to the priest. He would tell the priest how he'd fallen out with his family.

How he'd lost his temper with his kids. And how he'd gossiped and felt self-righteous. The punishment for Joe's sin was that Joe should have died.

And that he should have been separated from his creator. But God in his grace gave a system where the animal was killed as an offering for sin. In place of regular Joe Israel.

The priest in that situation is acting as the middle man as he receives the offering. And then he offers it to God in place of regular Joe's sin.

The priest would take the offering and kill it in place of the man. What's happening in that system given by God is a substitution. We know that word substitute.

[10 : 50] Sometimes we know it in not quite a good way. If you ever got your food delivered from the supermarket. Sometimes they don't have what you want. And you ask, have you changed anything?

And yeah, we've got ten substitutes. And half the stuff is the stuff that you didn't actually want. They've swapped. They've swapped it over. But here, the substitute is a brilliant thing.

The animal is swapped, substituted for the person. So that the person doesn't die, but the animal dies in its place.

Against God. Because God is of infinite value. When we hear about this, I don't know, especially if you're hearing about this kind of system for the first time, it can seem kind of strange.

Making sacrifices to God, killing animals. To our modern ways of thinking, it can seem a bit barbaric. Maybe a bit even unsettling. But the real reason.

[11 : 58] The real reason the living God gave this system to his people was always to point to something greater. It was a shadow. Because it was always supposed to point to be the shadow of what God intended to do by sending his own son.

He sent his own son, Jesus, to be the sacrifice for his people. The system. The system in the Old Testament is always pointing forward to that.

It's always pointing forward to that. We don't bring an offering to a priest. We don't bring an animal because Jesus offered himself. The priest foreshadows Jesus.

He's the one who offers. But this is where it gets really amazing. So does the animal. Because Jesus is not only the priest. He's the offering as well.

He's the sacrifice. He offers himself. He's the priest. And he is the offering. He is our substitute. So our sins are wiped out.

[13 : 04] So that we're made clean. So that for all the times that we've fallen out and got angry with a family member. When we've lost it with our kids.

When we've been self-righteous and gossiped. So that for all those times, his death is in our place. The substitution, the swap, is there.

In this great exchange, in place of your death, you're given his life. Now, I've said a lot there.

I've said an awful lot. And I just want to pause and give us a breather and run through the logic of what I've just articulated. Because what I've said is how sacrifice in the Old Testament points forward to and is fulfilled in Jesus Christ sacrificing himself.

That Jesus Christ is both the priest and the offering. Regular Joe offered an animal, but Jesus has fulfilled that and offered himself. Once for all. Once for all.

[14 : 05] There is no other offering that will bring you and make you right with God. No other offering that will pay for your sin. No other offering that needs to be done.

It's a once for all payment forever. In forgiveness of your sin. It is wonderful. The great exchange. This is what Jesus has done for you.

This is what Jesus has done for you. In the passage that we looked at today, one of the passages, the Philippians 2, where it outlines this amazing thing that Jesus did.

But crucially as the church, it also tells us that as we look to the cross for forgiveness, as we look to the cross to be made right with God, we don't need to offer anything to honor to do that.

But as the church, we continue as priests to look like Jesus, to model him in a very similar fashion. It has something to say about how, as we look as he selflessly gives himself for us, how our lives model that selfless sacrifice for others.

[15 : 22] It has a huge thing to say about the church. Just look with me at Philippians 2. I'll read it for you. In your relationships with one another, and here's the key phrase, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Have the same mindset. Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather he made himself nothing. By taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Right in the middle of this amazing chapter, which outlines what Jesus did, and we started by saying the selfless nature of Jesus, who left heaven, his home, to go down, first step down to take on a human frame, next step, all the way to death.

We see what it says, verse 7, he made himself nothing. He made himself nothing. He took the very nature of a servant. Verse 8, he humbled himself.

Right in the middle, right in the middle of this chapter, we see the mindset of Jesus Christ as he sacrificed himself. We see the key element to sacrifice, to living selflessly, and being sacrificial in the way that we live.

[16 : 47] The key attribute of Jesus is humility. It's the key attribute. That is what it takes. In valuing others, that he would die for others, and value them more than himself, it took humility.

And if we, the church, God's redeemed people, God's redeemed people, if we, the church, which we're called, as we saw in 1 Peter, the priests of the living God, a royal priesthood, if we were to follow Jesus, what it really means is that the church is to be characterized by humility.

Sacrifice equals humility. When the church to redeem people are humble, it is that they give themselves to, for the glory of God, and for the blessing of his people, that we love God, and love neighbor.

It is where the church would look cross-shaped, and would be humble. So just, I want to say a few things, of what that might mean for the church, if we're to look like the royal priesthood.

It means we must be humble. The first thing, is that a humble church prays. A humble church prays. Prayer is our great privilege.

[18 : 11] It's our great privilege, as the church, that we get to approach God. We have access to the one Father, by one Spirit. And we can approach God's throne of grace, with confidence.

So that we can find mercy, and find grace, to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4. Prayer is an act of humility. It is offering ourselves, because when you pray, what's happening is, you're saying to God, as you pray, in the act of prayer, I need you.

I need you. I don't have a, I don't, I can't do this on my own. I don't have what it takes. And it's a recognition, of the right order of things, that God sits on the throne, that we don't, and we go to Him in need.

It is humility to, it is humility to say, I don't have what it takes, but I know that you do. It is humility. Not only is it humble in that way, but it is a sacrifice of time.

There are a hundred things. If anything, the thing that we have, that we, that all of us have the same amount of, is time. And we are time poor. We are time poor.

[19 : 18] That is the thing that we would love, to have more of. You think that prayer is, is a sacrifice of your time? It is saying, of all the things that I could be doing, I need God, more than anything that I could do, with my time.

I need Him. It is worship, as you offer yourself, offer your time, to God. It is priestly. It is valuing God for who He is, because you have direct access to Him.

The church is a praying people, a speaking to God people, individually, together, at all times, and in all places, any time, any place, any prayer, you go directly to the living God, the King of Kings.

I was talking to a friend this week, midweek, that we were meeting together to pray. And he mentioned about, what does it mean to, what does it mean that Jesus, is the King of Kings?

What does it mean that, that Jesus is the King of Kings? Because we don't have, authority to speak to King Charles, but you do have access and authority, to speak to King Charles' King.

[20 : 30] The living God delights to hear you. The church is a praying people, a speaking to God people. Prayer is part of our worship. Prayer is part of our worship.

And not only that, as you intercede, as you intercede for prayer for other people, it is valuing them above yourself, that you not only do you give your time, but you give your time to pray for somebody else.

I don't know about you, but I find it incredibly moving, when somebody tells me, I've been praying for you. Somebody would give up their time, to pray for me, to the living God.

The churches are praying people. Second thing, so the churches are praying people, a humble church, a humble priesthood is generous. Already we've seen that, that prayer is a sacrifice of our time, but it's a sacrifice of other things.

When we give up our homes, invite people in, spending time with one another, it requires giving ourselves to bless, showing hospitality is an act of humility. There are a hundred ways that we could use our homes.

[21 : 46] What about our talents, the skills, and the abilities he's given us? We could use them to just enjoy, but using them to bless others, to build others up. And I don't say this as a checklist, of what you should expect.

One of the things that is so encouraging is, as the minister of this church, I see that in our church, of the generous generosity of people who give up their time, who give up their gifts, and their skills, and their talents, who give up their wallets, who give up so much to bless one another, give up their time to pray.

It is a joy. It is really a joy to be your minister. I love seeing God at work, and I want to encourage you that I see that in each of you.

God is at work in us, and as we see his sacrifice, we give ourselves to bless others. I see that. So does the living God. The last one, is that a humble priesthood works fights against sin.

Recently, I had to, I was leaving, I was leaving, me and the family were leaving the Starks' house, that we'd been staying in while our house was being renovated.

[23 : 11] And one of the last things that we had to do was do the garden. And there was weeds everywhere. Now I don't know if you've, if you've ever weeded the garden, you could do it really quickly and just like pull up the weed.

But the problem is, is that if you don't get the whole weed, it just comes back worse. You've ever known that? We've seen that with dandelions. You think you've got it, you pull the dandelion up, but then back comes more dandelions.

If you want to, if you really want to get hold of the weed, you have to get the, you either have to do things, you have to pull the whole thing up by the root, or there's a trick to it. You can just pull the top off and then spray some weed killer.

But you have to make sure that the root is killed for the weed to go away. Getting rid of sinful desires in our heart, that requires humility too.

Because it means looking and recognizing and admitting that you as yourself have messed up. But deeper than that, it is painful, it is painful to search, not just for the way that sin comes out on the open with, comes out as a, on the outside, but it is painful to look on the inside to where the roots of sin have grabbed your heart.

[24 : 29] And it is painful to unearth them. It is painful to do, to search of where things have happened in life that have caused you, that have caused difficulty.

It is really painful. It is a pain, transformation is not an easy process. And it is a sacrifice to, and a humble sacrifice really, to allow God to work in those difficult places.

Because we don't want to open up wounds. It is hard. A humble, a humble priesthood, a humble church, takes all that difficulty and goes to him and says, Jesus, I've messed up.

But not only that, sin has impacted me in such a way that I've got deep roots that need, that scars where I need you to minister to me. It takes humility to come to the living God and, it took humility for, for regular Joe to come to the priest with his best prized lamb and admit his faults and everything that he'd done.

It comes, takes humility to come to the King of Kings, the great high priest, admit that what we've done and, and allow him to come and minister him to the darkest places of our hearts.

[25 : 44] It takes humility. It takes humility to be said, God has changed me but I keep messing up every day and I need Jesus to keep on changing me.

A humble priesthood admits sin and the power of God turns us away from all the temporary pleasures now. And in doing it, you will look more like Jesus.

You will be a blessing as the redeemed people of God to your family, to your relatives, to your friends, to your community, to the rest of God's people. God is at work in you. He loves you.

He's gave himself for you and he wants to bless you. You are a royal priesthood. You're chosen. You are a race. A chosen race. A royal priesthood. A special possession.

And as you live and proclaim the gospel with your words and in your life as you allow him to minister to you so that he can set you free from all the shame and the past and the things that have scarred you in your life and all the things that have been against that you've done and that people have done to you.

[26 : 52] He will minister to you and make you his child. He loves you. He is your father. As the royal priesthood, he causally chooses us to bless other people.

The key marker of God's people. The church. What is the church? It is the humble people. Let's pray. Almighty God, we do pray and give you thanks for the Lord Jesus.

We see humility in him that he was willing to leave his own home, heaven, leave the throne and come down taken on a human frame and to die upon a cross and then to be exalted because he was obedient even to death on a cross.

We praise you that you are our substitute. That you've taken away sin and the sinful effects of the world will be vanquished. Lord, we thank you that you destroy evil.

We thank you for your humble sacrifice. And we thank you that it is one time forever sacrifice, once for all. And that we can come to you as our great high priest.

[28 : 11] We can come directly to you, our living God, and confess sins and admit our failings. And that you don't treat us as we expect to be treated.

Lord, with the things that we've gone and the things that I've done, sometimes we even forget of how good you are and sometimes we even expect you to turn us away but you never do. You always allow us to have access to you because you've forgiven us from our past, from our present and our future.

It's secure in Jesus. All the promises of God are yes and him. And so we praise you. But we pray, living God, as we look to you, as we look to your humility, your character, who you are, that you would make us a church that is holy, that is godly, that looks more like you every day, that you would transform us from one degree of glory to another, that we would be a praying people, that we would be a generous people, and that we would be a people that you work in as we confess sin to turn us away from sin, Lord, to look more like your son.

We need you and we pray for your blessing and purpose. In Jesus' name, Amen.