

I. INTRODUCTION: OUR PRIESTLY MINISTRY

A. Jesus brings us into a new *heavenly calling as priests to serve* God (Heb. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10).

⁶ He [Jesus] has made us to be a kingdom, priests to [serve. NIV] His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev. 1:6 NASB)

¹ Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling [priesthood], consider the...*High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus...* (Heb. 3:1)

B. Our priestly ministry consists of *meditation* (gazing on the Lord), *prayer, intercession, declaration, praise and blessing God, blessing and teaching the people*. The priestly ministry allows for the Kingdom of God to be established in the earth.

C. The goal of today's teaching is to examine and internalize truths regarding our priestly ministry before God.

II. PRIESTLY MINISTRY IN SCRIPTURE

A. Adam functioned in the Garden of Eden as the first priest (Gen. 2:15; 3:8).

1. The garden was where Adam and Eve walked and talked with God, gazed upon Him and grew in the knowledge of God (priestly ministry).

⁸ And they [Adam and Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day [expecting to meet with Adam and Eve]... (Gen. 3:8)

2. He tended the garden (Hebrew: *avad*, also translated, “do”, “serve” or “work”).

3. He kept the garden (Hebrew: *shamar*, also translated “guard,” “observe,” or “watch-over”).

¹⁵...the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend [Hebrew: *avad*] and keep [Hebrew: *shamar*] it. (Gen. 2:15)

4. These two words “tend” (*avad*) and “keep” (*shamar*) employ priestly language¹. In other words, the garden of Eden served as a temple (or was a part of the heavenly temple) where Adam had his duties to minister to God and rule.

5. Adam was given *dominion* over all creation (Gen. 1:26–28) but could only walk in it by how he responded to God. He was *God's representative bringing the things of God to earth* (Gen. 1:26–28; Psalm 8:1–9; Rev. 1:6). From this example we can see that *when the Church recovers its priestly ministry before God, it will walk in dominion on the earth*.

6. Adam's priestly ministry was his highest calling and what Satan assaulted (Gen. 3:1) and still does today (Zech. 3:1–2; Rev. 12:10). The same assault is on the Body of Christ to get the Church to do anything else besides priestly ministry to God.

7. Today the Lord is still asking, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9) to the priesthood of believers today. “Why are you hiding from me? Why do you busy yourselves but not come before me? Who will walk and talk with me, tend the garden of your heart, guard my Word in your heart and exercise the authority I have given you?”

¹ *Avad* (Hebrew, עָבַד, *to serve*): Ex. 8:1; Nu. 3:7–8; 4:23f.; 8:11, 19; 16:9; 18:6–7f. *Shamar* (Hebrew, שָׁמַר, *to keep*): Nu. 3:7–8, 10, 28; 8:26; 18:4–7f.

B. The picture of the priesthood in the line of Aaron and the Levites.

1. The nation of Israel as a kingdom of priests. God used the same two words, *avad* and *shamar*, when describing Israel's purpose for existence as a nation of priests². God told Pharaoh to let His people go so they could *worship* (*avad*) Him. At Mt. Sinai God told them to *keep* (*shamar*) His words found in the covenant. Israel would minister to God as a nation of priests and release the knowledge of God to the nations, as a reiteration to the original call upon Adam. Only they were doomed to fail. Like Adam, the quality of Israel's "service" (*avad*) was based on how they "kept" (*shamar*) His words.

¹ ...**"Let My people [nation of Israel] go, that they may serve [avad] Me. (Ex. 8:1)**

⁵ **Now therefore, if you [nation of Israel] will indeed obey My voice and keep [shamar] My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.**

⁶ **And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'... (Ex. 19:5–6)**

2. The Levitical priesthood likewise uses the same words to describe priestly ministry. What Adam lost and the nation would fail in doing, the Levitical priests were to keep.

⁷ **They [tribe of Levi] shall perform [keep guard ESV; Hebrew: *shamar*] the duties...for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do [Hebrew: *avad*] the service of the tabernacle. ⁸ **They shall also keep [Hebrew: *shamar*] all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel... (NASB, Nu. 3:7-8)****

3. God showed Moses a pattern and protocol of heavenly worship, namely the things related to the sacrificial system. He did so to have Moses *replicate it* on earth (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:4–5; Mat. 6:10). If these elements were shadows of a heavenly reality (Heb. 8:5), what do they mean for us today who have a *heavenly citizenship* (Phil. 3:20) and *calling* (Heb. 3:1)?

⁴⁰ **And see to it that you [Moses] make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain. (Ex. 25:40)**

⁴ ... **there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; ⁵who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." (Heb. 8:4-5)**

4. The pattern included *atonement for sin, ongoing fire on the altar, incense and glory*. The protocol and pattern was not for instructional purposes only, but was given to host the presence of God on earth.

- a) *Sprinkling of Blood* — Once a year atonement was made for the nation upon the Mercy Seat (Lev. 6:14–15), which signified the the shedding of Jesus' blood and His covering of our sins. Once-and-for-all, Jesus made a way for us to approach the Father and minister to Him through a "new and living way" (Heb. 10:20). Daily sacrifices were made on the brazen altar outside for individual sin offerings (Nu. 28:1–8). The Lord is telling us to live in agreement with the sacrifice of His Son.

² In fact these two words indicate the entire nation of Israel was a *kingdom of priests* in how they conducted their lives (Ex. 19:5–6; Lev. 18:4f. 19:30, 37; 20:22; 22:31; 26:3, Deut. 6; 10:12; 13:4, etc.). The first five books of the Law detail how they carried "keeping" God's commands and "serving" Him in a lifestyle of worship.

- b) *Keeping Fire on the Altar* — Fire was to be kept continually on the altar of burn offering (Lev. 6:9), symbolizing our unquenched love for God seen in surrender (Rom. 12:1; Song of Songs 8:6; Mk. 12:30; Phil 2:17; Rev. 6:9) as Jesus Himself demonstrated (John 10:15, 17; 1 John 3:16; Mk. 10:45; Lk. 22:42).
- c) *Incense* — Priests burned incense on the altar before the veil, morning and evening (Ex. 30:8; 1 Chron. 23:13; 2 Chron. 29:11; Luke 1:9), representing our prayers before God kept in bowls (Rev. 5:8). Jesus continues to pray and His intercession is combined with ours (Heb. 7:25; Rev. 8:1–5; Lk. 18:7).
- d) *Glory (cloud and presence)* — The glory of God came as a cloud upon Mt. Sinai, filling the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon (Ex. 24:17–18; 33:9–10; 40:34; 1 Ki. 8:10–12; Psalm 29:1–3, 9; 63:2; Rev. 15:8). While the Levitical priests could not minister in the glory, we will as ministers of a new priesthood in our resurrected bodies (1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 7:15; 22:4).

C. King David functioned as a priest³.

1. He ministered before the Lord along with the Levitical singers while wearing a Levitical ephod (1 Chron. 15:27, 29). The humility seen in David in these actions was not in his dancing before people but in wearing a simple priestly garment instead of his regal attire as King. He valued his ministry before God over his rule of power. He was unlike Saul who put his influence among men (power/rule) ahead of his ministry to God.

27 David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as were all the Levites who bore the ark, the singers, and Chenaniah the music master with the singers. David also wore a linen ephod....²⁹ And it happened, as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came to the City of David...King David whirling and playing music... (1 Chron. 15:27, 29)

2. One of the most notable acts of David's reign was when he established singers and musicians who ministered before the ark of God unceasingly (1 Chr. 9:33; 16:1, 4, 37; 23:5, 7). As a king with the heart of a priest, he established, funded and envisioned these Levites in their assignment to minister to God as He had revealed He wanted.

They brought the ark...and set it in the midst of the tabernacle that David erected for it. 4 He appointed Levites (singers) to minister before the ark...to praise the Lord...³⁷ to minister before the ark regularly, as every day's work required... (1 Chr. 16:1, 4, 37)

These are the singers... who... were free from other duties; for they were employed in that work day and night. (1 Chr. 9:33)

4,000 were gatekeepers, and 4,000 praised the Lord with musical instruments... The number... instructed in the songs of the Lord...who were skillful, was 288. (1 Chr. 23:5, 7)

3. These musicians and singers stood before the Mercy Seat where the High Priest could appear only once a year. The Mercy Seat was where blood offerings were given once a year for national atonement. The Mercy Seat is the throne of God where Jesus will sit on earth. *This occurred in a tent, not the Tabernacle of Moses, so there was no veil, nothing separating them from His presence. It's a prophetic picture of the saints ministering directly before the Lord.* How radical and also prophetic was that?!

³ Abraham also functioned before God as a priest (Gen. 18:22), Elijah (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15) and Elisha (2 Kings 3:14). Paul used priestly language referring to his ministry (Rom. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; 1 Cor. 9:13).

4. David's servants died for touching the ark when it fell off a cart (2 Sam. 6:6–8) but there was no punishment for establishing these ministers before the ark? Why?
5. The answer is because God showed these plans to David by the Spirit (1 Chron. 28:1–19) and commanded David to replicate what he witnessed pertaining to the heavenly order of worship (2 Chr. 29:25; 35:4, 15; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:45).
 - a) This command reflected the deep desires on God's heart to have His people be near Him and gaze upon His beauty (John 17:24; Psalm 27:4).
 - b) From this place of intimacy, His people would make declarations of agreement, releasing His rule throughout the earth (1 Kings 17:1; 2 Chron. 20:21–22; Psalm 149:5–7; 115:16; Amos 9:11–12).
 - c) The plans involved singers and musicians (all Levites) who surrounded and enthroned the Ark in praise (1 Chr. 9:33; 16:1, 4, 37; 23:5, 7).
6. Every time in Israel's history when the Judean kings followed these commands they experienced revival and military supremacy. This type of revival occurred *seven times* afterward: *Solomon* (2 Chron. 8:14), *Jehoshaphat* (2 Chron. 20:21f.), *Jehoida/Jehoash* (2 Chron. 23:18); *Hezekiah* (2 Chron. 29:25–27); *Josiah* (2 Chron. 33:3–15); *Zerubbabel* (Ezra 3:10); *Nehemiah / Ezra* (Neh. 12:4). The principles and values of the Tabernacle of David are timeless and relevant for the people of God in all cultures and situations.
7. Today, the Lord is rebuilding the Tabernacle of David (Amos 9:11–15; Acts 15:15–17) in its essence by raising up unceasing praise and worship as a major expression of the Church around the world. Numerous testimonies indicate it's happening independently and ubiquitously. Amos 9 tells us that the return of Israel to their land (1948), a great harvest would occur in this same time frame the Tabernacle of David would be rebuilt. Joel 2:28–32 tells us the outpouring of the Spirit at the Great Harvest comes just before His return. All four things will occur in the same general time frame.

11 “On that day I [the LORD] will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages... and rebuild it as in the days of old; 12 that they may possess the remnant of Edom [Islamic nations], and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,”... 14 I will bring back the captives of My people Israel... 15 I will plant them in their land [1948], and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them,” says the Lord your God. (Amos 9:11–15)

8. The Lord has said the expression of His House would be “prayer” (Isa. 56:6–7). The Lord is doing it in this generation and will increase on earth when He returns. If you are wondering about your calling there's no need to keep searching, it's to willingly offer your love in a life of prayer and feel joy in His house.

“Also the sons of the foreigner [Gentile believers] who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants... 7 Even them I will...make them joyful in My house of prayer... (Isa. 56:6–7)

- D. The Apostles John saw angelic and human beings engaged in priestly ministry before the throne in heaven. I believe most of the angels are there because they are filling the role humans will play in our resurrected bodies.
 1. The elders, human beings in the highest level of government who fall down in worship, continue in prayer, declare God's praises, while enjoying the beauty of God and ruling through intercession (Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:5–6,

- 8; 11; 11:16; 19:4). If this is the highest level of human government, then the Lord is placing great value on the ministry of the Word and prayer.
2. The seraphim have eyes all around them and unceasingly declare the beauty of Jesus. They never tire, are bored or distracted but with all the eyes given them, search out the beauty of God and declare who He is—this dramatically stirs other participants of heaven (Rev. 4:6–9). They also minister to the Lord through their declarations and words.
 3. Myriads of angels and saints worship at each declaration and revelation of the Lord (Rev. 5:11–13).
 4. Everyone gazes as God, makes declarations, worships Him with joy and exhilaration.
- E. The Father established a new order of priesthood with Jesus who serves as a High Priest (Heb. 7:17–24)—the order of Melchizedek which combined the priestly and kingly roles.

²¹“...You [Jesus] are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”... ²⁴*But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. (Heb. 7:21, 24)*

1. Jesus is a priest who rules, not just a king with a prayer life on the side (Psalm 110:1, 4; Zech. 6:13; 14:9, 17; Rev. 1:12–16; 1:5; 19:16; Isa. 9:6–7; 33:17, 22).

¹ *The Lord [Father] said to my Lord [Jesus], “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”* ² *The Lord [Father] shall send the rod of Your strength [Jesus’] out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!...* ⁴ *The Lord [Father] has sworn and will not relent, “You [Jesus] are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:1-2, 4)*

¹³*Yes, He [Jesus] shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne... (Zech. 6:13)*

2. Revelation 1 shows Jesus *as a priest, wearing an ephod* as He ministers to the Father in the heavenly temple (Rev. 1:12–16; cf. Ex. 28:8; 29:5; Lev. 8:7; Rev. 15:6; 1 Sam. 2:18; 22:18).

¹² *Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me...One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band...* ¹⁴ *His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire.... (Rev. 1:12, 14)*

3. Jesus serves in heaven by *atoning for our sin and mediating the new covenant* (Heb. 8:12, 15; 12:24), *sitting at the right hand of God, offering prayers* (Heb. 10:12; Rev. 8:3), *silencing the accuser* (Zech. 3:1–5; Rev. 12:10), *leading praises to the Father* amid the congregation of angels and saints (Psalm 22:22, 25; Rev. 5:6; 7:17) and *giving confidence for us* to stand before God (Heb. 10:20–22). The writer of Hebrews calls Him *a minister of the heavenly sanctuary* (Heb. 8:2).

III. WALKING IN OUR PRIESTLY MINISTRY TODAY

- A. Jesus said His people would worship the Father everywhere in “spirit and truth.” How do we do it today? We do so escorted by the Spirit of God using the Word of God. It’s not that there’s no temple at all, it’s that God wants us to focus on the heavenly temple where ministry is occurring—where our true ministry is! We come before Him *in our spirit* and we worship Him *in truth* as He has revealed who He is in the person of Jesus.

²¹ *Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father...”* ²³ *But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to*

worship Him.²⁴ **God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**” (John 4:21-24)

- B. What Jesus desired is now possible. We can be with Him where He is (John 17:24). We aren’t *only* waiting for our heavenly bodies so we can be with the Lord (Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:17). We are with Him now by the Spirit. We can grow in our ability to reside in our heavenly position and calling given us (Eph. 2:4–6; Heb. 3:1; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). We are with Him so we can gaze on His beauty and grow in the knowledge of God.

²⁴ **“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me... (John 17:24)**

⁴ **But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ...made us alive together with Christ...⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus... (Eph. 2:4–6)**

- C. When we gaze on the Lord through the Holy Spirit as we meditate, we must be convinced we are ministering to Him in His heavenly dwelling (Heb. 12:22–24). There’s a real temple, with a real throne, with a kind, all-powerful God sitting upon it, with real creatures and human spirits ministering to Him (Rev. 4–5). When you minister to the Lord, this is where your spirit is appearing⁴.

²² **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant... (Heb. 12:22--24)**

- D. Because of the realities of our compassionate and everlasting High Priest, our established priestly ministry and the love the Father has for us, the writer of Hebrews exhorts us *to come boldly* before God and *draw near Him* in confidence (Heb. 4:14–16; 10:19–25).

¹⁶ **Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace [where the Father sits], that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:16)**

²² **let us draw near [God the Father] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb. 10:19)**

- E. God is still looking for what He has always been throughout history: “Where are those that would walk with me, who would keep my Word and serve me? Who would draw near, gaze on Me through meditating on My Word and agree? Who desires to stand before Me in consecration? Where is my priesthood on the earth that would minister to me in heavenly places in songs and praises? That would bring heaven to earth? Who will turn my house into a house of prayer? Who will learn to find joy in my presence?”

F. Questions:

1. What is keeping you from embracing your *heavenly calling* which God has given you calling as a priest?
2. What truths in this teaching inspire you to love the Lord more deeply, freely?
3. What connections can you make regarding ministering in the power of the Spirit with your priestly ministry?

⁴ We also commune with the Holy Spirit who resides inside us while we live on earth—it’s a great mystery but both are occurring at one time! (Luke 17:21; John 14:17; Acts 7:48; Isa. 66:1–2; Rom. 8:11, 15–16, 18, 23, 26; 1 Cor. 1:27; 3:16-17; 6:19)