

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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WHAT IS THE WORK OF THE CHURCH?

In the beginning of his ministry Jesus said "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). At the close of his ministry he prayed and said "I glorified You on earth having accomplished the work which You gave me to do" (John 17:4). Specifically what was the work God gave Jesus to do? Titles describe the work people do. For example the titles "Doctor", "Professor", "President", "Senator", "Judge" and even "Reverend" or "Pastor" indicates the work the wearer of the title is doing. Jesus was the "Christ". The word "Christ" was not his name, rather his title or office. Thus it described his work. Churches that claim to be wearing his name by calling themselves a "church of Christ" are not wearing his name, but his title. It is "at the name of 'Jesus' that every knee shall bow." (Phil. 2:10). The word Christ (Messiah in the O.T.) means "anointed one" (Psalm 2:2). In Scripture Prophets were anointed (I Kings 19:15, 16), Priests were anointed (Exodus 40:15) and Kings were anointed (I Samuel 10:1). The work then given by the Father to Jesus was to be His Prophet, His Priest and His King upon the earth.

Christ was God's Prophet, Priest and King, accomplishing God's work on the earth. As Prophet he spoke God's word to the world and demonstrated it by the life he lived. He could say, "He that hath seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). As Priest he offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9:14), and as King he inaugurated the reign of God on the earth (Psalm 110:1, 2; I Cor. 15:25). Jesus represented the Father and did his work while he was upon the earth. But he ascended and returned to the Father. Who would now represent God and continue His work on earth that Christ began? Here we begin to see the purpose of the church. It was through the work of Christ that God created a new man to represent Him (Eph. 2:15). The church then, as the body of Christ, continues the work he "began to do" (Acts 1:1). In his physical absence, we stand on the earth as his ambassadors (II Cor. 5:20). This means the work of the church is the same as the work of Christ, specifically the work of the church is prophetic, priestly and kingly. Just as Christ fulfilled the function of Prophet, Priest and King, the same work is to be the work of the church today. The church then exists, not for our pleasure, but to do the work of God on the earth.

THE WORK OF A PROPHET. God prophesied through Moses that "the Lord will raise up a prophet like me from among you, you shall listen to him" (Deut. 18:15). This was fulfilled in Christ (Acts 3:22). The prophets of the Old Testament were uniquely favored with the privilege of entering the very presence of God and the angels to witness deliberations of the heavenly court and even take part in discussions (I Kings 22:7; Isaiah 6:1-8; Ezekiel chapters 1-3). The prophet could speak to the people because he had spoken to the Lord. The basis of being heaven's spokesman was (1) They had stood before the Lord (Jer. 23:18, 22) and (2) they had His Spirit (Num. 11:29). Jesus met both these qualifications (John 1:18, Luke 4:18). Amos 3:7: states "Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His sacred

council to His servants the prophets." The responsibility of the prophet was twofold: he was to speak God's word and intercede with prayer (Gen. 20:7; I Sam. 7:5). As God's prophet, Jesus fulfilled the work of the Christ by fulfilling both of these responsibilities.

If the work of Christ was to fulfill the prophetic office, then this becomes the work of the church. This is a little known and certainly not an accepted fact in the church today. In order to do this the church must meet the two qualifications mentioned above. Can we really stand in the Lord's council? Let's take at face value these Scriptures: Ephesians 1:20 states that Christ is seated in the heavenlies. Ephesians 2:6 shows we are seated with him. Ephesians 1:3 tells us we have access to everything in the heavenlies. And just what is "the heavenlies"? It is the entire realm of the Spirit, but specifically the place to where Christ ascended (Eph. 1:20), which the Hebrew writer says is "heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24) and is the area in which we are privileged to enter with confidence (Heb. 10:19). Therefore the church meets the first qualification of a prophet. We have access to heaven itself. The church certainly meets the second qualification: we have the Holy Spirit. (We are looking at only one aspect of the Spirit, that of having the Spirit as it relates to being a prophet). I Corinthians 2:12: "we have received the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given us by God". Note also the last phrase in verse 16: "But we have the mind of Christ".

What is the result of our standing in his council (sitting in the heavenlies) and having His Spirit, as it relates to the prophetic work of the church? The result is it makes every spiritual blessing available to us (Eph. 1:3), it shows the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness toward us (Eph. 2:7) and it takes our struggles out of the realm of flesh and blood and puts us in the battle with spiritual forces (Eph. 6:12). Most of the struggles of the church today are with flesh and blood, not spiritual forces. The result of our having the Spirit is not to make us feel good, nor to give us an unknown prayer language, but according to I Corinthians 2:12b it is that "we might know the things of God." Moses says in Numbers 11:29: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them."

THE WORK OF THE PRIEST: Christ as priest is mentioned in only one book in the N.T., the book of Hebrews, where it is said 16 times that he is a priest. He is not just any priest. He was neither a Levite nor a descendant of Aaron. He was a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is the first mention of a priest in Scripture (Gen. 14:18). He is mentioned by name 8 times in Hebrews. The only other book that mentions him is Psalms 110:4. Little is preached today about priesthood, let alone Melchizedek. Our major today is on the cross, a dead Christ to the neglect of the Priesthood, a living Christ. In Scripture there is more space given to Melchizedek than to baptism and more to the priesthood of Christ than to the Lord's Supper. This in no way means the subject of the priesthood is more important than these, but it does show how greatly it has

been neglected.

Christ having become a High Priest has established a new priesthood. In Exodus 19:5, 6 we find that Israel was to be “a holy nation of priests”. Israel never became a holy nation, much less a kingdom of priests. So God created a new nation of priests (Mt. 21:43; I Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). The church now serves as God’s priesthood on the earth. What does it mean for the church to be a nation of priests? The answer is found, as many answers are found, in the book of Genesis. In the beginning Adam was given two responsibilities: cultivate the garden (Hebrew word; *‘abed*, to serve, tend, till). And to keep it (Hebrew word *shamar*, to guard and protect). After his rebellion (3:23) Adam still had to work (*‘abed*) but his status is altered, he is defrocked and removed from the office as Eden’s guardian (3:24). Now in Numbers 18:5-7 the priest’s work is described. The same two words that described the work of Adam are used to describe the work of priests. They were to attend to the duties of the temple (*‘abed*) and to guard (*shamar*) the sanctity of their charge from intruders. Out of all the nations of the world Israel was chosen as priests to cultivate (*‘abed*) a relationship with God and to provide protection (*shamar*) to the nations and give them a revelation of God.

In Matthew 21:43 we find that Israel was deposed from office, the kingdom is taken from them and given to a nation (the church) bearing the fruit of the kingdom (I Peter 2:5, 9). The task of cultivation (*‘abed*) and protection (*shamar*) was given to the people of the new covenant. This means the church has the responsibility to the world. Jesus said “the field is the world”. The church is to cultivate it by making disciples then teaching them to grow in grace and knowledge of God, to become a holy people. Also they are to guard the world against the forces of evil (Ephesians 6:10-11). Only the church is equipped with the armor to defeat spiritual powers and if the church is not faithful in this the world will be (and is being) taken over by evil powers. Sadly instead of fulfilling our duty as priests the church busies itself with building buildings, arguing over contemporary or traditional worship and imitating the world by trying to find schemes to impress our young people and accommodate a generation of baby boomers who have rejected the Word of God and embraced a theology of psychology and well-being. There are three reasons why the church is a failed priesthood. We have embraced a weak doctrine of sin (when the religious world handles sin carelessly, there is a need for a priesthood). There has been an over emphasis on the cross (the blood is shed, but we need to apply it). And there is a failure to realize the significance of the resurrection and ascension of Christ (if his present rule is denied these have little meaning). We need to restore the office of the priesthood in the church.

THE WORK OF THE KING. The common belief in the church today, especially among prophesy preachers, is that Christ is not reigning. The popular belief is that he will not begin to reign upon earth until he returns “to set up his millennial kingdom in Jerusalem and rule the earth for a thousand years”. Then there is the idea that he could not be reigning now due to there being so much evil in the world. Satan must be reigning, not Christ. However, the Scriptures teach the opposite. When God raised him from the dead He “seated him on His right hand in the heavenlies far above all rule and authority and power and

dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the one to come” (Eph. 1:20, 21). Daniel saw this in prophetic vision when he saw “One like a son of man coming, and he came up (the ascension) to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him, and to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him” (Dan. 7:13,14). The Apostle Paul declares “he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death” (I Cor. 15:25). As to the evil in the world the learned theologians ignore the fact that he is ruling “in the midst of his enemies” (Psalm 110:2).

No wonder the idea of our fulfilling a kingly role is foreign to the church today. If we can’t believe that Christ is now reigning how can we possibly say that we are reigning? We cannot believe and accept this fact because we, in common with all men suppress the truth and believe myths (Rom. 1:18). Because of sin we believe that those who wield external power are the rulers of this world, but that simply is not the case. Only the church and the church alone has been given power and dominion (Dan. 7:18, 27) and if we don’t like the way things are going we have only ourselves to blame. No one nation or one man has ever been able to rule the world. The wicked just cannot get it together and rule. Everything in our experience rebels against the notion that we are kings. We like the idea of going to heaven, but rebel against the fact that we will judge (rule) the world and (get this!) angels (I Cor. 6:2,3). We hold on to the idea that the world is going to be destroyed and rebel at the fact that it will be redeemed (Rom. 8:21) and restored to the subjection of man (Heb. 2:5-10). We see no need of any rule being established on earth, so we see no need of a King now, let Jesus do that when he returns. Of course such topics as the kingship of Christ and the reign of the saints are of little interest to today’s average Christian.

Evidently they have missed the message of the New Testament’s most quoted passage from the Old Testament, Psalm 110. “The Lord said unto my Lord. ‘Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet’. The Lord will stretch forth your strong scepter from Zion, saying, ‘Rule in the midst of your enemies.’” God speaks to Jesus and informs him that he will sit at His right hand until his enemies are conquered (the last enemy to be conquered is death: I Cor. 15:26). God’s throne is in heaven. This is where Jesus will remain until he comes again in final judgment. Jesus sits at God’s right hand while his people extend his rule. If the church is his body, and he is reigning, then it follows that the church shares in his reign here and now. If our “entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings being made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority” can enable the kings and authorities to so rule “in order that we may lead tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (I Tim. 2:1,2) are we not sharing in his reign? Proverbs 16:7 says “if a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him”. When the church is faithful God changes men. This is how Christ is reigning through his church.

It was in Israel’s hour of unbelief that God said “All the earth will be full of the glory of the Lord” (Num. 14:21). The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation and God is still in charge of all things. Christ is ruling and we are on the winning side! (We do not have to read the last chapter of the book to find this out).