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The People that Make of a Kingdom of Priests

Scripture text: Exodus 30 and 31

God wanted His people to be “**a kingdom of priests**” (19:6).

Today, all of God’s people are a priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6), but in OT days, the nation of Israel had a priesthood that represented them before God.

Exodus 19:5-6 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

1 Peter 2:4-9 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but **in the sight of God chosen and precious**, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. **But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

Revelation 1:5-6 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

What the priests were, **the whole nation should have been**. What kind of people make up “a kingdom of priests”?

A Praying People; A Grateful People; A Cleansed People; and An Anointed People!

1. A Praying People (30:1–10, 34–38)

As we have noted, there were two altars involved in the tabernacle services—a bronze altar for the blood sacrifices and a golden altar for the incense.

The gold covering the wood speaks of the deity and humanity of the Savior and reminds us that we can **pray to the Father only because of the intercessory work of His Son**.

We bring our requests in the name of Jesus Christ (John 14:12–15).

John 14:10-15 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you **I do not speak on my own authority**, but the Father **who dwells in me does his works**. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. "**Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do**, because I am going to the Father.

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me **anything in my name, I will do it.** "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

The burning of the incense pictures the offering up of our prayers (Ps. 141:2; Luke 1:10; Rev. 5:8).

Psalm 141:2 Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!

Luke 1:10 And the whole multitude of the people were **praying outside at the hour of incense.**

Revelation 5:8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**

The fire that consumes the incense reminds us of the **Holy Spirit, for without His aid we cannot truly pray** (Rom. 8:26–27; Jude 20).

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise **the Spirit helps** us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but **the Spirit himself intercedes for us** with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because **the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**

Jude 1:20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and **praying in the Holy Spirit,**

The golden altar stood before the veil, outside the holy of holies, but **we are privileged to come boldly into God's presence and bring our requests to Him** (Heb. 4:14–16; 10:19–22).

Hebrews 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace**, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 10:19-23 Therefore, brothers, **since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus**, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith**, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies **washed with pure water**. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

The high priest burned the incense each morning and evening, a reminder that we should open and close the day with prayer and during the day “**pray without ceasing**” (1 Thes. 5:17). The priest carried the fragrance of the incense with him all the day.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, **pray without ceasing**, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

The special composition of the incense is given in vv. 34–38, and **this formula was not to be used for common purposes**. Likewise, **prayer is special**, and God dictates what **the requirements are for effective praying**.

“Strange incense” (v. 9) and “strange fire” (Lev. 10:1) were **not to be used on God’s altar**. **No matter how fervent a prayer might be, if it is not according to God’s will, it will not be answered**.

Leviticus 10:1 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and **offered unauthorized fire before the LORD**, which he had not commanded them.

2. A Grateful People (30:11–16)

The annual Passover celebration would remind the people that the nation had been redeemed from bondage, and this annual “census tax” would be another reminder of their redemption (see 1 Peter 1:18–19).

1 Peter 1:18-19 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

The silver was originally used for the sockets and hooks for the tabernacle (38:25–28); in later years, **it helped to pay for the upkeep of the house of God.**

Matthew 17:24-27 When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "**Does your teacher not pay the tax?**" He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "**Then the sons are free.** However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth **you will find a shekel.** Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."

When David impetuously took a census without receiving the “redemption money,” God sent a plague to the nation (1 Chron. 21:1–17).

It is dangerous to use “religious statistics” for the praise of man and not for the glory of God.

We should be grateful to God for the redemption we have in Christ, and we should be willing to give to Him for His glory.

3. A Cleansed People (30:17–21)

This bronze basin stood between the bronze altar and the tent, and the **water in it provided ceremonial cleansing for the hands and feet of the priests**. With no floor in the tabernacle, their feet would get dirty. In addition, the handling of the sacrifices would defile their hands. **It is possible to be defiled even while serving the Lord**. The laver was made out of brass mirrors (Exodus 38:8).

Exodus 38:8 He made the basin of bronze and its stand of bronze, from the mirrors of the ministering women who ministered in the entrance of the tent of meeting.

Since **the mirror is a picture of the Word of God** (James 1:23–25), the laver illustrates **the cleansing power of God’s Word** (John 15:3; Eph. 5:25–27; Ps. 119:9).

James 1:23-25 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, **he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror**. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But **the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.**

John 15:3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Psalms 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

When we trust Jesus Christ, we are “washed all over” once and for all, but it is necessary to confess our sins and “wash our hands and feet” if we want to enjoy fellowship with the Lord (John 13:1–11; 1 John 1:9).

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, **he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us** from all unrighteousness.

John 13:10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, **except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean,** but not every one of you."

4. An Anointed People (30:22–33)

Like the incense for the golden altar, the anointing oil for the priests was to be a special commodity, not to be duplicated or desecrated by common use. It could only be poured on the priests; the common people could not use this special ointment.

How wonderful that all of God's people today have been anointed by the Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27; 2 Cor. 1:21).

1 John 2:20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

1 John 2:27 But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie--just as it has taught you, abide in him.

2 Corinthians 1:20-22 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

5. The Ability to Work (31:1–11)

Whenever God calls us to do a job for Him, He gives us the enablement we need and the helpers we need. This He did for Bezaleel and Aholiab. Bezaleel means “in God’s protection”; his father Hur we have met before (Ex. 17:10–16; 24:14). God gave these men the ability they needed to follow the heavenly pattern and make the things necessary for the tabernacle. Their wisdom and skill came from the Lord, and they used their abilities in obedience to God’s command. **Artistic skills can be dedicated to God and used for His glory.**

Not everybody is called to be a preacher, teacher, or missionary. There is also a need for Christian writers, artists, musicians, architects, doctors, gardeners—in fact, in every legitimate vocation we can serve the Lord (1 Cor. 10:31).

1 Corinthians 10:30-32 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? **So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God**. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,

6. The Responsibility Not to Work (31:12–18)

There is a time to labor for the Lord and a time to rest, and both are a part of His plan for His people (Mark 6:31). Bezaleel and Aholiab were constructing the holy tabernacle, but **they were instructed to be careful not to violate the Sabbath.** The Sabbath was not given to the Gentile nations but only to Israel as a sign of their special relationship to the Lord. As we have noted before, **the Sabbath commandment is nowhere given to the church,** for the church honors the first day of the week, **the Lord's Day, the day of His resurrection from the dead.**

The Sabbath belonged to the old creation (v. 17), but the Lord's Day belongs to the new creation.

Mark 6:30-32 The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "**Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.**" For many were coming and going, and **they had no leisure even to eat.** And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.