

Becoming God's People IV: Serving God; Serving Mankind

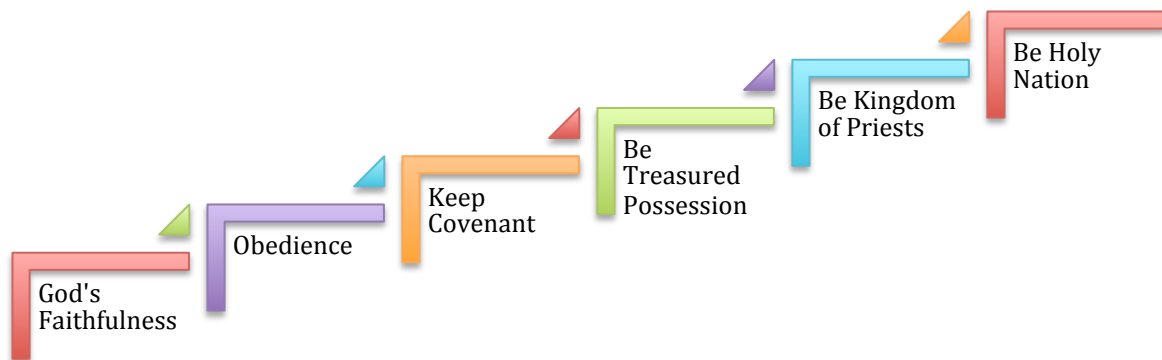
*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, **you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. – Exodus 19:4-6*

Stepping Stones

As God was about to transform Israel into the nation he had in mind, he took care to plan out the steps to their growth. He demonstrated a pattern of behavior in Egypt that Israel would see working out in their lives. We too can see that same pattern, and by recognizing it we can take comfort in the path God has us on.

*You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and **though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you.** Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and **with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites.** – Exodus 7:2-4*

Ten signs - each building upon each other, each addressing a particular area and stronghold in Egypt - tearing down each of the gods worshipped by Egypt. Once done, God could move Israel into the next step in their process. He did the same in his declaration in Exodus 19:



Starting with God's faithfulness to bring Israel from Egypt, he gave them steps toward becoming the nation he desired them to be. Israel's obedience was to be in response to God's faithfulness, and that was to extend not just to specific situations, but also to an entire life of relationship and covenant. From this Israel would realize

the full love of God and value they had in him. All of this was to be in place before the next step, being a **kingdom of priests**, could be initiated.

For us, many times we can try to use ministry to validate our person or our level of Christianity. However, for God our fulfillment is to come long before our ministry – He wants our lives, our actions and our relationships to be based on his faithfulness, and out of that ministry would flow

*These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The Kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. **Freely you have received; freely give.** – Matthew 10:5-8*

The disciples had already been with Jesus, received from him, and had just been given power to operate in the way he did. However they were to do it not focusing on any gain or status it would give them. They were to give **out of what they had already received**. Another time Jesus sent out 72 others with the same authority:

*The seventy-two returned with joy, and said, "Lord, even the demons **submit to us** in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. **However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**" – Luke 10:17-20*

The 72 were excited about what they were receiving back from their activity, and in one sense, rightly so – it's not every day that one sees spirits submitting to what is declared. Jesus did not want them using their authority for personal gain or recognition. He was more concerned about changed lives – that people were truly set free. Jesus also wanted the 72 to realize what was at the base of their ability to minister: God's faithfulness, their obedience, the covenant, and God's declaration that they were a treasure.

Just as God took Israel down a particular path and **systematically** brought them out of Egypt, he works with us to bring us step by step into the people we are to be

*But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness **with ever increasing glory**, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. – II Corinthians 3:16-18*

Understanding this pattern becomes important as we move into areas of serving, so that we do so with the right heart and expectation.

Priesthood Understood

In the previous lesson we saw a religious leader, a Pharisee who stood before the Lord and was thankful that he was not like other people. A person who had

separated himself enough from society that he felt justified as a symbol of God's righteousness. When Jesus came he challenged the mentality of the hyper-religious of the day

*Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments **and teaches others** to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices **and teaches** these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. – Matthew 5:19-20*

Jesus was calling people to be more than just “self aware” of their own righteousness. The context of this discussion on righteousness was their relationship to others. Jesus wanted his followers to show true, authentic righteousness *with* others. “With others” or “for others” is the basis of the priesthood – it is serving God and serving others.

Priestly Characteristics

When we think of priests, we tend to think of activities they do while in the temple. Priests, however only spent a portion of their time actually in the temple. Their characteristics, however, were always to be evident. Here are some characteristics as seen in scripture:

Characteristic	Scripture Reference
Intercession	Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. – Hebrews 7:25 Then Abraham approached him and said , “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? – Genesis 18:23-24

Characteristic	Scripture Reference
Mediates / Stands in the gap	<p>So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. – Numbers 16:47-48</p> <p>The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy, and mistreat the alien, denying them justice. I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. – Ezekiel 22:29-30</p>
Represents others before God	Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. – Hebrews 5:1
Shows compassion / empathy	<p>He is able to deal gently with those who are <i>ignorant and are going astray</i>, since he himself is subject to weakness. – Hebrews 5:2</p> <p>But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city? – Jonah 4:10-11</p>

Whether a priest is actively serving in the temple or not, these character traits should be evident and active. This is necessary because God was not looking for people to simply serve Him – he wanted people that would exhibit these characteristics to others.

Kingdom Life

*Although the **whole earth** is mine, you will be **for me a kingdom...***

God was making a distinction with Israel. Yes, he controlled and owned the entire world, but with Israel he wanted to establish a special relationship. In a kingdom, the inhabitants know who their king is, understand their place in the kingdom, and know the lengths the king will take to protect the life of the kingdom. God didn't just want to take Israel to the Promised Land and have them fend for themselves, or get

lost in the shuffle of all of the other nations. He wanted people to understand the King by virtue of the *kingdom they interacted with*. Inhabitants of the kingdom served the king and represented the king's interests. When God established Aaron as high priest, this was no different:

*The Lord said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in the land, nor will you have any share **among them**. I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites." – Numbers 18:20*

Aaron was to receive what he needed from God, and out of that *domain* to serve God and his people. As we look to Jesus as our high priest, we see the same philosophy:

*I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, **and what I have heard from him** I tell the world. They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that **I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me**. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him. – John 8:26-29*

Jesus understood kingdom life, and structured his life around God as his inheritance. Because of this, he was able to be a faithful priest in all things. In the same way, God wanted Israel to come to a place of understanding His faithfulness to them that they would be in tune with and active participants in what he wanted to do *in the world*.

The Comfort of a Whale

Jonah hated Assyria, for he saw them in light of what they did to Israel. Jonah did not see people, he saw an enemy - an enemy that needed to be wiped out.

The Word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before Me." But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord. – Jonah 1:1-3

Jonah could have taken the opportunity to preach destruction on Nineveh, and probably would have taken joy in doing so. When God called him, however, he recognized the kingdom he was in. He did not run for fear – he ran because he knew that God wanted Jonah to perform *as a priest* to the nation that he hated.

*But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. **I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity**. – Jonah 4:1-3*

Jonah wanted to be identified with the destruction of Nineveh. He wanted to receive something from their suffering. God, however wanted Jonah to be fulfilled in Him *so he could stand in the gap for a people God loved*. God wanted all of Israel to have this

same philosophy, and he calls us to walk in the same way. As we do, we are able to actively demonstrate the life, love and purpose of God to the world.

Introspection

- Does it seem like God is random in his actions toward you? Do you feel that he does have a plan for you?
- What are the things that validate you? What are you hoping for that will make you fulfilled?
- What part of God's moving (prophetic, healing, etc.) brings you joy and excitement? What are the stories you tell of God's activity, and what do they say about your focus?
- How does your righteousness compare with others? Why? What do you base your righteousness on?
- How does your life measure up to the characteristics of the priest mentioned above? What can you do to get closer?
- How do you react/respond to the world around you? What would you do if God called you to people who hurt you?

Call to Action

- Ask God what you have made your inheritance. Repent of the things outside of him that you have sought fulfillment in and dedicate yourself to his kingdom purpose in your life.
- Look for an opportunity to stand in the gap for someone else, both inside and outside the congregation. Actively engage God on behalf of those for whom you are standing in the gap.