
"The Priesthood of All Believers"
(1 Peter 2:4-10)
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⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," ⁸ and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Core Issue: "The priesthood of all believers" states that through Christ, we have the privilege of entering God's presence and the responsibility of declaring the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.

Opposing Value: We remain as passive observers rather than active worshipers.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon church. It's great to have you here. This year is very special not only to our church but to the Christian community all around the world, because we're celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation which took place in 1517, when Martin Luther nailed those 95 theses on the door of Castle church in Wittenberg, Germany. **The Reformation ultimately came out of a conviction that the church had drifted away from the truths of God's Word.** The Roman Catholic Church gave supreme authority to the pope *over* Scripture and claimed that salvation can be received through the works that have been invented by the church, as opposed to the Gospel, which states that we are saved by *the work of Christ alone*. In response, Martin Luther along with other reformers **protested** against the church (where we get the word "Protestants") and reformed the church according to the Word of God which radically transformed the course of church history.

That sounds amazing. But I wonder if any of you asked this question: **why does this matter to us today?** Why are we making such a big deal out of this? “Sure, I get that it was an important part of our church history. But why should I care?” **It’s because, to put it plainly, the Reformation is not over.** The truth is that we are facing the same challenges and threats that existed 500 years ago. **Just like in the past, we also live in a world where the Gospel is offensive; we’re facing real temptations to minimize the Word in the church and in our lives.** Instead of faithfully preaching the Gospel, many pastors are tempted to change the message so that it becomes more attractive, hip, and “relevant” to the people today. Instead of living a life of obedience to the Word, we are often tempted to diminish, distort, and compromise the Word in order to *pursue* our own ambition, *protect* our wealth and status, and *avoid* anything that may inconvenience our lives.

Remembering the Reformation is important because it reminds us the call to faithfulness that was proclaimed 500 years ago. **God is calling all Christians of all ages to always protect, proclaim, and live out the Word of God.** This is why we celebrate the Reformation. This is why we take time to remember.

Then as we continue to look back to the history, I want to invite all of you to ask yourselves, “**Is the Word of God at the center of my life today?**” We must continue to ask ourselves, “**Is the Word of God at the center of City on a Hill?**” **We must always remain humble to allow the Word to investigate us, expose us, and carve us so that we, as individually and corporately, may bear the image of Christ.** When the Word of God was not at the center, the history showed that the church fell. And this is no different for us. **If the Word of God is not guiding, shaping, and transforming our lives, we too will fall as well.** This of course is not easy to embrace because we’re *arrogant, selfish, and convenience-seeking* in many ways. **But brothers and sisters, let the Word of God speak to you today and every day.** And I pray that the Word will continue to have the supreme authority in your life that your *words, thoughts, and deeds* may be refined and reformed by the truth.

Today, I want to talk about one of the amazing truths that came out of the Reformation. You might be familiar with “*the Five Solas*” – *Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, and Soli Deo Gloria.* But there’s another truth that came out of this movement called “**the Priesthood of All Believers.**” **This truth simply tells us that if you are in Christ, you are a priest or a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.** This means that we have the *privilege* of having a personal relationship with God the Father and the *responsibility* that God our King has put upon us to represent Him. **And by the life we live, we are called to be an attractive aroma to those whom God has called.** To put it differently, it means that we are not called to be **passive observers** but to be **active worshipers** of God. So I want to take the rest of this time to teach the beauty of this truth and show you how this can impact every aspect of our lives today.

- The Truth that is Revealed – Scripture
- The Truth that was Rediscovered – History
- The Truth that must be Remembered – Application

1) THE TRUTH THAT IS REVEALED – SCRIPTURE

One of the most important things that we must recognize is that this truth (the priesthood of all believers) is based on the clear teaching of Scripture. So if you have your Bibles, let's turn to our passage for today, which is found in 1 Peter 2:4-10. Let's observe and see what God has to say.

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”⁸ and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Let's take a look at verse 9 again. Here, Peter tells us that **God Himself chose us from all eternity**, from all the people of the world – *not because of anything we did but simply because of His great love* – and made us **holy like God, special possession of God**, and (there's the phrase) **His royal priests**.

Then what does it mean to be a priest? What is their role? To put it simply, it means that **we are called to be the mediators between God and the people**. And the implication of this truth is incredible. **First, it means that we have immediate access to God.** Think with me. We have a direct access to Almighty God, the One who not only *created* the universe and life, out of nothing, only with words, but also *governs* and *sustains* it. Everything exists for His glory and we *get* to have an intimate relationship with God. **Secondly, it means that He gives us purpose and meaning to our lives.** We are not chosen, possessed, and made holy just to waste our time doing nothing. We are called now to minister by declaring praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.

This is an inconceivable truth that we can easily take for granted when we forget who we were. Romans 3:23 says, “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” Ephesians 2:1 says: “*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts... we were by nature deserving of wrath.*” **Scripture clearly tells us that all of us are sinners.** There's no exception. We all deserved God's wrath because God deeply hates sin and evil. **Therefore, it would be unthinkable for us as sinners to enter God's presence lest we be consumed by His holy fire.**

The only way to do this would be to follow the ways that God has prescribed for us. For example, this is essentially why God commanded the Israelites to build a tabernacle to be His dwelling place, so that the people would be protected from His holy presence. Now, here's something really interesting that I learned (the Bible Project video series). When you read the book of Exodus, it ends with **the construction of this beautiful tabernacle**. Then you would expect Moses to enter that tabernacle to freely speak to God face to face. But that's not what we see. Exodus 40:35 says, “*Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because... the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*” And the next book, Leviticus, begins this way, in 1:1: “*The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting.*” **Moses couldn't enter the tabernacle; God spoke from inside while Moses stood outside the tabernacle. Why is this? It's because Moses and the rest of the Israelites were sinful.** They would die in the holy presence of God.

Then, the book of Leviticus is all about God **teaching the Israelites how and when to enter the tabernacle – the very presence of God**. The way to God was very limited. His presence was sealed off behind the outer tent. He could only be approached in atonement once a year and **only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies**; and even he had to go with blood, covering both the sins of the priest, his family, and all the people. But after God finishes His instruction, the next book, Numbers, starts this way in 1:1, “*The LORD spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting.*” Isn’t that interesting? You were not allowed to enter God’s presence unless you followed His prescribed instructions – blood had to be shed to cover your sins. And even then, only the high priest was allowed to enter after meticulous work of sacrificing animals.

Then how is this changed? **How can Peter declare that all of us are priests of God – having the privilege to enter the presence of God freely, without fear of condemnation, and without having to kill an animal every time?** Peter makes it clear in verse 4: **we are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood through Jesus Christ**. Let’s turn to Mark 15:37 very quickly. In describing Jesus’ death, Mark says this: “*With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*” Have you ever wondered why Mark puts this detail in the account? “Who cares about what happens to the curtain of the temple? Someone just died! Jesus died! Let’s focus on that story!” But for Mark, this was so important to note because one thing that was limiting our entrance to the Holy of Holies, the very presence of God, the curtain, now through the death of Christ has been torn into two. Jesus Christ opened a way to God the Father. **This is made possible because when Jesus died on the cross for our sins, we have been declared righteous, holy, and perfect before God.**

Listen to how the writer of Hebrews puts it in 10:19:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Isn’t this beautiful? Exciting? Isn’t this incredible – that sinners like us could enter the presence of our holy God not because we’re smarter, richer, or more powerful than others, but simply **because of Jesus’ work on the cross?**

Jesus is the Living Stone. He is the Cornerstone that holds up all things. And everything hangs on our coming to this Living Stone. If we don’t come to Jesus, then we don’t have life, we are not built into royal priests, and we have no access to the Father. Then considering how important Jesus is in giving us life, identity, and purpose, let me ask you: “**Is Jesus truly precious to you?** Is this truth causing you to love Jesus with all of your hearts knowing that He is the only way, truth, and life? Is your heart longing for more of Him today?” Brothers and sisters, Christ is *precious*; He *must be* precious to us. Let this truth sink in your hearts. **Only in Christ, there is a true priesthood of all believers.**

2) THE TRUTH THAT WAS REDISCOVERED – HISTORY

Before we talk about how the truth was rediscovered, we should first point out how it was lost. And to do that we need to travel back in history to find that **the Roman Catholic Church had distorted and perverted this glorious truth of the priesthood of all believers**. And this is how it happened. The Roman Catholic Church believes that the pope is the vicar (a representation) of Jesus Christ on earth; and together with other church officials, they are the channel through which all of God’s grace flowed. So when a priest baptizes you, it’s as if Jesus Himself is baptizing you. When the pope leads the Lord’s Supper, it’s as if Jesus Himself is standing before the congregation.

This teaching gained strength when the church began to present Jesus as the holy Doomsday Judge – someone to be feared. Who could approach Him directly? And this was their answer: “Surely Jesus would listen to His mother.” And so **Mary** became the mediator through whom people could approach Jesus. But soon, Mary too became this unapproachable queen of heaven; hence, using the same logic, people turned to her mother, **Anne**. More and more, people sought for other mediators like the saints, the priests, and the pope who would speak to God on behalf of them.

The church’s teaching was clear: a lay person could not approach God. For example, they had to **confess** their sins to God *through* a priest. They had no access to **the Bible**. Sometimes they weren’t even allowed to drink **the wine** during the Lord’s Supper in fear that someone could spill the blood of Jesus Christ on the floor. **The Mass** was said in Latin – the people, of course, understood not a word. On a side note, a funny thing was this: many of the clergy also didn’t know Latin that well and would fluff their lines. So as they’re giving out the bread during the Lord’s Supper, instead of saying, “*Hoc est corpus meum*,” which is Latin for “This is my body,” they would just say, “Hocus pocus.”

The result was that this was creating a division of the people – the clergy and the lay people. The vocation of clergy was regarded as **sacred** (doing the work of God) and the vocation of the lay people was viewed as **secular** (existing only to support those who do the work of God). **The laity was viewed as a second class.** Then according to the Roman Catholic, **it was clear that God did not deal with people directly.** He only communicates through religious officials, which implies that **you as a lay person could not have an intimate personal relationship with God.** Priests had a personal relationship with God but not you.

So, when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg in 1517, he was declaring war against this very idea that salvation was mediated only through ordained priests. **Luther believed that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ is a priest;** and he came to this conclusion as he studied the Bible. When he was reading the book of Romans, he discovered that in and through Jesus Christ, a believer received the righteousness of God; and therefore, was given immediate access to God without the mediation of any human being. **No Christian needs a priest or a pastor to mediate their relationship with God, because Jesus Christ alone is the way to the Father.** It wasn’t just Luther who rediscovered this truth. John Calvin wrote, “**Christ once for all offered a sacrifice of eternal expiation and reconciliation; now, having also entered the sanctuary of heaven, he intercedes for us. In him we are all priests to offer praises and thanksgiving; in short, to offer ourselves and ours to God. It was his office alone to appease God and atone for sins by his offering.**” According to the reformers, we are set free from all slavery and were granted the dignity of a royal priesthood *in Christ alone*.

With this newly rediscovered truth, what Luther wanted to do was to connect faith and everyday life. Since all of us are priests, he believed that a simple task like plowing the field or milking the cows *is* priestly work in that God calls them to **love others** and **glorify God** through it. There was **no hierarchy** between an ordained priest and a farmer – of course, **differences in their roles but not in values.** According to Luther, what made work “Christian” wasn’t the type of work being done but the faith of the one doing it. Luther wrote, “**The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but all works are measured before God by faith alone.**” Through the reformers, not only our **identity** in Christ made clear, our **understanding of work** in Christ deepened.

Again, it’s important to remember that this wasn’t a *new discovery* of the reformers but it was a *rediscovery* of the biblical truth. Pastor R.C. Sproul said, “**The reformers didn’t bring a revolution but a reformation.**”

3) THE TRUTH THAT MUST BE REMEMBERED – APPLICATION

So what does this mean for us? If we are all called to be priests and ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, does this mean that we all have to start a church? Of course not. But I thought of three ways this truth can practically impact our lives today:

First, actively and passionately worship God on Sunday.

Worshippers in the **Roman Catholic Church** were **spectators**. In contrast, the **Reformation's emphasis** on the priesthood of all believers turned these spectators into **participants**. Ordinary Christians no longer needed a priestly class to intercede between them and God. We had the freedom to enter into God's holy presence. This is why Martin Luther translated the Bible into German so everyone could read God's Word, wrote a German Mass so everyone could sing along, and invited all Christians to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Brothers and sisters, what we do here on Sunday is a privilege. When we sing songs of worship, read and hear the Word of God, pray, participate in communion, serve, and fellowship with one another, we must remember that **it cost the very life of Jesus Christ** to make this possible. We have this today because many people boldly stood against the Roman Catholics who diminished the Word of God. **If we forget this truth, a Sunday service can become a mindless experience that impacts very little.** Even though we have this glorious truth of the Gospel, our hearts aren't moved. There's no passion, no gratitude, and no joy. We forget what it means to be in awe of God.

Brothers and sisters, this should not be. What we have is precious. Then let us come together to worship actively and passionately. Sing thoughtfully, rejoice in the Word, pray unceasingly, serve humbly, and love one another deeply.

Second, love others and glorify God through your work.

Martin Luther believed that the people, who work regardless of the type of their vocation, are "the fingers of God," because they act as the agents of His providential love for others. For instance, if you're a teacher, remember that you are ministering to the students with the love of God. If you're a barista, remember that each drink you make is a way for you to serve these people. If you're in business, remember that your diligence, faithfulness, and integrity glorify God. If you're a stay-home mom, remember that faithfully and lovingly nurturing your children honors God. **Brothers and sisters, is this how we think of work today?**

God has chosen to order the world in such a way that our food isn't just miraculously zapped into our refrigerators each day. Clothes do not grow on trees and houses don't assemble themselves. The trash we produce doesn't just magically disappear each evening. All of this happens through our "work." Martin Luther said, **"When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to give us this day our daily bread. And He does give us our daily bread. He does it by means of the farmer who planted and harvested the grain, the baker who made the flour into bread, the person who prepared our meal."** What's he saying? **God provides for our needs through the work He calls us to do.** When we give our best at workplace, we are glorifying God and loving others.

I know this is hard at times because work is frustrating and hard. We find ourselves **overvaluing** work to the neglect of our *health, families, and the church*; or **undervaluing** work which leads to *laziness and complacency*. **But we desperately need to see how God Himself delights in work and how God Himself designed our work for our good and for His glory.** Then being a Christian in the workplace means that we allow the truth of the Gospel to change our perception of work. Then regardless of where you're working, in business, communications, politics, or any other profession, **let us intentionally fight off the temptation to compartmentalize our faith from our everyday life. Let us remember that we are called to be ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Lastly, live as the agents of reconciliation.

Just as the Old Testament priests were agents of reconciliation to God and the Israelites, we are to be such mediators to this dark and troubled world. This is what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:18: "*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*" What's the message we are to carry? Verse 20: "*We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" **Because of what God has done in Christ, all of us are given a ministry of reconciliation as ambassadors or priests or ministers for Christ, calling people to be reconciled to God.** Simply put: **evangelism.**

Yes, it's important to work in ways that reflect God's love and glory; but the way we live will never fully communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to anyone; **we must use words to share the truth of what God has done in the person of Jesus Christ.** Brothers and sisters, **be the aroma of Christ** to the people around you especially those who do not yet know Jesus. Christianity Explored is starting this week. It's not too late to invite your non-believing friends or family members.

THE GOSPEL

As we end our time together, I do want to speak to those who haven't given their lives to Jesus. If we go back to verse 6 of our passage, Peter says this: "*See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.*" **The point here is that if you trust Christ, the living stone, the cornerstone, you will not be disappointed.** If you build your life on this stone, **your life will not crumble in the storm.** If you hide behind this stone, **you will be safe.** If you stand on the truth of this stone, **you will not be ashamed or be shaken.**

But look at verse 8; it says that to those who don't believe, this stone will become "*a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.*" Why is this true? Let me explain. You may think that your life is complete and secure because you have money, career, family, status, and the list can go on. But the truth is that **this is just an illusion.** They are fleeting things. They are temporary. And like I shared before, we are all sinners without exception deserving of God's wrath. Scripture is clear: **without Jesus, you will remain hopeless, meaningless, and without life. Jesus will become a stumbling block to your ambition, goal, and plans. They will fail you.**

But this can change because God's plan will never fail. **Friends, I want to invite you to give your life to Jesus today.** Don't wait until tomorrow, or next week, or next month. By turning away from your sins and relying on Jesus, you will find hope, security, meaning, and life that cannot be taken away. He is the only way to God. Our debt is paid in full by Jesus' death, and all the rewards He received through His own life of obedience are graciously and lovingly given to us. **The Gospel of Jesus is life-changing truth.** I invite you to experience this power. If you have more questions, I would love to speak to you after service.

CONCLUSION

“The priesthood of all believers” states that through Christ, we have the privilege of entering God’s presence and the responsibility of declaring the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. Martin Luther said, “This word ‘priest’ should become as common as the word ‘Christian’ because all Christians are priests.” This is our identity. Let this truth **reform** your life. Let it **encourage** you to work to love others and glorify God in whatever capacity or profession you are in at this moment. And let us **come boldly** into His presence, *praying* for fruitfulness, *standing* for justice in our society, and *acting* as agents of reconciliation in our homes, offices, schools, and community.

Let’s pray.